

HPG Research Report

Dependency and humanitarian relief

A critical analysis

Researched, written and published by the Humanitarian Policy Group at ODI

Paul Harvey and Jeremy Lind

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Overseas Development Institute
111 Westminster Bridge Road
London SE1 7JD
United Kingdom

Tel. +44 (0) 20 7922 0300
Fax. +44 (0) 20 7922 0399

E-mail: hpg@odi.org.uk
Websites: www.odi.org.uk/hpg
and www.odihpn.org

The authors

Paul Harvey is a Research Fellow with the Humanitarian Policy Group at ODI.

Jeremy Lind is a doctoral student in the Department of Geography, King's College London.

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Humanitarian Policy Group
Overseas Development Institute
111 Westminster Bridge Road
London
SE1 7JD
United Kingdom

Tel: +44(0) 20 7922 0300
Fax: +44(0) 20 7922 0399
Website: www.odi.org.uk/hpg
Email: hpgadmin@odi.org.uk

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Abstract

In many emergency contexts, aid agencies hesitate to provide food and other aid for extended periods because of fears that this may create ‘dependency’. Concerns about dependency are more than semantic: they can influence decisions about levels of assistance, and affect what type of assistance people receive, where and when.

People depend less on relief than is often assumed. There is little evidence that relief undermines initiative, or that its delivery is reliable or transparent enough for people to depend on it. In practice, many concerns about dependency seem to stem from a preoccupation with the disincentive effects of food aid. This report argues that framing these real concerns in terms of dependency is unhelpful because this can provide an excuse for cutting back relief for people who may still be in desperate need. If concerns about the possible negative impacts of food aid are genuine, then the more important question is what form of assistance is most appropriate to prevent hunger, save lives and alleviate suffering in times of crisis. In situations where people’s lives and livelihoods are under acute threat, and local capacities to cope with crisis are overwhelmed, being able to depend on receiving assistance should be seen as a good thing. The focus should be, not how to avoid dependency, but how to provide sufficiently reliable and transparent assistance so that those who most need it understand what they are entitled to, and can rely on it as part of their own efforts to survive and recover from crisis.

Discourses around dependency often blame the symptom, rather than the cause. Relief aid has often been the most visible, if not the only, form of international engagement in long-running crises. In these contexts, there is a tendency to criticise relief for failing to improve the situation, and enabling a movement towards recovery or development. Yet humanitarian aid may be a wholly inappropriate instrument for that purpose. The problem lies, not with relief and its failings, but with the lack of other forms of international engagement with crises.

Relief should not be withheld without solid evidence that the needs which prompted it in the first place have been met. This is not to imply that agencies should ignore the potentially negative effects of aid, but it does suggest a need for caution about how the label ‘dependency’ is applied, and how it is used to justify reductions in relief.

Executive summary

In many emergency contexts, aid agencies hesitate to provide food and other aid for extended periods because of fears that this may create 'dependency'. Concerns about dependency are about more than semantics: they can influence decisions about levels of assistance, and affect the type of assistance people receive, and where and when they do so. This report provides a critical analysis of the meaning of the concept, how it is used and the implications this has for how relief is provided.

Defining dependency

Dependency is a fuzzily-used term, which often conceals as much as it reveals and can have many different meanings. Its very vagueness and lack of definition have their own usefulness in providing justifications for action or inaction. Certain assumptions and meanings do, however, underpin its common usage within the discourse of humanitarian aid. Dependency is:

- generally seen as something negative and to be avoided;
- associated with the provision of relief, and contrasted with development approaches;
- seen as undermining people's initiative;
- contrasted with a variety of positive values or terms, notably independence, self-sufficiency, self-reliance and sustainability; and
- seen as a particular problem when relief assistance has been provided over a prolonged period.

Broadly speaking, it is possible to identify four main ways in which the term is used. These are:

- Relief risks creating a dependency mentality or syndrome, in which people expect continued assistance. This undermines initiative, at individual or community levels.
- Relief undermines local economies, creating a continuing need for relief assistance and trapping people into ongoing or chronic dependency on outside assistance.
- Dependence on external assistance as one of the features of extreme poverty, associated with a sense of shame or defeat.
- Dependency of governments at local or national levels, warring parties or aid agencies on relief resources.

One of the objectives of this report is to disentangle the various meanings, functions and ways in which the term dependency is used in humanitarian relief. There is therefore a need for caution in proposing our own definition. We suggest a value-neutral definition, adapted from the development literature:

A person is aid dependent when they cannot meet immediate basic needs in the absence of relief assistance.

This has the virtue of seeing aid dependence as neither a good or a bad thing. The definition can easily be adapted to work at community or national, as well as individual levels: a community or a country is aid dependent when it cannot meet the immediate basic needs of its citizens in the absence of external relief assistance.

In development theory, dependency is the antithesis of development approaches that aim at empowerment, participation and sustainability. The term dependency is often used in the context of debates around the problematic idea of some sort of transition between relief and development, with relief being seen as intrinsically undesirable because it creates dependency. A specific concern raised in this context is that relief interventions will undermine ongoing developmental programmes. Once people have become accustomed to receiving free commodities, the fear is that they will be less willing to make contributions to community development projects without being paid. It is also important to situate debates around dependency within a wider literature around livelihoods, social protection and coping strategies in response to crises. The literature on livelihoods and coping strategies stresses the point that people affected by emergencies are not passive recipients of aid, but use it as one of many livelihood strategies for survival and recovery. Aid assistance is therefore better seen as one of a range of options that people may be able to draw upon in their struggle to deal with crisis.

Functions of dependency

There have been regular attempts to debunk the 'myth of dependency', yet the term has shown a remarkable persistence. Perhaps the best way of seeking to explain this persistence is to examine the different functions that the term serves for the various actors involved in emergency relief.

A fear of creating dependency is sometimes used by aid agencies as a justification for scaling back relief entitlements. Trying to reduce dependence on aid, however, runs the risk of furthering other and more negative forms of dependence. For instance, the 1996 review of Operation Lifeline Sudan found that reductions in relief entitlements, linked with a desire to move towards more developmental approaches, had made people more vulnerable, forcing them into exploitative working conditions and increasing their exposure to violence.

Critics of the use of dependency arguments as justifications for reducing relief have stressed the need to work from a firm evidence base when planning reductions in relief entitlements. Vaguely formulated concerns about dependency should not be sufficient reason to reduce relief in the absence of alternative mechanisms for sustaining livelihoods. Aid agencies have a responsibility to establish empirically sound data on which to make judgements about the ongoing need for assistance.

Are relief recipients dependent?

There is a sense in which the degree of dependency can be empirically investigated in particular contexts, and it is possible to assess the contribution that aid makes to people's livelihoods. What is not clear, however, is at what level a household or individual can be said to be dependent on the assistance that they receive. Is a family where aid makes up 70% of their food needs dependent? Is it not dependent if the proportion is 30%? Even if aid contributes only a small percentage of calorific requirements, it could potentially make the difference between having just enough food and malnourishment.

Thinking about dependence in terms of what proportion of household needs aid provides is not particularly useful, and will in any case vary in different places, and between different households in the same place. What little literature exists on this issue tends to suggest that aid often makes up a smaller proportion of livelihood strategies than is often assumed by the agencies providing the assistance. Aid can, however, play a crucial role, and in some cases makes up a significant part of what enables people to survive.

Crises represent extreme levels of vulnerability and risk. In a sense, therefore, dependence is a defining feature of the need for humanitarian action. When shocks undermine the ability of a household to meet their subsistence needs as part of their regular livelihoods, then they have to depend on some form of transfer. The question is whether it will be public or private, on what terms it will be provided and whether the consequences beyond the immediate meeting of subsistence needs are negative or positive. These generic questions apply equally whether dependence is on food aid, on loans from money lenders at high interest rates or on asking relatives abroad to send more money home.

Dependence can also be used by poor people themselves to describe aspects of poverty. In Ethiopia and Kenya, the receipt of food aid is associated with a sense of stigma, shame and defeat. Having to rely on external assistance can undermine fundamental desires for independence and autonomy. Attempts to develop theories of human need stress that people require some degree of freedom, as well as having their needs for health, food or shelter fulfilled.

This helps us to frame concerns around dependency. The concern is less about whether people in desperate need should be assisted, but whether the way in which they are assisted respects basic needs for autonomy, and enables people to exercise their capability for deliberation. The problem is more about how relief is provided, than how much is given.

Where aid makes up an important part of the survival strategies of people in emergencies, the question arises whether this aid can be depended upon, in the sense of being able to rely on it. Those who died in famines in Malawi in early 2002, in Sudan in 1998 or in Ethiopia in 2000 clearly could not depend on relief being delivered by their own governments, or by the international relief system.

The transparency of assistance is therefore a key question. People can only reliably depend on assistance if they properly understand what they are entitled to, and when it is likely to be provided. Much of what is known about the targeting and delivery of relief assistance suggests that relief aid is rarely transparent or regular enough to be relied upon. Early-warning systems and the responses that they trigger are seldom sophisticated enough to ensure that people in need of assistance will necessarily receive it.

In situations of acute risks to survival, aid agencies should be aiming to ensure that people are able to reliably depend on receiving assistance. Greater investment in transparency and accountability, greater efforts to encourage the active participation of affected populations, and complaint mechanisms might help to address some of the negative consequences of relief assistance, which at the moment tend to be grouped under the umbrella term dependency. If relief can be relied on, then people will be better able to incorporate it productively into survival strategies.

Dependency and initiative

One of the meanings attached to dependency is the idea that the continued provision of relief risks creating a 'dependency mentality' or 'dependency syndrome', in which relief undermines initiative. All the evidence about how people survive during crises points to the fact that this is an unhelpful myth: relief does not undermine initiative or make people lazy. Recipients of aid are far from passive recipients, but remain engaged in a wide variety of activities, of which aid forms only a part.

Views of dependency are also often linked to a belief among aid agency staff that recipients are not only lazy or uncooperative, but actively try to cheat the system. Seeing attempts to abuse relief systems as evidence of dependency puts the blame for abuse on those receiving the assistance, and is often taken as evidence that too much assistance is being provided. Of course, it would be equally possible to

reach exactly the opposite conclusion, namely that attempts to cheat the system are evidence of need, and insufficient assistance. Perhaps a more useful way of viewing the manipulation of relief would be to recognise that people are likely to exploit what aid is on offer as fully as they can as part of their livelihood strategies.

In some situations, dependence on outside assistance is enforced. The best example of this is in refugee camps in countries where refugees are explicitly denied freedom of movement and employment opportunities. The extent of the dependence of refugees on continuing assistance largely depends on the policies of host governments. If refugee populations are confined to camps and prevented from seeking employment outside, the opportunities for becoming self-reliant or independent are likely to be limited. Addressing the continued dependence of refugee populations therefore often lies beyond the remit of humanitarian actors, depending instead on the political will to resolve conflicts, and the refugee and asylum policies of governments. In this, as in so many spheres of humanitarian action, it is important that aid agencies recognise the limits of their responsibilities.

The concept of dependency has tended to be less used in relation to the delivery of services such as health care or education by relief actors. However, concerns about sustainability are at the heart of debates about how relief should be provided in these sectors as well. In the health sector, much of the current debate has tended to focus on the appropriateness of cost-recovery mechanisms in relief settings, and how some sort of health service can best be sustained during long-running conflicts. But it is notable that the basic concept that people should be able to depend on the public provision of health care, supported either through government tax revenues or through donor funding, is generally accepted. This is also largely true in the education sector. The contrast with the stigmatisation of dependency on relief food aid is striking. It seems that the case for international support is accepted in the case of health care and education, whereas it is not accepted in the case of basic welfare provision to alleviate hunger and destitution.

The persistence of the idea of a dependency syndrome says more about the attitudes of aid providers towards recipients than it does about the attitudes of the recipients themselves. It is worth remembering how limited the interaction between humanitarians and recipients often is. People in desperate circumstances are likely to tell people in positions of power whatever they think they want to hear; as an Ethiopian proverb puts it, 'When the great lord passes the wise peasant bows deeply and silently farts' (Scott 1990: 1). In investigating dependency, therefore, we need to understand both the official discourse, how aid agencies view the people they are trying to help, and also,

to the extent that we can, what Scott calls the hidden transcripts of how people react to and resist the exercise of power. Using this perspective, the seemingly dependent recipient may be simply a 'wise peasant bowing deeply', and attempts to abuse the system may be the 'fart'.

Dependency and disincentives

The term dependency is sometimes used as shorthand for a concern with the possible negative economic impacts of relief. The argument runs that prolonged relief assistance can undermine local economies, and that large amounts of food aid can damage local agricultural production. This in turn leads to a continuing need for relief assistance, creating a vicious cycle and trapping people into chronic dependency. This dependency trap argument is closely linked to a larger debate about the impact of food aid and its potential disincentive effects. The problem with this debate is that, despite a large literature, the evidence for or against disincentive effects remains inconclusive.

Another type of dependency trap relates to possible labour disincentives from participating in public works programmes. If a work requirement is attached to the receipt of relief, this may take scarce labour away from other key livelihood strategies, increasing the dependence on relief. But again, the evidence for this is limited and mixed.

The debate around disincentive effects has been distorted by its association with dependency. The possibility of disincentive effects, particularly around food aid, has been used as an argument for reducing relief entitlements, without necessarily any reference to whether the needs that prompted food aid in the first place have changed. If the need for relief still exists, then the possibility of disincentive effects may be a risk that is worth taking to ensure that people continue to receive vital assistance. Disincentive effects are an argument for looking at the appropriateness of the assistance being provided, not whether it should be provided at all.

Dependency at the level of governments and aid agencies

As with beneficiary dependency, the dependency of governments or agencies is generally portrayed in negative terms. Government officials feel that aid agencies are profiting from disasters, and aid officials argue that relief assistance has become embedded in corrupt or neo-patrimonial political structures. But, as with beneficiary dependence, we argue that this is not necessarily the case. Governments whose capacities are overwhelmed in times of crisis, and which are unable to meet the basic needs of their citizens, should be able to depend on international support. Where governments are unable or unwilling to provide this support, aid agencies should be able to depend

on receiving sufficient public and donor support to prevent large-scale mortality through the delivery of independent and impartial humanitarian relief. The problem therefore is not dependence *per se*, but the way in which this dependence is structured: for governments, whether dependence on relief is creating additional incentives for corruption; for aid agencies, whether the organisational interests created by relief resources are distorting the ways in which relief is delivered. For recipient countries, there may be strong vested interests in continuing relief assistance, both because of the potential financial benefits and because of the opportunities for patronage that it can present. Aid agencies too can be seen as dependent on continued relief programmes. Large aid bureaucracies can develop in responding to crises, with their own incentives for self-perpetuation.

Rethinking dependency

The concept of interdependency is helpful in reframing the debate around dependency in emergency relief. Rather than seeing dependency on relief as necessarily negative, we should be trying to understand the role that relief plays in the complex web of interdependencies that make up livelihoods under stress in crises. The many interdependencies that comprise a community's social relations and people's livelihoods may have both positive and negative aspects. Poor people may be trapped into exploitative economic relations, such as crippling debts, sharecropping arrangements or bonded labour. In a more positive sense, people may be able to depend on support from friends and relatives. External aid influences these existing patterns of social relations and, if it continues over a prolonged period, it may become embedded within them. It is also important to understand who is likely to be excluded from the interdependencies that make up communities and societies, and how exclusion may be influenced by factors such as gender or ethnicity.

As a concept, dependency reveals much about many of the attitudes and assumptions that underpin the ways in which humanitarian aid is delivered. This matters for practical reasons because the amounts of relief that people receive have been reduced without justification, or because there has been a premature shift to developmental approaches.

This report, like others before it, finds that people depend less on relief than is often assumed. There is little evidence that relief undermines initiative, or that relief is delivered reliably or transparently enough for people to depend on it. In practice, many concerns about dependency seem to stem from a preoccupation with the disincentive effects of food aid. We argue that framing these real concerns in terms of dependency is unhelpful because this can provide an excuse for cutting back relief for people who may still be in desperate need. If we are really concerned with the possible negative impacts of food aid, then the more important question is what form of assistance is most appropriate to prevent hunger, save lives and alleviate suffering in times of crisis. In situations where people's lives and livelihoods are under acute threat, and local capacities to cope with crisis are overwhelmed, being able to depend on receiving assistance should be seen as a good thing. The focus should not be on avoiding dependency, but on providing sufficiently reliable and transparent assistance so that those who most need it understand what they are entitled to, and can rely on it as part of their own efforts to survive and recover from crisis.

Discourses around dependency often blame the symptom, rather than the cause. This is often compounded by the absence of other international actors in complex emergencies. Relief aid has often been the most visible, if not the only, form of international engagement in long-running crises. In these contexts, there is a tendency to criticise relief for failing to improve the situation and enabling a movement towards recovery or development. Yet humanitarian aid has never claimed to have that as an objective, or is a wholly inappropriate instrument for that purpose. The problem lies, not with relief and its failings, but with the lack of other forms of international engagement with crises.

Relief should not be withheld without solid evidence that the needs which prompted relief in the first place have been met. This is not to imply that agencies should ignore the potentially negative effects of aid, but it does suggest a need for caution about how we apply the label dependency, and its use to justify reductions in relief.

Chapter 1

Introduction

In many emergency contexts, aid agencies are hesitant to provide food and other aid for extended periods of time because of fears that this may create 'dependency'. The risk of creating dependency appears to inform a wide range of programming decisions. These include moving from free food distributions to public works schemes, and more generally shifting from relief provision to more developmental approaches, which explicitly aim at some form of sustainability. This may entail relief assistance being stopped or cut back when it is still genuinely needed.

The term dependency is frequently used in emergency relief, but is rarely defined with any precision. However, there are a set of common assumptions linked to the term, which this report will aim to disentangle and analyse. Central to these assumptions is a belief that dependency is negative; indeed, it has often been described as 'dependency syndrome', and something to be avoided. Taking the meaning of the word at face value, this is puzzling. Given that the objectives of humanitarian aid are to save lives and alleviate suffering during times of acute risk to people's livelihoods, it would appear that being able to depend on assistance being provided would be a good thing. Why the various actors involved in emergency relief have often not seen this as the case is one of the issues that this paper explores.

The fact that there has been little analysis of the term dependency in the literature on humanitarian aid forms part of the justification for this research. However, it is not a completely new subject. What literature does exist tends to attack the myth of dependency, either by arguing that people are not in fact dependent, or by pointing out the negative ways in which the concept influences aid agency policy and practice. An evaluation of UNHCR's community services programmes, for example, recommended that 'references to dependency should be purged from the UNHCR lexicon' (CASA Consulting 2003). But despite these critiques, the term has remained remarkably persistent in debates about emergency relief. This persistence suggests that the concept is addressing some core issues relating to humanitarian aid which cannot simply be dismissed. These include the possible negative impacts of aid on markets, the sense that the way in which relief is sometimes provided encourages passivity and continuing failures to make progress with accountability to beneficiaries.

There are clearly many different meanings attached to the term dependency, and different levels at which dependency can be seen as an issue. Individuals, communities, districts and countries can all be seen as dependent. Dependency may be a different issue for donors, recipient governments,

NGOs and beneficiaries of relief programmes, each of which may become dependent in different ways on continuing relief assistance. Investigating the concept of dependency requires an examination both of the ways in which recipients of relief assistance view aid and incorporate it into their livelihood strategies, and the ways in which arguments about dependency and attitudes towards beneficiaries influence relief policies and programming within aid agencies and governments.

A first step to understanding the term and how it is used is to identify its different meanings; this is attempted in Chapter 2. This includes a discussion of frameworks for analysing a concept and how it influences practice, drawing on concepts from discourse theory. It also examines how the term is used in debates around welfare in the West and in development theory, which influences and informs its use in humanitarian relief. The concept can also be analysed in terms of the functions that it serves, for example by providing a justification for scaling back relief efforts, shifting to more developmental approaches, or not mounting a relief response at all. The functions of dependency discourse for humanitarian actors are discussed in Chapter 3.

Chapter 4 attempts a more systematic analysis of the ways in which people are or are not dependent on relief, based on existing literature and evidence from two case studies (in northern Kenya and Ethiopia). This report follows previous analyses in finding the term dependency unhelpful. Clearly, there are some situations where people need relief assistance and, to the extent that it is reliably delivered, they depend on it for their survival. Dependency in this sense is almost a defining characteristic of appropriately targeted humanitarian relief. There is, however, little evidence that people depend on relief at the expense of other livelihood strategies, or that it undermines initiative in the negative sense that is often implied in phrases such as 'dependency syndrome'. The debate over whether or not aid, particularly food aid, creates disincentive effects continues to produce conflicting evidence, but labelling this as dependency is in any case unhelpful. The focus should be on what forms of assistance are appropriate. This report argues that a common tendency of dependency discourse is to blame relief, as a symptom of crisis, rather than the cause. The need for ongoing relief is seen as the problem, rather than blaming the poverty, destitution or conflict that creates chronic crises.

Labelling the term dependency unhelpful and calling for the 'myth of dependency' to be exploded has been attempted before, with little success. As well as attacking the myth of dependency, it is necessary to suggest

something to put in its place. Chapter 5 attempts to rethink the concept of dependency. Just as Dean (2004) has argued the need for a new 'ethics of welfare', so this report argues that the persistence of dependency discourse suggests the need for a new 'ethics of relief'. This would recognise that people are fundamentally interdependent, and would aim to provide relief which supports positive interdependencies and reduces dependence on exploitative economic and social relations.

We argue that some of the concerns about the impact of relief, often grouped under a dependency umbrella, do need to be addressed. They are revealing both about the attitudes of staff involved in relief provision towards the people they are trying to help, and about some of the fundamental tensions between relief and developmental approaches. But addressing these issues should be seen as an argument for looking at the way in which relief should be delivered, with greater attention to people's dignity and concern for downward accountability, rather than an argument for cutting back relief entitlements. People ought to be able to depend on assistance and to participate more actively in its management, rather than being encouraged to portray themselves as passive and vulnerable beneficiaries. A renewed interest in social protection and growing acceptance of the need for long-term welfare provision in response to chronic poverty also provides an opportunity to rethink the concept of dependency. If assistance is required over the long term, ways need to be explored to link this with states' responsibilities to provide social protection and basic welfare for their citizens.

An analysis of a concept could be seen as something of an indulgence, particularly given the scarce funds devoted to the humanitarian sector. This study does its best to avoid empty theorising and to relate the ways in which dependency is used back to concrete implications for policy and practice. It also sets out how aid agencies and other actors involved in the humanitarian sector should do things differently. But of necessity this report is not purely practical; rather, it is about how those who are involved in determining needs and providing humanitarian assistance think about and describe what they are doing and how it affects the people they are trying to help. We argue that this matters both because it affects the type of assistance that is provided to people in crises, and because the language used to describe this enterprise is revealing of attitudes towards the people that are being helped.

1.1 Methodology

This research project is based on an extensive literature review and field-based research carried out in Ethiopia and

Kenya (Lind 2005 and 2005b). These case studies conducted qualitative semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with government officials, aid agency staff, donors and people affected by emergencies to investigate local meanings and uses of the term dependency. The project has been carried out in partnership with Oxfam GB, which provided logistics support and staff input to the case studies. The case studies are published as web-based background papers to this study, and complement this report by providing more detailed and context-specific analyses of how the concept of dependency influences policy and practice. Evidence from the two case studies has also been used throughout this report to inform and illustrate the arguments being made. The two case studies were selected because, in both, debates about dependency have played an important role in driving the policy and practice of different actors involved in relief.

Time and budget constraints imposed important limitations on the scope of the study. The two case studies are disproportionately represented in the report, and there is a particular geographic bias towards the Horn of Africa. The way in which the concept of dependency drives policy and practice is also highly context-specific: debates about dependency in East Timor, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka, for example, are likely to be significantly different from those in northern Kenya and Ethiopia.

The study also focuses largely on dependency debates in relation to food security and food aid. In part, this was dictated by the dominance of these sectors in the relief responses of the case study countries, and in part because this is where the main focus of the debate in the literature has been. There are also important debates about dependency in relation to the provision of services such as health and education in emergencies; these are touched on, but dealt with less fully. There is also an important sense in which relations of dependency are gendered, and whilst the report attempts to consider the ways in which humanitarian aid might change gendered relations of dependency, this is an important avenue for further investigation.

Understanding the ways in which people do or do not depend on assistance in emergencies would ideally require anthropological, long-term and longitudinal research into how people present themselves to outsiders. This was beyond the scope of this study, which was based on short visits to two countries. Its findings therefore must be seen as tentative. However, many of the themes that this report raises have universal resonance, and the framework suggested for analysing dependency could be usefully applied to other contexts.

Chapter 2

Definition and analytical framework

This study examines dependency at different levels. At one level, it is concerned with whether or not people in emergencies really are dependent on outside assistance, and, if so, in what ways, whether in terms of needing aid for physical survival or a psychological dependence. But investigating whether or not dependence is real at a field level is only part of the picture. There is also the question of how the use of the concept influences what different actors involved in emergencies, such as governments, UN agencies and NGOs, do in terms of policy and practice. In this sense the discourse on dependency within aid agencies is important regardless of whether people are or are not really dependent. Dependency may be used by aid agencies to justify scaling back relief efforts, or by governments to assert control over the relief process. This second aspect requires a theoretical framework for thinking through these issues. This study draws on discourse analysis to provide a way of understanding how the concept is used and its influence on policy and practice. This is briefly introduced in Section 2.2.

It is also necessary to trace the ways in which the term dependency has been used in other linked contexts, notably in welfare policy in the West (Section 2.3) and in development (Section 2.4). This helps to situate the debate, and is important because these debates influence and inform the way in which the term is used in the humanitarian sector. The various ways in which the term has been used in linked debates around aid and welfare policy are sketched out in Table 1.

2.1 Defining dependency

Dependency is a fuzzily defined term; it often conceals as much as it reveals, and can have many different meanings. This section disentangles these different meanings, and provides some clarity about what is being talked about when the term is used within the field of humanitarian relief. However, it will not attempt to privilege one set of meanings over another. Part of what is interesting about the concept is the very fact that it is widely used but seldom clearly defined. Its vagueness and lack of definition has its own usefulness in providing justifications for action or inaction. The meanings attached to the term in the relief arena have important parallels and echoes with the ways in which it is used in other debates, for example in development theory or in controversies over welfare policy in Western countries. These will be discussed further in following sections.

Surprisingly, given how often it is used, dependency is rarely defined or analysed in any detail. It is, however, possible to suggest certain assumptions and meanings that underpin its common usage within the discourse of humanitarian aid. Dependency is:

- generally seen as something negative and to be avoided;
- associated with the provision of relief and contrasted with development approaches;
- seen as undermining people's initiative;
- contrasted with a variety of positive values or terms, notably independence, self-sufficiency, self-reliance and sustainability; and

Table 1: Dependency discourses

Dependency as development theory	In the 1960s and 1970s, dependency was used in the sense of the Third World being trapped into structural dependency on the developed world. This drew on Marxist analyses of the periphery. This usage petered out with the collapse of communism and the fact that growth in Asia seemed to challenge the theory, but echoes of it can still be seen in the discourses around trade and globalisation.
Welfare dependency	Debates in the UK, US and Australia among others about the extent to which people become dependent on welfare, and ways of adjusting social policy in order to discourage dependence.
Aid dependency	A debate within the development aid system about the extent to which countries are dependent on overseas aid, and the effect this has on economic growth and governance.
Dependency syndrome	'An attitude and belief that a group cannot solve its own problems without outside help' – as characterised by community development specialists who contrast dependency with the need to empower communities.

- seen as a particular problem in contexts where relief assistance has been provided over a prolonged period.

Broadly speaking, it is possible to identify four main ways in which the term is used. These are:

- Relief risks creating a dependency mentality or syndrome in which people expect continued assistance. This undermines initiative, at individual or community levels.
- Relief undermines local economies, creating a continuing need for relief assistance and trapping people into ongoing or chronic dependency on outside assistance.
- Dependence on external assistance as one of the features of extreme poverty, and associated with a sense of shame or defeat.
- Dependency of governments at local or national levels, warring parties or aid agencies on relief resources.

There is another possible meaning of the term that is almost never used. This is the idea that assistance can be depended or relied upon, in the sense of being able to rely on its delivery, understand who is entitled to what level of assistance and plan for this in livelihood strategies. Debates about dependency in the humanitarian sector have almost exclusively focused on the idea of relief as creating dependency, and have rarely considered more positive meanings of the term. It is equally possible, for example, to see relief as having the potential to reduce dependency, for example by enabling people to conserve productive assets that they would otherwise have had to sell.

Formal definitions of dependency in the literature are surprisingly thin on the ground, and those that do exist are often presented in the context of critical analyses of the term. Lautze and Hammock (1996) suggest perhaps the most neutral definition of the term: 'dependency can be defined as extreme reliance on resources beyond one's control' (Lautze & Hammock 1996). This has the virtue of making the point that people may not just be dependent on aid; they may, for instance, depend on warlords for protection, or exploitative landlords for access to credit. However, the idea of the extremity of reliance is problematic because it implies the idea of a cut-off point: medium reliance is acceptable, but extreme reliance is somehow negative.

Part of the objective of this report is to disaggregate the various meanings, functions and ways in which the term dependency is used in humanitarian relief. There is therefore a need for caution in proposing a definition, as this may pre-empt the process of deciphering meaning. However, there is clearly a need for some sort of definition to guide the study. This report follows the definition of aid dependence proposed by Lensink and White (1999) when discussing aid dependence in the context of development assistance. Their definition was:

A country is aid dependent if it will not achieve objective X in the absence of aid for the foreseeable future (Lensink & White 1999).

As they argue, this has the virtue both of being based on the actual meaning of the word 'depend', and of seeing aid dependence as neither a good or a bad thing. Adapting this for the context of emergency relief produces the following definition:

A person is aid dependent when they cannot meet immediate basic needs in the absence of relief assistance.

We are, of course, not only concerned with dependency at the individual level, but the definition can be easily adapted to work at various levels: a community or a country is aid dependent when it cannot meet the immediate basic needs of its citizens in the absence of external relief assistance. This definition does focus purely on dependence on aid, but this fits with our particular concern with humanitarian policy and the effects of humanitarian relief. The report is interested both in the question of whether people are dependent, and the effects of that dependence, whether in a negative sense, in terms of the impact on markets or the diversion of aid into predatory political economies, or a positive sense, in terms of enabling the preservation of assets. It is important to remember that people may also depend on forms of support other than aid. This might be support from neighbours or relatives in the form of remittances, or dependence on erosive coping strategies such as prostitution. In considering the extent to which people depend on aid, it is important to have a realistic understanding of its relative importance in wider livelihoods and the ways in which aid interacts with the other dynamics of local political economies and societies.

2.2 Discourse theory

The literature around discourse theory and policy narratives can provide some useful insights into the way in which the concept of dependency is used within the humanitarian field. Dependency represents a discourse or policy narrative in which those with power (aid agencies and donors) frame a discussion about the effects of aid on those without power (beneficiaries). As Keeley and Scoones (1999) argue (see Box 1), the way that issues are talked about is highly significant; it can define these issues in particular ways, and exclude alternative explanations.

The discourse around dependency has powerful real-world effects, in that it can determine programming strategies and the type, amount, coverage and duration of the assistance people receive. It can also shape people's perceptions of their own value or worth. For example, some of the recipients of relief assistance in Kenya and

Ethiopia interviewed for this study expressed feelings of shame or regret at the receipt of aid. In Ethiopia, Lind and Jalleta (2005) conclude that ‘dependency holds great discursive power’, and has influenced successive relief policies. The use of the term dependency in humanitarian relief represents a kind of policy narrative, or a simplified way of framing an issue that guides policy (Roe 1991).

Discourses about dependency can also create their own reality, in the sense that the recipients of aid may start to interpret and internalise the discourses of the powerful. In other words, people may find that the best way to obtain assistance is to present themselves as dependent and without resources.

2.3 Dependency and welfare

There has been a long-running debate in Western social policy about ‘welfare dependency’. This has always been an intensely political debate, with the right wing attacking welfare dependency and arguing that the provision of long-term welfare creates dependency, and the left wing challenging the view of the poor that this implies, and arguing for the maintenance and extension of welfare policies. More recently, these clear lines have become blurred in places like the UK, with ‘third way’ rhetoric focusing on rights and responsibilities.

Behind this debate about welfare dependency lies a history of attitudes towards the poor. For instance, in the US there is a long tradition of belief in ‘rugged self-individualism’ and the pioneer spirit, in contrast to which poverty is seen in terms of personal failing. For example, Fineman (2001), writing about the welfare debate in the US, argues that there are a series of negative associations attached to dependency:

Dependence is decadent – its byproducts are laziness and degeneration, poverty and crime. It is a way of life transmitted to the young, generating cycles of dependency. Dependency justifies, even compels, negative judgements. As a result, both political parties enthusiastically endorse punitive measures to spur dependents towards independence.

One of the common features of the welfare dependency discourse is its tendency to stigmatise those groups that are labelled as dependent. In the US, for example, a particular target has been single mothers, often described as ‘welfare mothers’ (Fineman 2001). In Australia, Aboriginal communities have been a particular focus of debates around ‘welfare dependency’, and it is certainly true that a large proportion of Aboriginal people rely on welfare payments for their basic income (41% of indigenous households have no resident wage-earner). But, as Dellit (2004) argues, dependency debates tend to blame indigenous peoples for processes of marginalisation that

Box 1: Discourse theory and policy narratives

Hajer defines discourse as ‘a specific ensemble of ideas, concepts and categorisations that are produced, reproduced and transformed in a particular set of practices and through which meaning is given to physical and social realities (1995: 44). In Foucauldian terms, ‘ideas, concepts and categorisations’ are expressions of knowledge and power (Foucault 1980), controlling human subjects by the definitions and categories imposed upon them. Discourses are frames which define the world in certain ways, in the process excluding alternative interpretations (Schram 1993; Apthorpe and Gasper 1996; Grillo 1997). Discourses do not emanate exclusively from particular individuals and institutions. They are larger than this: the cumulative effect of many practices. Even the discursive practices of identifiable actors are themselves reflections of other discourses.

The way that issues are talked about is highly significant. Key concepts in different policy sectors do not exist in some neutral and purely technical sense. Concepts have histories, and they reflect types of knowledge: they empower some institutions and individuals whose concerns and competencies they are associated with, and simultaneously marginalise others (Drysek 1997). They also guide thinking about a policy area in certain directions, either implicitly or explicitly.

The broad point is that it is impossible to talk about policy neutrally. Whatever one says carries assumptions, and is in some senses prescriptive: the language in which it is framed is as significant as (and is indivisible from) the actual content.

At times, the embedded assumptions in the way specific policy areas are talked about come together in particularly explicit and quite simplistic summaries of situations. Policy narratives are one example of these simplified framings.

Source: Keeley and Scoones 1999

are beyond their control, and reflect ‘paternalistic and patronising attitudes’ (Dellit 2004). As Chambers (1983) argues, a belief in the ‘idle poor’ is common in many cultures, and sometimes has its antecedents in the racial ideologies of colonialism, and the colonial view of the native as improvident, lazy and fatalistic.

Dean, writing about the ethics of welfare in the UK, notes that ‘there is a tendency across the political spectrum to fetishise dependency’, and that ‘dependency is something that evokes negative feelings’ (Dean 2004: 195). He notes that current policy wisdom in the UK is ‘consistent with a restrictive, top-down conception of human rights in which the subject is to be bolstered as an independent, competitive individual, rather than protected as an independent social being who may be vulnerable to exploitation’. Former British Prime Minister Margaret

Thatcher made an attack on dependency a central part of her political philosophy: 'I came to office with one deliberate intent. To change Britain from a dependent to a self-reliant society' (*The Times*, 9 February 1984). The 2001 Labour Party manifesto promised to 'refashion the welfare state on the basis of rights and responsibilities, with people helped to help themselves not just given handouts'. Dependence on the state tends to be viewed as particularly problematic:

While dependency on employers for the means of subsistence and upon families for care and support are made to appear natural if not indeed as a form of independence, dependency on the state – particularly for cash benefits – tends to be uniquely visible and especially problematic. (Dean 2004: 195).

Labelling people as dependent may force them to represent themselves in certain ways. It may also create resistance or attempts to cheat a system that stigmatises people. Hirschmann and Liebert (2001) note how the fact that being on welfare is stigmatised can influence how recipients value themselves: 'the empirical reality that these women live (welfare claimants) influences their self conceptions – feelings of shame and low self worth'. Attempts to discourage welfare dependency may also lead to resistance, or 'a certain degree of rational calculation born of efforts at resistance'. Edin similarly notes that, by using the belief that welfare is riddled with fraudulent cheats to keep payments punitively small, welfare policy in fact forces recipients to cheat (Hirschmann and Liebert 2001: 94).

The literature on welfare dependency also suggests different ways of framing dependency, notably the argument that it is more useful to recognise our mutual interdependence:

Interdependency is an essential feature of the human life course and the human condition. One might argue that it is constitutive of our humanity and the achievement of human identity. This is neither new nor radical. It is captured for example, in the timeless aphorism attributed to the Xhosa people of South Africa – 'A person is a person through other persons'. Personhood is founded in and through dependency on other persons (Dean 2004: 194).

This literature has also pointed to the important ways in which relations of dependency and debates about it are gendered. In both the developed and developing world, women's enforced dependency on men within highly patriarchal societies often constitutes the basis for their relative disadvantage. However, discourses of dependency are often blind to this, stigmatising 'welfare mothers', for example. It has been argued that one of the failures of Western welfare policy is a focus on the role of work and a neglect of the role of care. Ellis (2004), for instance, argues that policy often reinforces gendered stereotypes by

taking women's care-giving for granted. Similarly, it is important to consider the ways in which humanitarian aid might reinforce or challenge gendered relations of dependency (Byrne & Baden 1995). One attempt to construct a feminist ethics of care argues that 'it is our need for, and capacity to, care that precede and shape our rights and responsibilities' (Dean 2004; Williams 2001). This report returns to the idea of inter-dependency in Chapter 5, and argues that this represents a potentially useful and important way of rethinking the concept of dependency.

Dependency debates in relation to welfare in the West suggest that we should be aware of the politics of how the term is used, be alert to the negative connotations that it often brings with it, consider the ways in which dependency is gendered and be alert for the ways in which dependency discourses can force people into particular types of behaviour, including attempts to cheat the system.

2.4 Dependency and development

In contrast to the left- and right-wing distinction in debates about dependency in Western welfare policy, in development theory dependency has been associated with left-wing critiques of aid. In the 1960s and 1970s, dependency theory constituted an explicitly Marxist economic development approach. More recently, dependency has often been framed as the antithesis of development approaches that aim at empowerment, participation and sustainability.

Dependency was a key term in early theories about the process of development. Dependency theory sees underdevelopment as the result of unequal power relationships between rich developed capitalist countries and poor developing ones. It comes from a Marxist tradition, and in mainstream development economics largely fell out of favour with the collapse of communism. However, its concerns about how international relationships are implicated in poverty processes live on in debates around globalisation (Gore 2003). There are clear links here to the ways in which countries can be seen as dependent on continuing relief assistance, to debates around the disincentive effects of aid and to the argument that food aid is inextricably tied up with unequal trade relationships. Oxfam GB, for instance, argues that food aid is a trade issue, and that new disciplines on food aid should be part of negotiations at the World Trade Organisation. They argue that 'food aid reflects the availability of surpluses, the desire of exporters to expand markets and the involvement of special interests seeking benefits from food aid programmes' (Oxfam GB 2005). Country-level dependency can also be seen in terms of the debt burden of developing countries; according to this argument, greater debt relief is essential in order to allow countries to meet developmental objectives such as the Millennium Development Goals (ActionAid et al. 2004). When considering, for instance, the dependence of a

destitute farmer in the Ethiopia highlands on food aid, it is important not to lose sight of global issues of trade and debt, which are arguably as important as relief, albeit less visible in creating dependency. A linked debate addresses the question of countries' dependence on aid. Development aid in the world's poorest countries, particularly in Africa, makes up a high percentage both of national incomes and of government budgets, and discussion has focused on whether this dependence on aid inhibits or encourages economic growth and poverty reduction (Collier 1999; Lancaster 1999):

Adjustments to high levels of aid over a number of years are all part of what is often referred to as 'aid dependence'. A dependence on high aid inflows is not necessarily a bad thing. If the aid is used productively to promote social and economic progress, its net effect is likely to be highly positive for development in the country receiving the aid. But where the aid is ineffective, it is important to consider the potential negative effects of that aid (Lancaster 1999: 494).

Lensink and White (1999) propose a neutral definition of aid dependence as 'a country needing aid to obtain an objective in the foreseeable future'. Using this definition, aid dependence is no longer automatically defined as a bad thing; 'seeing aid dependence as bad is to confuse aid dependence with "bad aid"'. This report argues similarly that dependency debates often confuse relief dependence with bad relief.

The debate on aid dependence also includes concern with whether or not high levels of aid create a lack of ownership among recipients, and therefore contribute to undermining governance in highly aid-dependent countries. This debate may help to inform the understanding of the impact of regular inflows of relief assistance on politics and economics at a national level. De Waal argues that international relief risks undermining political contracts between the state and its citizens (de Waal 1997). This suggests that the problem is not dependence *per se*, but shifting dependence, from the state to aid agencies which may be less accountable to beneficiaries, and whose ability to deliver comprehensive assistance is often compromised. We return to this debate when considering national-level dependencies on relief assistance in Chapter 4.

The term dependency is often used in the context of debates around the problematic idea of a transition between relief and development. Often, relief is seen as intrinsically undesirable because of its tendency to create dependency (rarely defined in this context), and is contrasted with more developmental interventions, which have objectives such as sustainability, self-reliance or empowerment. These approaches are seen as combating dependency. In the linking-relief-and-development debate, relief is often assumed to automatically lead to dependence, and

dependency is therefore used as an explanation for moving towards development processes as soon as possible. What these transitions often mean in practice is that dependence is simply shifted, from the dependency of individuals on relief transfers provided by aid agencies to government dependence on international aid to provide basic services such as health care and education. For instance, in Cambodia dependency moved from dependency on aid to support care at a health centre-level to country-level reliance on aid to finance public health provision (Macrae 2001).

A specific concern raised in this context is that relief interventions will undermine ongoing developmental programmes. Once people have become accustomed to receiving free commodities, the fear is that they will be less willing to make contributions to community development projects without being paid. Micro-finance practitioners worry that repayment rates may be affected, and water programme managers fear that communities will be less willing to contribute labour to the maintenance of common assets. Whilst these fears are a common part of the tensions between relief and development actors within and between agencies, the extent to which these negative impacts actually take place remains largely unclear.

More fundamentally, dependency is seen as the antithesis of developmental principles. A good example of this is from a website that provides training resources for community development workers:

Counteracting dependency is your prime goal. Dependency in the community must be reduced by every action you take. A donor agency should try to avoid giving the community anything for nothing. That encourages dependency (Bartle 2004).

Concerns about dependency therefore are central to some of the fundamental tensions between relief and development. These basic tensions have generally been skated over in the literature on linking relief and development, and in attempts to marry humanitarian and developmental principles in documents such as the Code of Conduct (Buchanan-Smith and Maxwell 1994; SCHR 1994). At the core of this debate has been the idea that relief can become more developmental, incorporating concerns for participation, empowerment and capacity-building (Anderson 1996; Anderson & Woodrow 1989; Harmer & Macrae 2004). There have, however, been criticisms of this happy marriage of developmental and relief principles. Developmental relief has been criticised for compromising humanitarian principles of neutrality and independence in the way in which it engages with local actors in conflicts, and for neglecting the continuing need for basic relief assistance in a premature attempt to move towards developmental interventions (Bradbury 2000; Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue 2003; Macrae & Bradbury 1998).

But debates about dependency suggest a more basic problem. Relief is fundamentally about giving people assistance, and developmental philosophies are intrinsically opposed to free handouts. This tension is often played out in practice within a single organisation, with different parts responsible for relief and development. Those involved in development see relief as to be avoided if at all possible, are often appalled by the way in which it is delivered, regard it as disrupting long-term development efforts and want it to stop as soon as possible. Those involved in relief see development as slow, sleepy and in need of shaking up with the dynamism of rapid emergency responses. Indeed, part of the genesis of this study was tensions about the way in which dependency was discussed between those with emergency and development backgrounds within Oxfam GB.

It is also important to situate debates around dependency within a wider literature around livelihoods, social protection and coping strategies in response to crises. The literature on livelihoods and coping strategies stresses the point that people affected by emergencies are not passive recipients of aid, but use it as one of many livelihood strategies for survival and recovery (Ellis 2000; Lautze 1997; Young et al. 2005). Poor people's livelihoods in rural areas, for instance, are usually made up of a wide range of activities, including migration, petty trading, casual labour and non-farm activities, in addition to subsistence agriculture (Francis 2000; Wolmer & Scoones 2003). This diversity of activities does not cease during crises and

shocks. The literature on coping strategies in emergencies makes clear that aid is only one of many ways in which people attempt to cope with crisis (Corbett 1988). Strategies such as migration, relying on remittances, petty trading and casual labour all continue to play key roles. Aid assistance is therefore better seen as one of a range of options that people may be able to draw upon in their struggle to deal with crisis.

One of the concerns around dependency is the idea that external assistance may undermine informal social security mechanisms such as cooperatives, market associations, savings and credit clubs and burial societies. However, some writers have warned against the dangers of too sunny a view of informal support mechanisms. As Davies argues, this fails to recognise that 'the moral economy ... often engenders relations of subservience and dependence' (Davies 1996 in Devereux & Sabates-Wheeler 2004). There has been increasing recognition that the strategies by which people attempt to cope with crisis may be deeply erosive, and indeed that 'coping' may be a misleading term (Rugalema 2000). Depending on external assistance may be far more preferable than 'coping' via prostitution, or being forced into the distress sale of key productive assets. Indeed, one of the arguments for the early and generous provision of assistance has always been that aid provided early enough may enable people to maintain their livelihoods, preventing a slide into destitution and ongoing reliance on external assistance.

Chapter 3

Functions of dependency

When the concept of dependency has been analysed, it has usually been dismissed. There have been regular attempts to debunk the ‘myth of dependency’, some of which are summarised in Box 2. And yet the term has shown a remarkable persistence. Perhaps the best way of seeking to explain this persistence is to examine the different functions that the term serves for the various actors involved in emergency relief. Clearly, the functional uses of dependency discourse vary hugely between different contexts, as can be seen clearly in the background case studies carried out for this study. Nevertheless, some common themes emerge.

Box 2: Dismissals of dependency

‘Perhaps the time has come to look for a new metaphor’ (Clark 1985).

‘The problem of “dependency” then, seems to be essentially a product of extreme impoverishment and marginalisation rather than that of too much aid’ (Hall-Matthews 1996: 225).

‘In the rare occasions where people are genuinely dependent on food aid, it is usually because their livelihoods have been destroyed and their survival hangs in the balance, hardly an occasion to worry about abstract concerns such as “dependency”. But it is rarely food aid itself that destroys livelihoods. Dependency seems badly overblown as a concern about food aid’ (Barrett & Maxwell 2005).

3.1 Dependency as a justification for reducing relief

A fear of creating dependency is sometimes used by aid agencies as a justification for scaling back relief entitlements, in terms of coverage, the amount of aid provided and the timescale of provision. The 1996 review of Operation Lifeline Sudan, for example, noted that agencies had frequently justified reducing rations on the grounds that it would stimulate communities to re-establish production and income-earning activities. It argued that, rather than enabling war-affected communities to rebuild their lives, this strategy had the effect of making people more vulnerable to being forced into exploitative working conditions, reducing their access to food and increasing their exposure to violence. It concluded that the idea that ‘the reduction of food aid will reduce aid dependency is deeply flawed’ (Karim 1996: 201). Similar concerns were raised during a review of WFP’s work in Liberia (Apthorpe et al. 1996).

A review of the unintended consequences of humanitarian action in Sudan found that ‘reductions in food aid

have tended to reinforce the reliance of the displaced on exploitative labour contracts (Duffield 2000: 33). Trying to reduce dependence on aid therefore runs the risk of furthering other and more negative forms of dependence.

An example of concerns about dependency leading to reductions in rations is illustrated in Box 3. The apparent contradiction between noting problems of malnutrition owing to inadequate resources and the reduction of rations to minimise food aid dependency is not explained (WFP 1999).

Critics of the use of dependency arguments as justifications for reducing relief have pointed out the negative consequences that this can have for beneficiaries in terms of forcing people into erosive coping strategies. They have also stressed the need to work from a firm evidence base when planning reductions in relief entitlements. Vaguely formulated concerns about dependency should not be a good enough reason to reduce relief in the absence of alternative means of sustaining livelihoods. Aid agencies have responsibilities to establish empirically sound data, for instance in the form of malnutrition rates, on which to make judgements about the ongoing need for assistance (Bradbury 2000; Duffield 2000).

Box 3: Azerbaijan displacement

‘During the recent visit of the Representative of the Secretary General (RSG) on IDPs a prime concern expressed by donors, international agencies and NGOs was the dependency of the displaced and the government on international assistance. The displaced in particular have indicated a strong willingness to work in order to provide for themselves. To minimise dependence on food aid, the RSG recommended that more food for work and training activities be introduced to assist IDPs to resettle and reintegrate.

‘To minimise the risk of food aid dependency, WFP provisions have been limited to supplementary rations. All beneficiaries receive a unified ration providing half the energy required per person per day (around 950 kcal) with 25g of protein and 28g of fat.

‘The visit of the RSG confirmed that although agencies like WFP have taken a greater role to help meet the food needs of the internally displaced, there are still problems of malnutrition owing to inadequate resources.’

Source: WFP 1999

3.2 Dependency as a justification for shifting from relief to development

Particularly in long-running conflicts such as in Somalia and south Sudan, it is often unclear that the risks faced by people in their struggle to survive change substantially over time. There have often nonetheless been major shifts in aid agency approaches. Dependency discourses in these contexts represent a way of justifying a strategic shift from the provision of relief to more 'developmental' approaches. A review of the consequences of humanitarian assistance in Sudan found that:

Relief is seen as necessary when conflict makes populations vulnerable, but because relief is free to beneficiaries it can be seen as creating disincentives and undermining the functioning of markets making people dependent. There is thus a perceived tension between the humanitarian imperative – assistance to those in need – and a return to the development process. This has been addressed by attempts to protect assets, to invest in productive capacities, to repair infrastructure, to improve services and to use local organisations and build local capacities (Duffield 2000: 16).

This review, as well as the review of Operation Lifeline Sudan conducted in 1996, found that attempts to introduce more developmental approaches were in part related to a fear of creating dependency, and premised around attempts to promote self-sufficiency (Karim 1996). But the report found that these debates failed to recognise the political roots of vulnerability, or the reasons for the economic exploitation of the displaced and the real nature of their inability to become self-sufficient: their political and social marginalisation, impoverishment and exclusion. More recently in the DRC, a study found that humanitarian actors were engaged in what the report argued was 'premature developmentalism' (Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue 2003). In an evaluation for ACORD in Somalia, Bradbury (1997) found that the NGO was very concerned with dependency, but that this represented less a 'relief mentality than an ACORD mentality' (Bradbury 1997). In other words, the use of the term represents less a good description of the real extent to which people depend on relief, and more a way for aid agencies to justify and explain changes in their own strategies and approaches for engaging with people in crises.

One of the concerns sometimes raised under the banner of dependency is the idea that expenditure on relief is at the expense of development assistance. For example, Barrett and Carter (2002) argue that 'micro-level poverty traps generate macro-level relief traps for donors who must then dedicate an ever-growing share of scarce overseas development assistance resources to humanitarian relief at the cost of development interventions'. This concern is expressed both at national and global levels. At a national level, for instance, money being spent on relief in Ethiopia

Box 4: The relief mentality and dependency syndrome in Somalia

'A relief mentality and a dependency syndrome are perceived to be one of the main legacies of the international relief intervention in Somalia. ACORD has explicitly sought to address this in Sablaale and Heliwa. The Development Education Programme (DEP) in Sablaale, for example, teaches communities the difference between relief and development, and the benefits of self-reliance.

'In Sablaale, the evaluation found no evidence of a relief mentality, or proof that people had willingly abandoned any attempt at independence during the famine. Historical timelines and trend diagrams collected in the villages suggest the opposite. There is consistency in the trends recorded in all villages, that food production reached a peak around 1987. From that point, as the government weakened and services declined, food production decreased. People moved out of villages in search of work. Crisis was pending. As the war spread, a combination of insecurity and drought caused famine conditions. People had no choice but to seek outside assistance. Once the situation improved, people sought to return to farming.

'ACORD's preoccupation with "dependency" arises, in part, from a confusion between the agency's understanding of people's needs, and those people's perception of the role of the agency. In Sablaale and Heliwa much of the evidence offered by the team that communities were afflicted by a relief mentality or dependency syndrome is based on community responses to ACORD. From the perspective of ACORD, the attitude of communities has changed and they now receive fewer demands for hand-outs. However, it is not clear that this is evidence of a change in attitudes towards relief, or that communities have come to understand what can be expected from ACORD. The impression gained during the evaluation from discussions with communities in Sablaale and Heliwa is not so much that there is a "relief mentality" but an "ACORD mentality".'

Source: Bradbury 1997: 9

means less money for development assistance; at a global level, increasing budgets for humanitarian aid mean less development spending.

The extent to which this is actually true depends on the extent to which relief spending occurs at the expense of development spending, and this will vary from donor to donor. The hugely generous international response to the Indian Ocean tsunami points to the fact that emergency spending can be additional, in the sense that it would not otherwise be available for development assistance. However, principles and good intentions do not always translate into practice, and it is certainly plausible that greater relief expenditure reduces development budgets.

Strangely, rather than seeing this as an argument for separating relief and development budgets, this concern is sometimes regarded as an argument for less relief and more development. In Ethiopia, for example, the prominence of dependency concerns in relief debates reflects a broad-based preoccupation with the scale of relief assistance. Amounts of relief assistance being provided have been expanding; the 2003 relief operation was the largest in Ethiopia's history, with an estimated population in need of over 14 million, and 1.5 million tonnes of food aid distributed. Ethiopia has been structurally food deficit since at least 1980, and reducing the predominance of relief assistance is a shared aim of many actors (Devereux 2004). For the Ethiopian government, this has meant fighting what it labels as the dependency syndrome. The focus is on finding ways to move beyond a need to provide annual relief assistance to the destitute population (Lind & Jalleta 2005).

Discourses around dependency often represent a form of blaming the victim for the situation in which they find themselves. Dependency in this formulation sees the need for ongoing relief as the problem, rather than blaming the poverty and destitution that has created a chronic crisis. Dependency debates often appear as a particularly strong example of the tendency to blame the symptom rather than the cause. This is often compounded by the lack of other international actors in complex emergencies. Relief aid as what Macrae calls 'the instrument of last resort' has often been the most visible, if not the only, form of international engagement in long-running crises, such as those in northern Uganda, Burundi and the DRC (Macrae 2001). In these contexts, there is a tendency to criticise relief for failing to improve the situation and enable a movement towards recovery or development, when humanitarian aid was never claiming to have that as an objective, or is a wholly inappropriate instrument for that purpose. The problem lies not with relief and its failings, but with the lack of other forms of international engagement.

It has also been suggested that the tendency to blame the victim is in part explained by the way in which aid workers cope with the stress of working in humanitarian relief. Walkup (1997) identifies four stages of reaction: overwork, detachment, transference and reality distortion. In the transference stage, aid personnel are no longer able to detach themselves from the ever-present suffering that surrounds them, transfer the guilt away from themselves and place the blame on other factors. Harrell-Bond (2002) argues 'in addition to blaming politics, their superiors, the

donors, the bureaucracy and the host government, they also begin to blame the victims'. Walkup identifies dependency syndrome as enabling personnel 'to get on with their work in spite of the various dilemmas arising from the institutional contradictions between expectations and reality'.

Those that are seen as dependent can sometimes be regarded as a group to be targeted. In Ethiopia, for instance, those that the government sees as dependent are being targeted for inclusion in highly controversial resettlement programmes. Resettlement is both unpopular amongst the local population and regarded with caution by aid agencies and donors. The dependency debate is highly politicised in areas such as Delanta Dawunt, a remote district in the north-eastern highlands where fieldwork for the Ethiopia case study was carried out. Discussions on dependency are entwined with the government's revised food security strategy, centred on the resettlement of destitute farming households and the establishment of a safety net for chronically food-insecure households, which are considered to be potentially food self-sufficient where they currently reside. Relative dependence on relief assistance is used to differentiate between households, with the most dependent targeted for resettlement. The views and experiences of some farmers in Delanta Dawunt suggest that food aid is being used as a weapon to coerce destitute households to resettle. *Woreda* and regional officials alike have proclaimed that food aid will no longer be available as a way to pressure reluctant farmers to resettle. In this situation, people interviewed for the case study were extremely reluctant to identify themselves as dependent on any sort of assistance, for fear of being targeted for resettlement (Lind & Jalleta 2005).

By looking at the functions served by a discourse around dependency, we can begin to understand the persistence of the concept in the face of criticism. Almost regardless of whether or not it reflects some form of ground-level reality, the concept serves useful functions for the actors involved in the provision of emergency relief. As Clark (1985) argued 20 years ago, what this in turn suggests is the need to look internally, at what aid agencies do and how they do it:

If this alternative view is taken, the 'treatment' (for dependency syndrome) to be undertaken is not one prescribed by assistance officials for the refugees, but rather one which requires changes in the thinking and behaviour of these officials themselves and in the system which they help to create and administer (Clark 1985: 3).

Chapter 4

Analysing dependency

This chapter investigates the senses in which people, communities, governments and aid agencies are or are not dependent. It does so systematically, starting with the question of the extent to which people depend on aid and its reliability, and moving on to think about how any dependence on aid might affect livelihood strategies. It then considers the question of dependency in the sense that governments and aid agencies depend on the continuing provision of relief.

At its simplest, the extent to which one might depend on aid relates to how important it is compared to other sources of income or ways of surviving crisis. This is discussed in Section 4.1. However, we also argue, in Section 4.2, that to be able to depend on aid, even if it makes up an important part of a livelihood, one also has to be able to rely on it. Whether or not aid is dependable rests on whether it is regularly delivered and entitlements are clearly understood, or is irregularly provided, with unclear targeting or eligibility criteria.

It is also important to consider how relief assistance affects livelihoods, and this is addressed in Section 4.4. This might be because food aid affects prices, creating disincentives for production, or because participation in public works lessens the time for other productive activities. Equally, however, being able to depend on aid might have positive effects, for example reducing the need to engage in negative or erosive coping strategies, and might lead to lowered dependence in the future. Dependency may also be seen as an issue at the level of the community, nationally or at an aid agency level; this is discussed in Section 4.6.

4.1 Are relief recipients dependent?

There is a sense in which the degree of dependency can be empirically investigated in particular contexts, and it is possible to assess the contribution that aid makes to people's livelihoods. In this sense, dependency is referring to the relative significance of aid in people's livelihoods.

What is not clear, however, is at what level a household or individual can be said to be dependent on the assistance that they receive. This is the problem with the Lautze and Hammock (1996) definition that 'dependency can be defined as extreme reliance on resources beyond one's control'. Is a family where aid makes up 70% of their food needs dependent? If the proportion is 30%, does this mean that they are not dependent? Trying to quantify dependency in these terms starts to illuminate some of the problems with the concept. Clearly, if people are in desperate need in

the context of an emergency or chronic crisis, then any assistance is going to be very valuable, even if it makes up a relatively small proportion of their overall needs. Even if aid contributes only a small percentage of calorific requirements, it could potentially make the difference between just enough food and malnourishment.

Thinking about dependence in terms of what proportion of household needs aid provides is not particularly useful, and anyway will always be hugely variable both in different contexts and between different households within the same context. What little literature exists on this issue tends to suggest that aid often makes up a smaller proportion of livelihood strategies than is often assumed by the aid agencies providing the assistance. For example, Lentz and Barrett, in a study of food aid among pastoralists in the 2000–2001 drought in the Horn of Africa, found that the amounts received were relatively small. Food aid comprised 11% or less of income for half the Kenyan households during this crisis, and only represented half or more of income for 17% and 7% of Kenyan and Ethiopian households. The study found 'no qualitative or quantitative evidence that the meagre amounts of food aid they received had an appreciable effect on their capacity to become self-reliant' (Barrett & Maxwell 2005; Lentz & Barrett 2004). Evidence from the 1998 floods in Bangladesh found that food aid was quite small relative to households' needs and other coping mechanisms. Household borrowing was six to eight times the value of all transfers to poor flood-exposed households (De Ninno et al. 2004 in Barrett and Maxwell 2005).

In Ethiopia, there is contrasting and contradictory evidence on the significance of relief assistance in meeting household needs. An Oxfam GB survey found that contributions of remittances, defined as including food aid, amounted to an average 2% of household mean annual income (Demeke et al. 2003). Aid agency staff interviewed for the study highlighted the irregularity of distributions and the wide sharing of relief rations, decreasing the importance of relief in individual livelihoods. In interviews, farmers reported that rations were insufficient to meet their household's food needs, but that relief assistance complemented other work activities. A female beneficiary of relief assistance succinctly expressed the dominant view among farmers: 'I am not dependent. Aid complements other activities like selling wool or cow's milk and butter. But aid is not a big issue for me.' For many farmers, 'reliance' on food aid is seen as part of a rational exploitation of all available resources. Several farmers indicated that relief aid bridges the food gap, particularly

when rains fail. Many added that aid also prevented distress migration in crisis years and, in extreme circumstances, saved lives.

Aid can play a crucial role, and, in some cases, makes up a significant part of what enables people to survive. Approaches such as Save the Children's household economy model can sometimes put figures to this. For example, in Wollo, Ethiopia, household food economy baseline data shows that between 25% and 50% of the population in different areas are dependent on relief for more than 20% of their food requirements (Sharp et al. 2003). In a study of destitution in Ethiopia, Devereux et al. (2003) found that households across the survey area depended on free food aid, on average, for 23% of their income, rising to nearly 40% for the destitute group. What is clear is that most farmers do not rely exclusively on relief assistance, even during crisis years. Dependence on relief assistance is one of many mechanisms farmers use to get from one hungry season to the next.

Aid agencies have often under-estimated the contribution to survival by sources other than aid assistance in emergencies. This is despite calls for better analysis of people's own capacities, and tools such as the Red Cross' vulnerability and capacity analysis which aim to better reflect local capacities and get away from the idea of the passive beneficiary (IFRC 2002). It can probably safely be said, therefore, that in many crises people are less dependent on aid than aid agencies judge them to be, and that non-aid sources of support play a larger role than is generally measured or acknowledged.

It is also important to consider the ways in which the extent to which people depend on aid may be gendered. Women and men may face different types of vulnerabilities and risks, and so may depend in different ways on relief assistance (Byrne & Baden 1995). For example, the different risks of violence and rape faced by men and women in Darfur means that people's dependence on the ability of international actors to provide protection will be gendered.

A different approach is taken by Sharp et al. (2003), which used dependence as one of the features of extreme poverty in a study of destitution in Ethiopia. Dependence is seen as one of the defining characteristics of destitution, which is defined as:

a state of extreme poverty that results from pursuit of 'unsustainable livelihoods', meaning that a series of livelihood shocks and/or negative trends and processes erodes the asset base of already poor and vulnerable households until they are no longer able to meet their minimum subsistence needs, they lack access to the key productive assets needed to escape from poverty, and they become dependent on public and/or private transfers (Sharp et al. 2003: 13).

Although referring to long-term processes of destitution, this definition is also applicable to people who are no longer able to meet their subsistence needs because of disasters. Crises represent extreme levels of vulnerability and risk and in one sense, therefore, dependence is a defining feature of the need for humanitarian action. What is also important about this definition is the emphasis that dependence can be on public or private transfers, or a combination of the two. When shocks undermine the ability of a household to meet their subsistence needs as part of their regular livelihoods, they have to depend on some form of transfer. The question is whether it will be public or private, on what terms it will be provided and whether the consequences, beyond the immediate meeting of subsistence needs, are negative or positive. These generic questions apply whether dependence is on food aid, loans from money lenders at high interest rates or on relatives abroad sending more money home.

There is an interesting shift here from dependence as a concept used by aid agencies to describe the behaviour of aid recipients to dependence as a concept used by poor people themselves to describe some of the aspects of being poor.

Depending on the goodwill of others – whether 'begging' neighbours for various types of help or receiving food aid from government and other organisations – was also frequently raised in discussions and was widely recognised as a defining feature of extreme poverty. There was often a stigma of shame or defeat about such dependence for the people we talked to, who contrasted it with the respectable ideal of self-sufficiency and being able to support one's own household. Several informants mentioned the importance to them of being 'tira dehu' (good poor or proud poor) meaning independent of other people's help, and not indebted (Devereux 2003: 14).

Dependence in this sense refers therefore not only to the extent to which people rely on aid; the extent to which they have to rely on external assistance can undermine fundamental desires for independence and autonomy. Attempts to develop theories of human need stress that people require some degree of freedom, as well as having their needs for health, adequate food or shelter fulfilled. Sen describes this in terms of capabilities, or the capacity and freedom of the individual to choose and act (Sen 1985). Doyal and Gough (1991) argue that fundamental human needs include autonomy. Dean (2004: 204) talks about the capability for deliberation, meaning the 'ability freely and effectively to engage in mutually constituted discursive processes – both informal and formal – through which human needs can be identified and resources to meet needs negotiated'. These philosophical and ethical arguments are relevant in the context of humanitarian relief because of the tendency of aid providers to treat those they try to help as passive recipients of assistance, and to constrain their capabilities and autonomy. This helps us to frame concerns around

dependency. The concern is less about whether people in desperate need should be assisted, but more about whether the way in which they are assisted also respects their basic need for autonomy, and enables people to exercise a capability for deliberation. In other words, to what extent can people affected by crisis play an active role in negotiating and deciding how best to meet the needs arising from an emergency?

4.2 Can people depend on these resources?

In situations where aid makes up an important part of the survival strategies of people in emergencies, there is also a set of questions around whether this aid can be depended upon, in the sense of people being able to rely on it. This is a meaning of dependency that, as discussed in the section on definitions, is rarely used. However, for some of the other meanings of dependency to have any validity it would be necessary for people to be able to rely on assistance. For poor people to sit back and wait for assistance, and for aid to create a dependency mentality, people would have to be able to rely on its regular delivery. The transparency of assistance is therefore a key question. People can only reliably depend on assistance if they properly understand what they are entitled to, and when it is likely to be provided.

Clearly, the reliability of aid varies from context to context, and there is a limit to how much it is sensible to generalise. In parts of Ethiopia where relief assistance has become a fairly regular annual event, people's understanding of, and expectations about, relief assistance are likely to be very different from those in places where relief is a rarer event. However, much of what is known about the targeting and delivery of relief assistance, even in contexts of chronic crisis, suggest that relief aid is rarely transparent or regular enough to be relied upon. A study based on longitudinal survey work in south Wollo, Ethiopia, found that uncertainty surrounding the amount and timing of food aid deliveries has taught residents not to depend on it (Little 2004, in Barrett and Maxwell 2005). Duffield et al. (2000) found that, in south Sudan, there was no evidence that people were becoming dependent on food aid in any prolonged or permanent way: 'relief deliveries have in general been too unreliable and inadequate for dependency, except in limited periods of acute emergency'. People's understanding of relief assistance may also be gendered, with women often receiving inadequate information about how relief is being targeted and delivered. This has been the case in Afghanistan, for example, where aid agencies' ability to access and communicate with women was highly constrained during the Taliban period, and where society remains very patriarchal.

Targeting criteria are often opaque, poorly understood and abused, with the result that any individual poor household

cannot be sure about getting on registration lists and staying on them (Jaspars & Shoham 1999; Jayne 2001; Lentz & Barrett 2004; Sharp 1999). Even once people are targeted, there is ample evidence from many different contexts that aid once distributed is often shared out more widely within communities, diluting the amount that is transferred to any particular family and lessening the extent to which they can depend on it. Early-warning systems and the responses that they trigger are also seldom sophisticated enough to ensure that people in need of assistance will necessarily receive it. Those who died in famines in Malawi in early 2002, in Sudan in 1998 or in Ethiopia in 2000 clearly could not depend on relief being delivered. These are not unusual exceptions; assistance often arrives late or in insufficient quantities for it to be depended upon.

In Ethiopia, interviews suggested that aid had become entangled in the web of local-level power relations that determine access to support. Local people questioned the extent to which they could rely on aid because it was often shared widely within communities, reducing its impact, and because it was diverted by local elites. The targeting process is marred by accusations of favouritism and nepotism by the administrators and *ad hoc* committees responsible for targeting; in practice, targeting is politically negotiated, and social contacts matter greatly in determining final beneficiary lists. Some farmers interviewed in Delanta Dawunt expressed concern that poor households had been excluded from food aid distributions because they were not close to local leaders. This would tally with evidence from other regions in Ethiopia that shows significant problems with targeting (Clay et al. 1998). Such tendencies are recalled in an Amharic proverb: 'the government has sent us the relief food but the *kebele* (sub-district) leaders have taken it'. One female beneficiary complained that vulnerable groups did not benefit from relief assistance: 'aid is provided to wealthy people. We poor receive a small ration. The aid comes in the name of the poor of our community but the poor do not receive the aid'. The *woreda* administrator for Delanta Dawunt admitted that distributions of food aid had created enmity between local people and *kebele* administrators. But criticism was muted among farmers, with the exception of a few dissenting voices. There was tacit acceptance of ration spreading, particularly among those who regarded relief aid as a type of welfare that the government provides to all. In northern Kenya, interviews found contrasting evidence about the extent to which people could rely on relief assistance. Just over half of the 40 men and women interviewed felt that relief assistance was reliable, but several women likened aid to an opportunity; in other words, something unexpected and helpful, but which otherwise cannot be counted on.

The case study in Kenya showed a similar picture, with the majority of those interviewed arguing that relief assistance is insufficient in amount to be depended upon exclusively,

partly because rations are shared with those who are not registered. One official with a donor agency commented that community-based targeting has not been able to overcome the entrenched hierarchies in rural communities in Kenya, and that local elites still determine where food aid flows.

This report argues that, in situations of acute risk to survival, aid agencies should be aiming to ensure that people are able to reliably depend on receiving assistance. Relying or depending on relief should be seen as a positive objective that agencies should strive to meet. Greater investments in transparency, accountability, the active participation of affected populations and complaint mechanisms might help to address some of the negative consequences of relief assistance, which at the moment are often grouped under the umbrella term of dependency. If entitlements to assistance are better understood, then people may be less likely to portray themselves as passive recipients. And if relief can be relied upon, people will be better able to incorporate it productively into survival strategies, decreasing the risk that it will undermine the other ways that people try to survive and recover from crisis. These are discussed further in the next section.

4.3 Dependency and initiative

One of the meanings attached to dependency is the idea that the continued provision of relief risks creating what is sometimes called a dependency mentality or dependency syndrome. The precise meaning of this is rarely spelt out, but the implication is that relief undermines initiative and may create laziness. There are parallels here with the negative connotations attached to dependency in the literature on welfare in the West. Bakewell (2003b) argues that the term is most often used within aid agencies when referring to the idea that prolonged relief undermines individual initiative:

The notion of dependency is frequently used by the staff of UNHCR and NGOs working with refugees as an explanation for the refugees' lack of cooperation or excessive demands for assistance. People who have been refugees for a long time are perceived as having lost their natural means of coping and being reliant on aid agencies to provide all their needs. They do not take the initiative and do not take responsibility for the care of the poorest people within their midst (Bakewell 2003b).

The term has certainly been persistent. Writing in 1985, Clark found that the term 'refugee dependency syndrome' was essentially a metaphor from the mental health field, and that dependency was described as something that exists in the mind of refugees (Clark 1985).

Few studies have explicitly examined this question, and it tends to be more of an unspoken assumption. There is,

however, a small but consistent body of research that stresses that recipients of aid are far from passive recipients, and remain engaged in a wide variety of activities, of which aid forms only a part. As Bakewell (2003) argues, in the context of refugee camps:

Humanitarian aid becomes a component of refugees' resource base which they manage to promote their interests, but it is not necessarily, and possibly rarely, the major part. Many groups of refugees have been observed to make strenuous efforts to avoid being dependent on humanitarian aid to preserve their limited autonomy and control over their lives. Sometimes this may take the form of avoiding going to official settlements or subverting aid to match their own interests and priorities. Refugees go to great lengths to preserve their lifestyle and earn extra incomes where they can (Bakewell 2003a: 10).

Even in contexts of prolonged aid delivery and in refugee camps, studies have stressed that people remain 'imaginative, resourceful and industrious' (Hoeing 2004; Kibreab 1993). Kibreab (1993) makes a similar point in examining the livelihoods of refugees in Somalia. CASA Consulting (2003) argues that 'refugees are actively engaged in every possible type of productive work based on the opportunities and resources at their disposal'. Bradbury (1997: 9), in evaluating an ACORD programme in Somalia, found 'no evidence of a relief mentality, or proof that people had willingly abandoned any attempt at independence during the famine'.

Despite the lack of evidence, the concept of a dependency syndrome has remained remarkably persistent, and continues to influence aid agency and government policies. In Ethiopia, government policy continues to be influenced by concerns about dependency syndrome, for instance contributing to the policy to restrict the distribution of free food aid, and make all able-bodied recipients work for assistance.

In northern Kenya, there was little concern for dependency syndrome expressed by government, donor and aid agency officials visited for this study. A mixed picture emerges from the views of Turkana recipients. A significant percentage of people interviewed (45%) report that relief assistance has made some people lazy. Men in one remote village complained of an 'eat and wait' attitude among some community members. The existence of such views in remote communities suggests the power of the dependency syndrome argument. Even in extreme circumstances, beneficiaries are being socialised to accept that it is wrong to receive relief. However, what interviewees seemed to be describing was people who temporarily reduced their involvement in an assortment of arduous survival activities when relief assistance was distributed. It is notable that several women (women customarily undertake survival activities such as burning

charcoal and collecting and selling bundles of fuel-wood) described 'rest' as one of the ways that relief assistance improved their lives.

The idea that relief assistance may substitute for people's engagement in other livelihood and income-generating activities presumes the existence of work options. However, it is the lack of such options that in part characterises the state of destitution in pastoralist communities in northern Kenya, and that necessitates external support. Most people who were interviewed (73%) claimed that the receipt of relief assistance did not affect their involvement in other work activities. Several people emphasised that they had to continue with their normal activities because relief rations were inadequate.

The insufficiency of aid indicates that most Turkana pastoralists must continually seek new opportunities to survive. Diversification has long been an important livelihood strategy in Turkana. There is a tradition of gathering wild foods, the opportunistic gardening of ephemeral sorghum gardens, flood retreat agriculture and migration locally and further afield in search of opportunities for education and wage labour. There is no evidence that relief assistance replaces any of these long-established traditions. For many pastoralist households, relief assistance is absorbed into diversification strategies that already exist. The challenge for government and aid agencies is to enlarge access to information and education, so that pastoralist people themselves can reach informed decisions and contribute to debates concerning the direction of their livelihoods.

Relief assistance plays a complex role within local networks of resources and obligations, and this needs to be better understood. Box 5 describes the exploitative relations that developed between host communities and the displaced in southern Darfur, and the manner in which aid agencies became implicated in these relations (Duffield et al. 2000).

The idea that people's dependence is demonstrated by a lack of cooperation or even gratitude from recipients also underlies many of the discussions around dependency in aid agency discourse. This attitude is perhaps well demonstrated by the then British development minister's unguarded comment about the people of Monserrat following the volcano ('they'll be asking for golden elephants next'). This kind of comment reflects, both a perception of recipients' attitudes, and the attitudes of those who see people as dependent. Cuny and Hill call this perceived dependency:

Perceived dependency is an attitude. It can result from apathy, lethargy, frustration, and commonly, paternalism. Development agencies are most concerned about the latter two, frustration and paternalism. They often result from programs that last a long time, have little input from victims and continuously provide

Box 5: The role of aid for displaced people in southern Darfur

'For the displaced, the assistance they receive in the camps has come to be part of a portfolio of resources and obligations. These resources are poor and unreliable but they are diversified. They include sharecropping and agricultural day labour in the cultivation season and various forms of menial work in the off-season. It was put to us in so many words by one local NGO employee that the role of the agencies was to keep the agricultural workforce in good condition in conveniently situated holding camps. They needed food aid, we were told, so as to go to work in the early rainy season. Aid to the displaced also involves them in complex debt relations with their hosts. In the dry season the IDPs suffer from food shortage; their leaders take loans from their hosts. If they are given a single bag they must repay three bags six months later. The government-appointed sultans act as guarantors of these loans. Because of the debt system, a considerable proportion of the relief thus ends up with the creditors from the local community. Future relief distributions are accepted as security against food loans made at a rate of interest equivalent to 400% pa. Thus so is relief woven into the economic web, used to pay debts at outrageous rates. Distribution through chiefs means that, among other things, these dues can conveniently be extracted at source.

'The displaced are, effectively, asset-stripped at every stage of their migration. In Bahr-el-Ghazal, their herds and grain stocks are stolen or destroyed and members of their families abducted. In Darfur, their labour is extracted at disadvantageous rates and goods intended for their welfare systematically diverted. They may also be subject to looting once again. Thus, while acting as a seasonal recourse for the displaced and a safety net in nutritional terms, relief is also incorporated into a system of exploitation in which the host community are the principal beneficiaries. Since the displaced have no effective legal protection in Darfur, they seek protection through various forms of alliance; by establishing patron-client relations with Rizeigat omdas or village chiefs, or marriage relations with local families. Aid resources vanish into a complex web of enforced dependency. Agencies exist in a half-understood relation to these other sources of power; none of which can guarantee the safety of the displaced.'

Source: Duffield et al. 2000: 153

free goods and services. The victims often find it more convenient not to work. It is easier to receive food than to work to produce the food that would remove them from the distribution rolls. Perceived dependency syndrome exists when disaster victims refuse to participate in self-help activities, when they demand that they be given more, or when they will not participate in food for work or similar programs.

While this behaviour is frustrating for relief personnel, it is not too serious. It may indicate that an excess of food aid is going into the community or that some people on the food

rolls could be excluded. It usually is a sign that people are taking advantage of a program or the benevolence of donors rather than that a true dependency exists (Cuny & Hill 1999).

Aid agency staff often feel that recipients are not only lazy or uncooperative, but are actively trying to cheat the system. Framing attempts to abuse relief systems as evidence of dependency puts the blame for abuse on those receiving the assistance, and is often taken as evidence that too much assistance is being provided. Of course, it would be equally possible to reach exactly the opposite conclusion: that attempts to cheat the system were evidence of need and of insufficient assistance. What is striking is how often the first conclusion is jumped to, and how rarely it is based on any concrete evidence. For example, Reed and Habicht, in a review of food aid rations for refugees in Uvira, Zaire, in 1996, found that WFP reduced food rations by 20% on the assumption that refugees were receiving too much assistance, since food aid was being sold in local markets, and even exported. They found that rations were in fact insufficient for the majority of households, and that the poorest families were twice as likely to sell or exchange food aid in order to purchase other foods to break the monotony and balance their diet (Reed & Habicht 1998).

Perhaps a more useful way of viewing the manipulation of relief would be to recognise that people are likely to exploit what aid is on offer as fully as they can as part of their livelihood strategies. As Harrell-Bond (2002: 57) argues:

The stereotype of the helpless refugees also informs refugees' perceptions concerning the role that they are expected to play to gain the approval of the helpers and be successful in obtaining aid. As most refugees are able to infer, accepting their client role and ingratiating themselves with camp authorities and individual helpers is one of the survival strategies used in the context of fierce competition over scarce humanitarian aid resources.

Particularly when aid providers are seen as external actors, whose engagement and motivations are poorly understood, it clearly makes sense from an individual point of view to try and maximise the benefits that can be gained in the short term, because it is not clear how long these benefits will remain available.

All the evidence about how people survive during crises points to the fact that dependency syndrome is an unhelpful myth, and that relief does not undermine initiative or make people lazy. That the myth persists says a great deal about the attitudes of aid providers towards recipients, which in turn suggests that, in order to understand the persistence of the discourse about

dependency syndrome, these attitudes need to be examined. It is important to consider how humanitarian aid officials interact with, and gain their understanding of, the recipients of aid. Chambers' (1983) classic description of outsiders' views of the poor may provide a worryingly familiar picture:

Outsiders' views of the poor are distorted in many ways. Lack of contact or communications permits them to form those views without the inconvenience of knowledge, let alone personal exposure. Poor people are rarely met, when they are met, they often do not speak, when they do speak, they are often cautious and deferential; and what they say is often either not listened to, or brushed aside or interpreted in a bad light (Chambers 1983).

Current views of poverty in aid policy contain echoes of both European and colonial discourses. Broch-Due (2000) argues that a European discourse on poverty was imported to Sub-Saharan Africa during colonialism. Characteristics attributed to the poor working classes within Victorian society were scaled up to continental proportions. British administrators took a dislike to the supposed 'slothful excesses of Somali lifestyle', on the presumption that Somali peoples were lazy. Such attitudes toward natives were part of what Broch-Due refers to as the 'good-native, bad-native moralizing' central to the ethnic politics of colonialism (Broch-Due 2000). The violent engagement of the colonial state with pastoralist Karamojong people in Uganda and Turkana people in Kenya, described by Knighton (2003) and Lamphear (1992) respectively, can be linked to a 'bad-native moralizing' of pastoralist people, and the state's interest in controlling inter-group relations (Knighton 2003; Lamphear 1992).

Davis (2003) explains that one of the foundations of British rule in India was the belief that the past life of natives was full of depravity. The stereotype of emaciated and oppressed peasants was part of the system of beliefs that underpinned the spread of colonial power. Colonial discourse around native societies and polities sanctioned the imposition of colonial authority and new forms of domination and control, ostensibly to improve standards of living. However, as Davis shows, policies and instruments of control in colonial India subtracted from indigenous coping strategies and safeguards against famine. Davis suggests that food for work requirements introduced in Bengal under Victorian Poor Law contradicted a Bengali premise that food should be given ungrudgingly to the needy. For many native people, colonialism was an impoverishing process that heightened dependence on an inherently exploitative relationship.

In this context, it is worth remembering the often-limited interaction that humanitarians have with recipients. When people are in desperate circumstances, they are likely to tell

people in positions of power, and who may be able to help them, whatever they think they want to hear. For example, a local person interviewed as part of a review of OLS stated:

The main issue is the stoppage of food rations. We did not complain. Now the rain is falling and we have no seeds and no food. We will agree to anything you say (Karim 1996: 205).

It is useful here to bring in a theoretical perspective on poor people's strategies of resistance to power. This is neatly summed up in an Ethiopian proverb: 'When the great lord passes the wise peasant bows deeply and silently farts' (Scott 1990: 1). What Scott is investigating is why 'the poor sang one tune when they were in the presence of the rich and another tune when they were among the poor. The rich too spoke one way to the poor and another among themselves'. In interpreting the behaviour of powerless or dependent groups, Scott argues that their politics 'make use of disguise, deception, and indirection while maintaining an outward impression, in power-laden situations, of willing, even enthusiastic consent.' People in emergencies are often extremely powerless and vulnerable; indeed, one of the main features of crises is that they often destroy the assets and resources that people had previously been able to rely on. In these situations aid agencies, through the provision of assistance, acquire enormous power.

In investigating dependency, therefore, we need to understand both the official discourse, how aid agencies view those that they are trying to help, but also, to the extent that we can, what Scott calls the hidden transcripts of how people react to and resist the exercise of power. Using this perspective, the seemingly dependent recipient may simply be a 'wise peasant bowing deeply'; attempts to abuse the system may be the peasant's fart.

Harrell-Bond draws on the anthropological literature on gift-giving to illuminate the patterns of power that develop in the aid relationship, and the problems that are created. She cites the French sociologist Mauss in saying that 'receiving gifts generates an obligation to reciprocate', arguing that power is often at the very centre of giving and receiving gifts (Mauss 1925 in Harrell-Bond 2002: 55):

Thus in the context of giving humanitarian assistance, whether or not they are aware of it, humanitarian workers stand in an asymmetrical relationship to refugees who are symbolically disempowered through becoming clients of those upon whom they are dependent for the means of survival and security.

Some of the anthropological evidence suggests that gift-giving in pre-modern societies did not necessarily conform to a narrow bilateral calculus of reciprocity between giver and receiver. In a pre-modern society, unilateral gift-giving

could cement the solidarity of a small human community from season to season. Titmuss uses this to argue that there can be an innate need to give, for the benefit of neighbours and strangers alike (Titmuss 1997). This need was arguably demonstrated in the generosity of the public response to the Indian Ocean tsunami.

4.4 Dependency and disincentives

The term dependency is sometimes used as shorthand for a concern with the possible negative economic impacts of relief, often food aid. The argument runs that prolonged relief assistance can undermine local economies; in particular, large amounts of food aid can damage local agricultural production. This in turn leads to a continuing need for relief assistance, creating a vicious cycle and trapping people into chronic dependency. This dependency trap argument is obviously closely linked to a larger debate about the impact of food aid and its potential disincentive effects. A classic formulation is provided in a study looking at the impact of aid in Haiti, which stated that 'USAID-funded programs stifle local initiative with short term offers of free food and employment, creating cycles of dependency among Haitian farmers' (Grassroots International 1997). Another example of this use of the term dependency is given by Swift et al., in a discussion of the impact of emergency relief in northern Kenya:

There is increasing concern about the social, economic and environmental cost of drought (food or famine) relief. Massive efforts both logistical and financial are required to prevent the loss of human life. This approach, often dependent upon bilateral donors and international organisations (WFP and others) while effective in achieving their aim of reducing loss of life often lead to dependency while contributing little to the sustainability of pastoral livelihoods. Provision of relief is now expected by pastoral communities which may be leading to increased sedentarisation during periods of adequate rainfall in anticipation of handouts during drought (Swift et al. 2002).

Devereux (2004) refers to the 'dangers of food aid dependence':

The problem with all this food aid pouring into Somali Region is that it's excessive, poorly targeted, and not preferred. The problem is local farmers can't compete against free food, even if they drop their prices, which many are forced to do. In the Jijiga plains, many farmers have given up growing wheat altogether (Devereux 2004).

The problem with this argument is that the evidence for or against it remains inconclusive, though the balance probably points against disincentive effects, at least at national levels (Barrett & Maxwell 2005; Lentz 2004). As Barrett (2002: 16) argues, 'the empirical evidence is strikingly inconclusive. There are plenty of studies finding positive

effects of food aid on recipient country production, plenty finding negative effects, and many with mixed results’.

A recent example of a substantive analysis of the likelihood of disincentive effects comes from a Bellmon analysis for Ethiopia. This is an analysis required by US law in countries where the monetisation of US food aid takes place. It concluded that ‘there will be no significant disincentive effects due to the distribution of 225,000 MT of wheat’. In interviews, farmers indicated that their decisions to grow crops were not determined by short term price fluctuations, but that in the longer term a prolonged price for wheat may impact on production (Deloitte Consulting 2005: 41). The study found that high levels of food aid in 2000/1 and 2001/2, against a backdrop of relatively good local production, resulted in an effective surplus in local food markets, and undoubtedly contributed to a substantial slump in prices during those years. It concluded that disincentive effects on production arising from such over-importation appear to be general rather than specific in nature, and amount to the overall depression of the agricultural sector, reducing the capacity to produce in subsequent years.

What this perhaps suggests is that individual farmers are not forced into dependency, in the sense that they plant less or base their planting decisions on the likelihood of food aid depressing prices. But there is a danger that high levels of food aid can depress commodity prices at a national level, and that this can lower farmers’ incomes and therefore increase vulnerability and the need for ongoing assistance.

The other type of dependency trap that is sometimes, although less often, referred to relates to possible labour disincentives from participating in public works programmes. The argument here is that, if relief is provided in the form of food for work or cash for work, people may have to participate in these projects in order to meet basic subsistence needs, taking scarce labour away from other key livelihood strategies that might enable recovery, and increasing their dependence on relief. This has been much less researched, and the assumption seems to be either that households are likely to have surplus labour, or that public works programmes can be timed to fit in with agricultural slack seasons (Maxwell et al. 1994).

As with many of the other aspects of dependency, the paucity of evidence has not prevented the concept from being remarkably persistent. A strong anti-food aid discourse, for example, runs through both government and development agency circles in Ethiopia, in part centred around the idea that it has strong disincentive effects and creates dependency. Again, this seems to be a misguided way of looking at the issue - blaming the most visible symptom of a problem rather than its cause. WFP in

Ethiopia argues that food aid is a visible target and scapegoat for development failures (WFP 2004). In Ethiopia, there are many factors underlying the chronic and persistent poverty of a large proportion of the population. But since food aid has been the most visible form of aid response to chronic food insecurity over the last decade, it serves as an easy scapegoat for the wider failures of development policy and attempts at poverty alleviation.

Similarly, in Kenya, the government’s dependency concerns centre around the possible negative effects of food aid, and there is strong anti-food aid sentiment among government officials. The draft National Policy for the Sustainable Development of Arid and Semi Arid Lands highlights dependency as a key concern: ‘[t]he negative consequences of emergency relief are everywhere to be seen: local producers cannot compete with free food, local service providers go out of business and short term thinking removes the incentives for dealing with the underlying problems’ (Republic of Kenya 2004). Reduction of dependency on food aid is a policy objective. Official rhetoric emphasises disaster risk reduction as a way of moving out of what is perceived as increasing dependence on food aid and other sorts of humanitarian interventions.

The Kenya case study was conducted in a predominantly pastoralist economy, where the possible disincentive effects of food aid are very different from agrarian contexts, where they have normally been considered. In pastoralist areas, most livelihoods derive from keeping animals, which are then bartered or sold for imported cereals. In this situation, food aid that brings down prices for cereals may benefit the terms of trade for pastoralists. Food distributions can contribute to more favourable terms of trade for livestock keepers by causing a decrease (improvement) in the cereal/meat price ratio. Food aid can provide the incentive for pastoralists to hold onto animals, and thereby contribute to the livelihood recovery process after an emergency. Fieldwork in Turkana shows that food distributions have a noticeable market effect by lowering grain prices, according to 61% of pastoralists who were interviewed, and increasing livestock prices, the response of 77% of all respondents. There are, however, a growing number of pastoralists who engage in petty trade in cereals as part of a diversified livelihood, and may thus be negatively affected by the distribution of free food aid. A concern specific to pastoralist areas is that the distribution of free veterinary drugs during an emergency may displace community animal health workers and other private animal health providers that sell drugs to livestock keepers.

The debate around disincentive effects has been strangely distorted by its association with dependency. The possibility of disincentive effects particularly around food aid has been

used as an argument for reducing relief entitlements or shifting to more developmental approaches, without necessarily any reference back to whether there have been changes in the needs that prompted food aid in the first place. If the need for relief assistance still exists, then the possibility of disincentive effects may be a risk that is worth taking to ensure that people continue to receive the assistance that they need in order to survive. Equally, disincentive effects are an argument for looking at the appropriateness of the assistance being provided, not at whether it should be provided at all. If disincentive effects from food aid are occurring, it may make sense to examine the appropriateness of food aid and consider shifting to, for example, cash-based approaches (Harvey 2005). What it does not justify is stopping or cutting back on relief requirements, which should only be justified by reference to the shifting patterns of need and vulnerability faced by people in need of assistance.

4.5 Dependency and public works

Fears of dependency syndrome have often been one of the key justifications for public works programmes. Including a work requirement is seen as a way of avoiding dependency because it gets away from what is seen as the evil of free handouts. Work requirements for relief have a long history. In the nineteenth century in the UK, distinctions were made between the able-bodied and the non-able-bodied poor. The able-bodied poor were seen as prone to idleness, and assistance was only provided through workhouses that were explicitly meant to serve as a deterrent to idleness. There are many other examples from history of an elite concern with the feckless poor and attempts to coerce or control them, from the building of roads as part of the famine response in Ireland to the Elizabethan poor laws. Under the colonial administration of Turkana District in northern Kenya in the 1930s, some recipients of relief assistance had to fish or work on locust eradication campaigns as a condition for receiving aid.

In today's relief programmes, the justifications for public works are different, although the idea that public works are likely to be self-targeting because only the poor will want to take part has echoes of punitive antecedents. Another common rationale is that the assets built through public works schemes are useful and contribute to development. However, a dependency argument is often part of the justification for public works – on the grounds that having to work for assistance makes dependency less likely.

It is of course equally plausible that participating in public works schemes could create what economists call labour disincentive effects. Having to fulfil a work requirement may take people away from other productive activities. The evidence for or against labour disincentive effects is remarkably thin. A 1994 study from Ethiopia found that

disincentive effects were largely avoided, although there was some evidence that a reduction of labour supply might be occurring as a result of food for work. Kohlin (1987) found that 'there is a competition for labour between FFW activities and other income-generating activities, both for men and women ... (though FFW still does not seem to affect what is produced to any great extent) (Kohlin 1987: 3 in Maxwell, Belshaw, & Lirensio 1994).

Despite this lack of evidence, public works programmes are an important part of relief assistance strategies. In Ethiopia, for example, it is mandated that 80% of relief resources are used as payment to workers on labour-intensive public works, with what the government calls gratuitous relief only allowed for needy households that lack able-bodied labour. Labour-intensive public works are viewed by Ethiopian government officials as a way of changing the mentality of beneficiaries and creating popular awareness that relief assistance is something to work for, in other words not a right but a wage earned for one's contribution to development projects. Public works are also tied into government ideology and the aim of mobilising the poor to lift themselves out of poverty.

Part of the problem with the existing evidence base is linked to the tendency to assume that poor people in rural areas are predominantly subsistence farmers (what Christoplos (2004) describes as the 'yeoman farmer fallacy'). Because the evidence that does exist suggests that public works programmes do not impact negatively on agricultural production, there has been a tendency to assume that disincentive effects are not important. However, livelihoods approaches increasingly show that poor people's livelihoods are far more complex and diverse, and that, even in slack periods for labour in the agricultural calendar, people are actively engaged in other livelihood strategies.

Linked to concerns around dependency in public works programmes are concerns that relief projects create disincentives for participation in longer-term development projects; for example, that it makes beneficiaries reluctant to provide free labour as part of the community contribution towards aid agency projects. This idea of community contributions is a direct import from developmental approaches aimed at promoting sustainability and participation. Bakewell (2003) found that Angolan refugees in Zambia were described as dependent by an aid worker because they complained about the incentive payments offered by UNHCR for their labour for building services in the settlement. Bakewell found that these refugees were labouring in local farms to supplement what they saw as inadequate rations, and that they were too busy using their time and labour to improve their living conditions to work freely on what they saw as aid agency projects.

The idea that people's reluctance to provide free labour for development projects is evidence of dependency is problematic. Often, the problem seems to lie with the fact that the projects themselves are poorly designed, or lack a sense of community ownership. Failure to maintain assets built through public works is also sometimes taken as evidence of dependency, but it seems more likely that this is in fact evidence that assets produced through public works are not valued; there is plentiful evidence of assets built with too little community involvement, poor technical rigour and inadequate complementary inputs (Harvey 1998). There is a long history, particularly in Ethiopia, of poorly designed and maintained public works programmes. By the same token, the fact that people accept or even demand payment from aid agencies to undertake work should not in itself be seen as evidence that they depend on it. A recent evaluation of a public works project in Ethiopia, where works had included maintenance of previously built roads, argued that 'inclusion of maintenance financing in cash for relief promotes dependency' (Girgire and Desta 2005). Instead, the acceptance or demand for cash is evidence of the hardly startling truth that, given a choice between doing something for free and being paid for it, most people will opt to be paid. Furthermore, people facing crises, particularly the most vulnerable, may not have the labour available to contribute to development projects without compensation in kind or in cash.

4.6 Dependency, health provision and refugees

This report has largely focused on dependency in relation to food aid or on relief in a generic sense, where the concern is with a vaguely defined dependency syndrome. This reflects the focus of debates about dependency in the case study countries and in the literature, and this focus is in itself illuminating. Concerns about dependency are largely focused on food aid, and are closely linked to concerns about its possible negative impacts. In part, this stems from the fact that food aid often forms the most visible and largest part, in budget terms, of humanitarian assistance, and so is an obvious target. It also reflects the fact that food aid is often provided over a prolonged period, as in the case study examples of Ethiopia and Kenya, in a way that shelter assistance or non-food items are not. But the relative neglect of other sectors and aspects of humanitarian relief is a limitation. This section attempts to address this by considering dependency debates in relation, first to refugee populations, and second to the provision of health services.

In some situations, dependence on outside assistance is enforced. The best example of this is in refugee camps in countries where refugees are explicitly denied freedom of movement and employment opportunities. The debate on dependency in the refugee context therefore raises a

slightly different set of issues. Part of the debate has focused on the negative consequences of this enforced dependency. Crisp, for example, in discussing the option of local integration of refugee populations, argues:

It has become equally clear that simply 'warehousing' refugees for years on end, deprived of the right to freedom of movement and without access to educational and income generating opportunities, has many negative consequences. It prevents refugees from developing their human potential and limits their ability to make a positive contribution to the economy and society of the country which has granted them asylum. It creates a situation in which refugees – especially young males – are more prone to become involved in illicit and anti-social activity (Crisp 2004: 6).

The extent of refugee dependence on continuing assistance largely depends on the policies of host governments. If refugee populations are confined to camps and prevented from employment outside, opportunities for becoming self-reliant or independent are likely to be limited. In UNHCR terminology, there are three 'durable solutions' available to refugees: local integration, voluntary repatriation and resettlement in a third country (Crisp 2004). In the absence of these durable solutions, UNHCR has tended to approach the question of dependency in terms of encouraging self-reliance through what it calls 'community services' approaches. UNHCR's own guidelines for community services see avoiding dependency as a major objective:

It is important to involve the refugees in the provision of assistance and allow the community to share the responsibility of caring for itself and its vulnerable members. This minimizes dependency and encourages self reliance (UNHCR 1999: 97).

However, care needs to be taken that attempts to promote self-reliance are not at the expense of continuing support to meet the basic needs of refugees, where this is needed. As Bakewell argues:

What refugees tend to conclude about the drive towards self-reliance (community services) is that UNHCR and the NGOs are refusing to provide resources for fear that they might engender 'dependency'. From a refugee's perspective the community development approach is likely to be read as a way of saving money on refugee aid (Bakewell 2003a: 9).

In refugee situations, as in other forms of long-running chronic emergencies, there is a danger that concerns about dependency can be used as a justification for reducing levels of humanitarian support, even though this support is still needed. This may be due to donor fatigue, or to a desire on the part of host governments to encourage refugees to repatriate. There remains, however, a humanitarian imperative to support those for whom it is

not safe to return home, and for whom integration into host communities is not possible. Addressing the continued dependence of refugee populations therefore often lies beyond the remit of humanitarian actors; rather, it is linked to political efforts to resolve conflicts in the countries from which the refugees have fled. In the absence of the political action that could allow safe return, addressing issues relating to dependence rests with the refugee and asylum policies of host governments. In this, as in so many spheres of humanitarian action, aid agencies need to recognise the limits of their responsibilities. To the extent that host government policies allow, they can try to encourage refugees' self-reliance, and they can advocate for asylum policies that allow for greater self-reliance and integration. But while refugees remain unable to return or to integrate, then the aid actors involved in supporting them have a responsibility to continue that support, and to accept that a degree of dependence on it is inevitable.

The concept of dependency has tended to be less used in relation to the delivery of services such as health care or education by relief actors. However, in these sectors too concerns about sustainability are at the heart of debates about how relief should be provided. In the health sector, much of the current debate has tended to focus on the appropriateness of cost-recovery mechanisms in relief settings, and how some sort of health service can best be sustained during long-running conflicts (Hands 2005; Poletti et al. 2004). But it is notable that the basic concept that people should be able to depend on the public provision of health care, supported either through government tax revenues or donor funding, is generally accepted. This is also largely true in the education sector. Where public provision of basic services by governments has broken down, it is also generally accepted that aid agencies may have to play a substitutory role, sometimes for long periods, and that this should be as dependable as possible (Hands 2005). As argued earlier in this report, the case for international assistance to allow poor countries to maintain basic social services seems to be largely accepted; the question is whether dependency occurs at the level of the beneficiary or the state. The contrast with the stigmatisation of dependency on relief food aid is striking. It seems that the case for international support for the provision of health care and education is accepted, whereas it is not accepted in the case of basic welfare provision to alleviate hunger and destitution. There are, however, signs of a greater willingness to consider support for long-term welfare provision; we will return to this issue in Section 5.2.

4.7 Dependency at the level of governments and aid agencies

It is not just people affected by disasters that can be seen as dependent on relief assistance. Particularly in the case studies in Ethiopia and Kenya carried out for this research,

the dependence of governments and aid agencies on relief was seen as a key issue. As one UN official in Ethiopia remarked: 'Is the more important issue macro level dependency or beneficiary dependency? ... The attention is on getting farmers off dependency, but there is no attention on the governments' dependency'. As with beneficiary dependency, the dependency of governments or agencies is generally portrayed in negative terms. Government officials feel that aid agencies are profiting from disasters, and aid officials argue that relief assistance has become embedded in corrupt or neo-patrimonial political structures. But as with beneficiary dependence, we argue that this is not necessarily the case. Governments whose capacities are overwhelmed in times of crisis, and that are unable to meet the basic needs of their citizens, should be able to depend on international support. And where governments are unable or unwilling to provide this support, aid agencies should be able to depend on receiving sufficient public and donor backing to prevent large-scale mortality through the delivery of independent and impartial humanitarian relief. The problem therefore is not dependence *per se*, but the way in which this dependence is structured: for instance, for governments, whether dependence on relief is creating additional incentives for corruption, and for aid agencies, whether organisational interests created by relief resources are distorting the ways in which relief is delivered. Certainly, there is a problem of perception. The widespread local belief, found in the case studies and in other contexts, that international aid agencies are profiting from disasters suggests a need to develop a more constructive dialogue.

Government dependency

The question of whether or not relief provided on a regular basis creates dependencies at a national level is linked to a wider debate around aid dependency beyond a narrow focus on relief assistance. Development aid in the world's poorest countries, particularly in Africa, makes up a high percentage both of national incomes and of government budgets. As Table 2 shows, aid in 2002 accounted for 22% of national income in Ethiopia, and 47% in Sierra Leone. In Mozambique, more than 50% of the government's budget is provided by donors (De Renzio 2005). Some authors have argued that aid dependence can potentially undermine the quality of governance by weakening accountability, encouraging rent-seeking and corruption and alleviating pressures to reform inefficient policies and institutions (Knack 2000).

The heavy ongoing dependence on development aid among many of the poorest countries in the world reinforces the fact that humanitarian aid spending is relatively small, and often marginal in comparison. It acquires greater importance in some failed or fragile states where donors are not able or willing to provide development assistance. So, for instance in Ethiopia, emergency aid assumed greater importance following

Table 2: Aid dependence in Africa: country examples

	Population (millions)	GNI per capita (US\$)	Aid/GNI (%)	Aid per capita US\$
DRC	51.9	100	15	16
Ethiopia	67.2	100	22	19
Malawi	10.7	160	20	35
Mali	11.4	240	15	42
Rwanda	8.2	230	21	44
Sierra Leone	5.2	140	47	67
Tanzania	35.2	290	13	35
Sub-Saharan Africa	688.9	450	6	28

Source: World Development Indicators (2002 data)

reductions in development support during and after the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Changes in aid policy and financing from emergency to development mechanisms may therefore result in shifting types of dependency. There may be a shift from being dependent on an international aid agency to deliver basic services to meet minimum subsistence needs, to governments depending on international donors to finance basic service delivery by government providers. This is currently what is happening in Afghanistan (Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan 2003). In other words, there is a transition from dependence at a local level to dependence at a national level.

Dependence at a national level can have a variety of different meanings. It could be seen as a government relying on the financial transfer of resources that relief represents, and being unable to import enough food to meet basic needs without food aid support, for instance. It could also refer to national-level disincentive effects, with the possibility that large levels of food aid could lower prices, and thereby lower agricultural production at a national level, deepening the reliance on food aid. More importantly perhaps is the harder to measure sense in which the continued provision of international assistance may affect the social contract between a government and its citizens, and have distorting effects on perceptions of governance and citizenship. International relief assistance, by allowing governments to evade their responsibilities to support people in times of crisis, may make it more difficult for people to hold their governments to account (de Waal 1997). Shifting responsibility for humanitarian action from governments to international humanitarian actors may also create dependence in the sense of undermining the capacity and ability of a government to fulfil their responsibilities to provide assistance, and set

policies. Harrell-Bond (2002), for example, argues that an essential problem in encouraging host states and civil society to assume responsibilities for upholding refugee rights is that the authority to determine refugee and assistance policy has been assumed by the humanitarian regime. She concludes that 'one can say generally that the "independence" of host government policy is a function of its ability to avoid financial dependence on UNHCR'.

There may be strong vested interests in continuing relief assistance, both because of the potential financial benefits and because of the opportunities for patronage that it can represent for those able to control the distribution process. There is money to be made from trucking and delivering food aid, and political capital to be gained from being seen to bring food aid to local constituents. People may also be doing well from the diversion of aid from its intended recipients. A review of aid in south Sudan, for example, argued that:

to the extent that aid has created dependency, it is probably most marked not among its intended beneficiaries but amongst those who divert relief or who earn their living in its design and distribution (Duffield et al. 1997: 33).

There may be times when keeping populations reliant on outside assistance serves useful functions for actors involved in the provision of relief assistance. In Zimbabwe, the current regime has often been accused of using food aid as a political weapon, as a way of mobilising the support of rural populations.

Emergency relief has been provided on a large scale over many years in both Ethiopia and Kenya. In Ethiopia, this has created strong commercial and political interests in it. Relief

is seen as having become institutionalised and entrenched in government planning and budgets at both federal and local levels. Interviews and discussions with recipients in Ethiopia concluded that relief assistance is an important political currency, an observation consistent with other recent studies (Elliesen 2002; Pankhurst & Bevan 2004). Local government authorities depend on relief resources as patronage to cement client networks and expand their influence. Recipients of aid assistance interviewed as part of the case study accused *kebele* (sub-district) leaders and *Mengistawi Budin* (village leaders) of registering their family members, friends and supporters as beneficiaries on relief public works projects. Local government officials interviewed acknowledge that relief assistance subsidises the budgets of line departments that often lack the requisite technical capacity and capital inputs to implement the development projects that they are responsible for under Ethiopia's decentralised system of government. *Kebele* leaders often exaggerate crop failure in their area to justify a greater amount of relief assistance; *woreda* (district) officials accept this as standard practice, and equate food aid with budgetary support. According to an NGO source, *woreda* and *kebele* officials also gain political leverage by increasing food aid flows to their constituencies. In 2003, a large distribution of food aid took place in Delanta Dawunt, even though conditions were relatively normal. *Woreda* officials used the national emergency to claim food aid for the *woreda*. Farmers were selling food aid to merchants the same day it was distributed.

Ethiopia is introducing a five-year social protection scheme, entitled the Productive Safety Nets Programme (PSNP). The PSNP has been influenced in important ways by views and debates about dependency. Ethiopia's leading bilateral and multilateral donors have played an important role in driving the current debate and advocating in support of new strategies to assist chronically food insecure households. USAID's strategy document for Ethiopia states that '[d]epleted coping strategies have not been restored because of a few months supply of food. Relief provided on an emergency basis has barely kept the poor above water. At best, it has simply kept people in a holding pattern. It has not built assets nor has it secured livelihoods' (USAID 2004: 25). The PSNP represents a significant institutional transformation of the aid system in Ethiopia. A critical design feature is multi-annual funding commitments by donors, which will enable the government to provide predictable resources to a targeted beneficiary population defined as chronically food-insecure. There is broad donor support for the government's decision to address chronic food insecurity through a budget line, rather than the annual appeal.

The government is determined to gain greater control of relief resources through policy and programme reforms that see the introduction of a national safety net. While the overriding justification for a national safety net is to reduce

the dependence of the chronically food-insecure on relief assistance, another type of dependency informing the government's position is to reign in what some government officials see as the excesses of international agencies involved in distributing relief assistance. The government position is that the PSNP is a government programme. Funds for it are mostly channelled through the government, with the important exception of USAID, which has virtual prohibitions on direct budget support and thus works primarily through NGOs and contractors (USAID 2004). The position of NGOs in the PSNP is a sensitive issue. The government's guidelines closely define the terms under which NGOs can be involved in the programme. They can help in its implementation only where their activities represent additional resources, and if they implement activities within the government's programme framework (Aide Memoire (draft) 2004). On the eve of the PSNP's launch in late 2004, some NGO officials were confused by the government's position and unsure how their efforts would complement the programme.

In Kenya, there have been similar concerns about the dependence of government. People interviewed for the case study argued that there was systemic dependence on emergency aid as a response to food crises, and that this reflected limitations in how aid institutions think and respond to the problems of pastoralists. There is a widespread view – most strongly expressed by pastoralists themselves – that pastoralist areas are marginalised by the government and are not incorporated into the main political and economic currents of contemporary Kenya. The Kenyan government is accused of a reductive approach in dealing with the complicated problems in the pastoralist north, and of falling back on 'guns and food aid' as a standard response.

Dependency was also used to describe concerns over corruption in the procurement and distribution of government food aid. Dependence on food aid is entrenched in the Kenyan political system, according to the spectrum of government and non-government officials that were interviewed. Politicians are dependent on food aid as a form of patronage through which they preserve and expand their support. A notable example of this is the distribution of food aid during elections, to influence the outcome of the vote. Politicians are also seen as profiting from the distribution of relief assistance, through transport contracts for example. District administrative officials responsible for overseeing distribution of government relief assistance are also alleged to intercept a considerable volume of food aid before it is distributed, to sell on local markets and through personal networks of traders and shop owners.

There have been some signs of a greater political will to respond to emergencies on the part of the government. Freeman (2005) sees this as evidence of the 'erosion of African dependency'. Recent changes in the institutional

framework for emergency response in Kenya have enhanced the overall coordination of food security information and responses, and put the government at the centre of the response to food crises (KFSSG 2005). These changes are credited with enhancing inter-agency co-operation and coordination at the national level, improving trust between the Kenyan government and donors, and creating a unified relief response system. The Kenyan government assumed a central role in the response to the 1999–2001 drought emergencies. The democratisation process, the effective lobbying role of parliamentary groups and MPs and a critical media are all cited as prompting the government to enhance its leadership in relief response (Akilu & Wekesa 2002). However, people interviewed for this study expressed reservations about this positive picture, and donors worry that needs assessment and the establishment of beneficiary numbers have been unduly influenced by politicians. Compounding these challenges is the fact that relations between the Kenyan government and donors have worsened considerably over allegations of high-level corruption. A famine relief contract worth an estimated 500 million Kenyan shillings is one case covered by a dossier presented by the UK High Commissioner to the Kenyan President in February 2005.

Tension between governments and aid agencies and the desire of governments to assert greater control over the delivery of resources is also seen in other contexts. In Afghanistan, the government has regarded a transition from food aid-based relief to cash-based social protection as a key step in beginning to assert its control (Christoplos 2004; Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan 2003). The new African leaders who came to power in the late 1980s and early 1990s were often strongly anti-aid. For example, Eritrea's President Isaias Afwerki argued:

If our government pursues a policy of making aid continual, then poverty will be continual and all the other ills of society will continue. I am against welfare anywhere. Welfare is crippling, welfare is dehumanising (Goldberg 1997; Lautze et al. 1998).

This review of experiences from Kenya and Ethiopia suggests that relief aid is often embedded in local political structures. In many of the world's poorest countries and in complex emergencies, these structures are likely to be corrupt and neo-patrimonial (Chabal & Daloz 1999; Van De Walle 2005). This is of course hardly surprising, and is a point that has been made before in the literature on the political economy of complex emergencies (Anderson 1999; Collinson 2003). As argued at the start of this section, this sort of dependence should not be seen as an argument for withholding potentially lifesaving assistance from people in crises. It does, however, suggest a need to focus on how aid is delivered. There is a need to address questions of governance and corruption in relation to

emergency relief more robustly than is currently the case. Corruption within emergency relief remains an under-researched issue, characterised by an embarrassed silence (Willits King & Harvey 2005). Addressing corruption in part must be about promoting greater levels of local transparency and accountability to beneficiaries, so that people know what they are entitled to, and are able to complain if it is being corruptly diverted.

Aid agency dependency

Aid agencies themselves are sometimes seen as dependent on continuing relief programmes. Large aid bureaucracies can develop in responding to crises, particularly where these continue over many years. This in turn creates incentives for self-perpetuation, as it is always hard to lay off staff and sell assets. Agencies may also be in some sense financially reliant on the relatively generous overhead provisions from donor funding to maintain international headquarters and capital city offices. Of course, vested interests are not confined to the level of recipient countries or aid agencies. US food aid, for example, has to be shipped by US companies, which receive generous subsidies and represent a strong pro-food aid lobby (Barrett & Maxwell 2004). To some extent this argument is circular: aid agencies that have a mission or mandate to provide emergency relief in crises where local capacities have been overwhelmed of course depend on donor and public support to be able to deliver that relief. But resentment about the scale of funding received by international aid agencies and the ways in which this funding is spent reveal real tensions about the appropriate role of international agencies in humanitarian crises.

Aid agencies are certainly perceived to be dependent in a negative sense. Ethiopian government officials interviewed referred to an 'emergency culture' to characterise the dependence that they presume exists among aid agencies. A senior government official contended that 'there is no dependency among beneficiaries. The dependency problem lies with implementing agencies [NGOs]. The expectation is there that the government will appeal for food. There is an emergency culture in Ethiopia among NGOs looking for resources'. This reveals clear resentment about the role of international aid agencies, and distinctions between expatriate and national staff within agencies. The issue of NGO dependency is a strong factor bearing on the poor state of relations between NGOs and the government. Both government officials and national NGO staff interviewed questioned the ways in which international NGOs finance recurrent expenditures through annual emergency appeals. Many NGOs operating in Ethiopia have their origins in responding to emergencies in the 1980s. Since then, many have steadily enlarged and refined their relief response capacities. In the 2003 emergency, NGOs managed more than 48% of the relief resources donated to the country.

Government officials and aid recipients interviewed for the Kenya case study also saw aid agencies as dependent on relief assistance. Relief assistance in Kenya is distributed according to a 'lead agency' system, whereby one operational agency is identified in each district to coordinate the distribution of aid with other NGOs working under its direction. In some districts, there are struggles between operational agencies to attain the role of lead agency. Officials interviewed for this study regarded problems with the lead agency system as a manifestation of dependency in aid organisations. Some suggested that some NGOs relied on responding to emergencies to sustain their wider operations, while many humanitarian actors expressed frustration with what one official called 'big dependency', which describes the ease with which operating agencies can fundraise for emergency operations, particularly distributions of food, compared to longer-term and non-food interventions. For example, WFP in Kenya has never received a multi-annual funding commitment.

The opinions expressed in the Ethiopia and Kenya case studies are far from unique, nor do they convey a new message; the do no harm literature, for instance, has pointed out how the lifestyles of expatriate aid workers can create local resentments (Anderson 1999). And agencies have long committed themselves to building and respecting local capacities, in the Code of Conduct for example (SCHR 1994). But there remains at the very least a problem of perception and a need for aid agencies to address the largely negative ways in which many local actors see their role. As was argued above in the case of governments, the dependence of aid agencies on continued funding should not be seen as an argument for reducing their ability to provide lifesaving relief. It does, though, suggest a need for greater investment in local level transparency and accountability, and for a more constructive engagement and dialogue with governments and local civil society actors.

4.8 Chapter summary

This section has attempted to take a step-by-step approach to analysing the different meanings of dependency, the different levels at which dependency takes place and the implications this has for how relief is delivered. It has argued that people depend less on relief than is generally assumed, that there is little evidence that even long-term relief undermines initiative and that relief is rarely delivered reliably or transparently enough for it to make sense for people to depend on it. Many concerns about dependency in practice seem to stem from worries about the disincentive effects of food aid, but we argue that framing these real concerns in terms of dependency is unhelpful because it can provide an excuse for cutting back entitlements to relief for people who continue to be in desperate need. If the concern is with the possible negative impacts of food aid, then it is better to frame the debate around how to decide what form of assistance is most appropriate to prevent hunger, save lives and alleviate suffering in times of crisis. Relief can become embedded in local political economies, and this creates a need to understand these processes and work to find ways to minimise the incentives for corruption and diversion that this can create. Aid agencies have developed sizeable bureaucracies, and these may become similarly entrenched, with perhaps perverse incentives to perpetuate themselves. At the very least, we argue that there is a problem with the way that the role of international agencies is perceived by local actors in many contexts, and there may also be a case for reviewing how relief is provided.

This report, like many others before it, finds the concept of dependency as it is often understood by actors involved in relief to be unhelpful. But its persistence suggests that there is a need, not just to attack it as a myth, but to suggest how it can be reframed to address the fundamental issues at the heart of concerns about dependency. We turn to this in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5

Rethinking dependency

The previous chapter undertook a critical analysis of the way in which dependency is currently used and understood within humanitarian relief. This chapter suggests ways in which the concept could be usefully reframed.

5.1 Interdependency

A different way of looking at dependency in relief would be to use Dean's (2004) analysis, that it is more useful to recognise people's mutual and overlapping interdependencies. The many interdependencies that make up a community's social relations and people's livelihoods may have both positive and negative aspects. Poor people may be trapped in exploitative economic relations, such as crippling debts, sharecropping arrangements or bonded labour. In a more positive sense, people may be able to depend upon support from friends and relatives and other links created through the social capital within communities. External aid influences these patterns of social relations and, if it continues over a prolonged period, may become embedded within them. Framing the issue in this way therefore helpfully changes the debate from a need to understand how people do or do not depend on aid, to understanding the role that aid plays within the multiple forms of interdependency that make up people's livelihoods, and how these change during crises.

Dean makes a contrast between intimate relations of dependency, for instance within families, which are sustained through love and solidarity, and human rights approaches, which provide the basis for recognising our shared responsibility for strangers. He sees rights as a mode of discursive struggle providing 'a pivotal link between love and solidarity; between the ways we come to recognise and negotiate our interdependency and the ways in which we might establish cooperative forms of responsibility; between the welfare of intimates and that of strangers' (Dean 2004: 205).

We argue that this concept of interdependency is also helpful in reframing the debate around dependency in emergency relief. Rather than seeing dependency on relief as necessarily negative, we should be trying to understand the role that relief plays in the complex web of interdependencies that make up livelihoods under stress in crises. The concept of interdependency draws on feminist critiques of welfare policy, and attempts to develop a feminist ethic of care which 'displaces the dominant discourse of human rights in favour of an understanding that human freedom is built upon interdependency; it is our need for, and capacity to, care that precede and shape our rights and responsibilities' (Dean

2004: 19). What is being suggested here is a reinterpretation of liberal concepts of autonomy and independence that, as Williams argues, would entail tolerance of human limitations and frailties, and an acceptance of human diversity (Williams 2001: 481 in Dean 2004). This seems particularly relevant in the humanitarian sphere, where reconsidering dependency forms part of a necessary shift from concerns with independence to a tolerance of human frailty and vulnerability.

Framing the issues in this way underlines the importance of context. As Barrett (2005: 19) argues, 'it is essential to consider the identities, communities, groups and networks at play in a given setting if one seeks to understand the motivations behind individuals' choices regarding the allocation of scarce resources'. Debates about dependency on relief can often seem oddly divorced from the context of a particular crisis: the assumption is that a negative dependency will result from prolonged relief wherever this takes place. By contrast, seeing relief as one of many forms of interdependency within livelihoods, and stressing the need to understand how these interact in a particular context, puts the onus back onto aid agencies and other external actors to understand the societies in which they are working. An example of the importance of a context-specific analysis of interdependency is provided in Box 6, which discusses how aid policy interacts with local-level realities in Sudan.

People in crises do not depend only on aid, and it is important to recognise the overlapping forms of dependency that may characterise livelihoods in crises. For example, in Box 7, Christoplos (2004) argues that poor farmers in Afghanistan are more likely to depend on exploitative landlords than on aid assistance.

In situations where people are dependent on exploitative social relations or are being forced into erosive coping strategies, it is at least possible that external assistance could play a positive role in providing opportunities to move away from other negative types of dependency. There is clearly a need for caution in assuming that aid assistance necessarily plays a positive role in replacing exploitative social relations. However, relief assistance may provide opportunities to change social relationships. For example, cash grants provided by Save the Children in Ethiopia have enabled poor households to renegotiate the terms under which they work with local landlords (Adams 2005). Part of the argument being made by Christoplos for why, in the case of Afghanistan, it makes sense for the rural poor to rely on landlords rather than aid agencies is that landlords

Box 6: Interdependencies in Sudan

Duffield et al. (2000) argue that aid agencies need to develop a more informed and complex model for analysing the role of aid:

‘Constructing such a model would involve moving away from an economic framework that focuses on supposedly isolated households and self-contained communities. It would imply recognising the existence of a complex, interconnected and ethnically-structured system. Within this system – and contrary to the dominant assumptions in the aid community – the categories of ‘rich’ and ‘poor’ do not exist independently of each other. Poverty is in large part a function of the way that wealth is produced; and wealth may sometimes be used to ameliorate poverty through ethnically-structured networks. Dinka sharecroppers who work for little more than the food they eat, contribute to the profitability of commercial groundnut production in Sudan. Destitute labourers and prosperous merchants are not independent accidents of nature. Aid agencies, including rights-based NGOs, appear to have forgotten this simple truth. Displaced southerners are at the bottom of the racial hierarchy in north Sudan. Having few resources, they are highly dependent on a complex set of patron–client and exploitative relations which link them to local groups and power-brokers, including merchants, Dinka ‘sultans’, and aid agencies. Within this system of dominance, relations range from servitude, through various forms of

bonded work, to providing cheap agricultural and urban labour and receiving aid.

‘One example of this process is the way dominant groups adapt to opportunities for diverting or expropriating aid. The system is also affected when assistance is removed or when it is decided that certain actions should not be undertaken. For instance, the reduction of food aid in the mid-1990s served to reinforce the dependence of many displaced southerners on servile and bonded forms of clientage.

‘For dominant groups and classes, displaced southerners have a double utility: first, as cheap, malleable labour; and second, as a subordinate client group that can be managed and manipulated to attract outside resources. The GoS administration, local government structures, commercial farmers, local leaders and host communities have all benefited from this system in different ways. At the same time, the desperate condition among most displaced Dinkas has remained unchanged during the 1990s. The redefinition of human rights and protection in terms of the promotion of self-sufficiency has meant that agency forms of simulation are effectively blind to these structures of dominance and exploitation.’

Source: Duffield et al. 2000: 120

Box 7: Interdependencies in Afghanistan

‘Poor farmers throughout the world generally recognise that their best chance of accessing reliable services is to ally themselves with patrons who can either provide services directly, or who have the political, economic and social relations to arrange services from others. The cost of entering into these relationships may be high and even exploitative, but a near-destitute farmer usually looks first at what is left for the family to survive on, rather than the cost. Various studies have pointed out that access to credit is highly dependent on ties to patrons. Even other services, such as ploughing, are easier to access where strong ties to a patron exist ... The massive profits that are made through the interlocking of services related to opium production are the most glaring example of how poor farmers become trapped in cycles of increasing debt bondage and destitution.

‘While certainly often extractive, patron–client relationships

are currently the most viable way that many farmers seek to lower (or at least stabilise) their transaction costs. They are the lesser of evils that poor farmers face ... Landlords are in many ways more accountable to their tenants for the quality of seed that they provide than aid agencies whose presence is dependent on short-term contracts ... Given the limited reach of current agricultural and rehabilitation programming, attempts to replace these relationships with greater independence may not be feasible or desirable now. Dependence on an exploitative landlord has clear advantages over dependence on an NGO with a six month contract or a government with virtually no capacity to cover its recurrent costs. Replacing an exploitative but functioning social system with one that relies on institutions not yet created is a high-risk strategy and it is rural Afghans that will bear such risks.’

Source: Christoplos 2004: 45

are often more accountable. This suggests that, if assistance was more accountable and provided with greater reliability, then it would be more likely to play a positive role in reducing exploitative dependencies. This perhaps implies an added argument for attempting to link relief assistance more closely with the longer-term provision of social protection and welfare assistance by governments

that may ultimately be more accountable to their citizens than external aid agencies.

It is also important to understand who, in a particular context, is likely to be excluded from the interdependencies that make up the community or the society. For example, in examining the recovery of Honduran households after

Hurricane Mitch, Carter and Castillo (Carter & Castillo 2004) found that reciprocal and altruistic transfers formed an important social safety net, but that they tended to favour a subset of relatively privileged households. As Barrett (2005) argues, their analysis warns against the naïve belief that community norms of mutual assistance are equally available to all. In a study of destitution in Ethiopia, Sharp et al. (2003) found that community support and informal safety nets were much weaker than in the past, and that those who were destitute were often the least able to access these safety nets. They found that the destitute in Wollo were so poor and marginalised that they were excluded from social support networks, which conventionally provided informal safety nets to the poor. They also argue that the major reason for the weakening of informal safety nets was:

not the moral effect of outside aid (as some people claim), but the impoverishment of whole communities and of the better off groups within these communities, who were previously better able to support their poorer neighbours both through charity and mutually beneficial economic arrangements such as employment, share-rearing and loans ... The general impoverishment of the middle and better-off households (compounded by out-migration of those who can afford to make a better life elsewhere) contributes to a vicious cycle of increasing need for aid and increasing aid dependence (Sharp, Devereux, & Amare 2003: 203).

The poorest and most marginalised groups within societies are likely to be the least able to rely on informal community support mechanisms, the most in need of external support and the most likely to depend on it.

5.2 Dependency and social protection

Depending on relief has been seen as particularly problematic because of the lack of any long-term social protection measures in many developing countries. As Sharp et al. (2003) argue for Ethiopia, referring to the high proportions of people's income contributed by food aid and public works:

On the one hand, the data presented here suggest that the relief distribution system is doing an impressive job in reaching remote communities and in ensuring that destitute households are almost twice as likely to receive free food aid as the non-destitute. At the same time it must be a grave concern to policy makers that so many people in rural Wollo are depending so heavily on food aid. There is little doubt that the relief system will remain a vital safety net for the foreseeable future: but it is not development, and it is not indefinitely sustainable.

Similar concerns were seen in the northern Kenya case study, where increasing levels of destitution among northern Kenya pastoralists constitutes one way in which dependency is discussed. Two related issues were

highlighted by sources interviewed for this study. One is the viability of pastoralist systems. There is concern for the future of pastoralism in its current state, and a perception that pastoralists are increasingly vulnerable to 'normal' climate stress. In this view, successive shocks, including multi-year droughts, animal disease, pest invasions as well as chronic conflict and political instability, have eroded the resilience and coping capacities of pastoralists. This in turn relates to another issue, which is the expanding need for relief assistance to meet annual food requirements in northern Kenya. One source likened the current situation of northern Kenyan pastoralists to 'an Ethiopia waiting to happen'. Already, some believe that relief assistance is (barely) sustaining a system that has collapsed.

A renewed interest in social protection and long-term welfare in the development literature suggests a possible way forward. Safety net transfers are no longer necessarily seen as unproductive and unsustainable. Surveying the recent literature, Ravallion (2003) concludes that:

The conventional wisdom in mainstream development policy circles is that income transfers to the poor, and safety net policies more generally, are at best a short term palliative and at worst a waste of money. These views are starting to be questioned at two levels. Firstly, evidence from careful evaluations has pointed to a number of success stories ... Secondly, the presumption of an overall trade-off between redistribution or insurance (on the one hand) and growth (on the other) has come to be questioned (Ravallion 2003: 3).

The safety nets programme in Ethiopia, described in Chapter 4, is one example of attempts to develop new strategies to support chronically food-insecure households.

The renewed interest in social protection and enthusiasm for the state provision of welfare in developing countries may provide an opportunity to recast the debate around dependence. Rather than seeing depending on relief in negative terms and as unsustainable, being able to rely on relief could be regarded as a positive objective of assistance, with the possibility that social protection measures have a realistic chance of providing some form of transition between relief and development.

5.3 Earlier and more generous relief

Debates about dependency in the humanitarian sector have almost exclusively focused on the idea of relief creating dependency. It is equally possible, however, to see relief as having the potential to reduce dependency, for example by enabling people to conserve productive assets that they would otherwise have to sell.

The northern Kenya case study provides a good example of this. Oxfam GB has argued strongly for earlier, more

generous and less strictly targeted assistance as an appropriate response to the particular context of pastoralist populations. Dependency arguments are commonly based on the assumption that most poor people are subsistence farmers in rural areas. Examination of dependency concerns in pastoralist areas must be grounded on different assumptions, which take into consideration the particularities of vulnerability and food crises in such areas.

The collapse into famine for livestock keepers can be sudden. Pastoralists adopt increasingly damaging coping strategies as drought conditions worsen. Food security and nutrition may be maintained in earlier stages of the drought cycle as herders sell or barter animals to acquire non-livestock food sources. Pastoralists may slaughter core breeding livestock for food as drought conditions intensify. For this reason, some argue that aid agencies must intervene earlier to pre-empt coping strategies that are detrimental to livelihoods in the longer term. The key is rapid response in order to prevent a system from collapsing. It makes little sense to wait and provide relief after someone is already destitute, when early intervention can pre-empt distress coping strategies.

Recovery from the loss of livestock in emergencies is a protracted process stretching over multiple seasons. The time required for herds to recover to pre-emergency levels depends on the severity of the emergency and the level of coping undertaken, as well as the reproductive cycles of different seed stock and the recurrence of shocks. It can take several years for a household herd to recover to a point where it once again produces sufficient livelihood products. The implication is that relief assistance may need to be provided over a longer period, until herders rebuild their herds to a point of reasonable food security. It may also be necessary to give larger amounts of relief, since restocking is costly and because poor households may still need to sell livestock to acquire food. Larger rations support the pastoralist economy by preventing asset depletion and supporting natural herd growth through reproduction (Bush 1994). For these reasons, Oxfam GB has based targeting criteria in Turkana on a broader definition of vulnerability, which encompasses even those households that have animals. A concern that wide coverage would cause dependency in the beneficiary population was an important line of argument for those who opposed Oxfam GB, including WFP.

5.4 The psychology of relief

It is also possible to examine the idea of dependency in the sense of the psychological impact of emergencies. As Clark (1985) notes, the term itself is borrowed from the field of mental health. In WHO the topic of mental health in emergencies is dealt with by the Department of Mental Health and Substance Dependence. Feelings of helplessness and dependency in response to emergencies are, for some

people, in some contexts, a psychological reality, not an invention of aid agency discourse.

A small literature looks at the ways in which aid is delivered and the feelings that this creates in the recipient of assistance. For instance, Harrell-Bond asks:

Is one of the major sources of stress the experience of being helped? ... All human beings are dependent on others to a greater or lesser extent; the issue is not being helped per se, but the relative powerlessness of the recipient vis a vis the helper. In this sense, research would test whether one of the major sources of debilitating psychological stress is the structure of the aid regime for refugees itself (Harrell-Bond 1999).

Dependency in this sense focuses less on the fact of receiving assistance and more on how aid is delivered. It is also linked to another under-explored area of emergency relief, the psychological impact on the survivors of emergencies. There is of course a literature on psycho-social interventions, but this has focused on counselling approaches to deal with traumatic events, rather than on what the psychological responses to extreme events mean for how broader assistance is delivered.

In a First World context, feelings of helplessness and dependency are seen as one of many normal reactions to emergencies. Box 8 presents an Australian government publication providing information for emergency workers, in which dependency is depicted as part of the normal process of recovery. There is also a stress on how emergency workers can help people with these reactions, both in providing information and being as transparent as possible about the assistance on offer; the involvement of the affected population in recovery planning is also emphasised. WHO's guidelines on mental health in emergencies also stress the importance, in the acute emergency phase, of establishing a reliable flow of credible information on the emergency, establishing physical safety for the population, relief efforts and family reunion efforts (WHO 2003).

A study conducted in Bosnia found widespread feelings of loss of power and self-esteem. Feelings of chronic fatigue and listlessness were also often referred to (Carballo et al. 2004). The study identifies the need for better dissemination of information: 'people wanted to know far more about what was happening to them than the humanitarian community and national authorities were able or willing to tell them'. It also argues that feelings of helplessness were exacerbated by the way in which relief was delivered, and that agencies 'should have involved their clients far more in planning and handling of the process of relief'.

But there is a need to be careful with debates around psychosocial impact and interventions in disasters, as the

Box 8: Personal response and recovery

‘Although many people do not react adversely to disaster, most are affected at some stage of recovery. Any of the following normal stress responses to the abnormal events may be experienced.

Short Term Responses (First days to weeks):

Excitement, confusion, disorientation; changeable emotions; hard to think, plan, organise or remember things; numbness, reactions postponed until later or displaced onto other issues.

To Help:

Respect privacy and independence; offer help and support for people to work out what they need and how they can obtain it; allow time for planning and decisions; reach out, but offer suggestions not instructions or orders; provide information and repeat it often; involve affected people in recovery planning

Medium Term Responses (From weeks to months):

Persisting emotions, numbness, nightmares or preoccupations with the event; grief, anger and other reactions to the emergency’s accumulating impacts; uncertainty, worry about the future; feeling of helplessness, dependency, pessimism, distrust and disillusionment; exhaustion, no leisure or relaxation, health problems, accidents, changes in eating, drinking, smoking, sex or other habits; chronic stress; neglecting one’s own needs; over sensitivity to political or community events, wanting to blame.

To Help:

Let people talk themselves out as often as they need; don’t take expressions of emotion personally; foster group support; convey understanding and concern; show willingness to help with small things that may be important symbols; provide information repeatedly on normal reactions, recovery operations and help available; reach out to help but foster independence.’

Source: ACT Recovery Centre 2002

field has its own heated controversies. In particular, there has been criticism of a tendency to impose Western models on different contexts, in particular to diagnose widespread post-traumatic stress disorder in those who have experienced adversity. It is important for attempts to understand the psychological impact of disasters not to reinforce the idea of passive and traumatised recipients. As Pupavac (2000) notes, ‘often overlooked by many international psychosocial counsellors is that anger, fear, stress, suspicion of strangers, hyper-alertness, and sleeplessness are rational responses to dangerous circumstances and are linked to survival strategies’. According to Summerfield:

Trauma programmes certainly can be seen cynically by those for whom they are intended, they can be experienced as

patronising or indeed as a form of pacification. In Bosnia, people derisively referred to the aid delivered to them through a model that did not offer physical protection, restitution or justice as ‘bread and counselling’ (Summerfield 2002: 1,106).

Harrell-Bond (1999 and 2002) argues that we should focus on a slightly different aspect of the psychology of relief. She contends that looking to the experience of violence as the main explanation for a lack of mental well-being among refugees may be looking in the wrong direction. Instead, she argues that we need to understand the stress of the refugee experience itself, and that ‘there is much evidence that the treatment meted out to refugees by too many of those delegated to help them is such that it can only be described as inhuman’ (2002: 52).

What then can we take from the mental health literature? Bearing the need for caution in mind, it is probably still fair to conclude that emergencies do have psychological

Box 9: Interventions for psychological trauma and grief

Silove and Zwi note that the question of what interventions are appropriate for addressing psychological trauma and grief remains controversial, and the area of least consensus in psychosocial programmes. They suggest a set of observations that may help to steer a path through this controversy:

‘Acute stress reactions are common after trauma but, as yet, our capacity to predict the minority whose symptoms will become chronic and disabling is limited. Hence screening whole populations for traumatic stress soon after disasters provides little practical guidance on the need for targeted interventions. Fortunately, we know that for most survivors of disasters, acute traumatic symptoms will subside naturally over time. As such there is no place for mass psychological debriefing a strategy that is neither cost effective nor logistically feasible. Instead, emphasis should be given to culturally appropriate social strategies aimed at providing protection for the vulnerable, reuniting families and communities wherever possible, creating meaningful roles and livelihoods and re-establishing institutions and services (religious, cultural, mental health) that promote communal cohesion and a sense of order. Giving recipient groups a say in designing these processes, and treating them with justice and dignity, are critical to forging a culture of partnership between helpers and survivors. Feeling protected and cared for has a powerful effect on reducing acute traumatic symptoms. In that respect, rather than trauma counselling being the foundation for social recovery the opposite may be true: effective social reconstruction may be the best therapy for most trauma reactions.’

Source: Silove and Zwi 2005

impacts on the people affected by them, and these often include feelings of helplessness and powerlessness. These are often further reinforced by the way in which relief assistance is delivered. Greater efforts to make assistance as transparent as possible, to inform people about methods of assistance and to involve people in its planning and delivery may help to address some of these issues.

The literature on mental health tells us something about the psychological impact of disasters, but little about how the recipients of relief view their own situation. Thus far, we have mostly examined the way in which dependency is constructed and understood by aid agencies, but local attitudes towards dependency are also important. A sense of shame about having to depend on others seems to be a common feature in many societies. Some universal definitions of human needs put autonomy as one of the fundamental ones, and the desire for independence and freedom as universal (Doyal & Gough 1991; Gough 2003). Because of the lack of reciprocity involved, relief may sometimes be particularly shameful. A sense of stigma around dependency, therefore, should not be seen as purely an external construct. There is a need, therefore, for context-specific understandings of the role of relief and discourses around dependency and independence.

In northern Kenya, interviews with Turkana people carried out for the case study found an assortment of views about what it feels like to receive relief assistance. Several interviewees expressed indifference mixed with resignation. Several people also expressed a feeling of dignity and a renewed sense of worth. Typically, this was explained as being spared the humiliation of having to beg or being dependent on extended family members, friends and even refugees, and being able to give gifts and assist others. Some Turkana pastoralists also voiced feelings of shame and regret. A Turkana woman commented: 'I feel guilty depending on food aid. I look like a beggar or someone who is destitute and cannot improve my living standard. I think of what else I can do to reduce my dependency on aid'. One man likened relief assistance to a 'parent' that provides children with food.

5.5 Dependency and participation

Chapter 3 argued that one of the functions of discourses around dependence has been to shift the blame for failures in how aid is delivered. So, for example, failed food for work projects are not the fault of the agency, for failing to build assets to adequate technical standards, identify projects that were local priorities or invest enough time in building capacity for maintenance, but the fault of local

Table 3: A typology of participation in humanitarian action

Type of participation	Description
Passive participation	The affected population is informed of what is going to happen or what has occurred. While this is a fundamental right of the people concerned, it is not always respected
Participation through the supply of information	The affected population provides information in response to questions, but it has no influence over the process, since survey results are not shared and their accuracy is not verified
Participation by consultation	The affected population is asked for its perspective on a given subject, but it has no decision-making powers, and no guarantee that its views will be taken into consideration
Participation through material incentives	The affected population supplies some of the materials, cash and/or labour needed to operationalise an intervention, in exchange for a payment in cash or in kind from the aid organisation
Participation through the supply of materials, cash or labour	The affected population supplies some of the materials, cash and/or labour needed to operationalise an intervention. This includes cost-recovery mechanisms
Interactive participation	The affected population participates in the analysis of needs and in programme conception, and has decision-making powers
Local initiatives	The affected population takes the initiative, acting independently of external organisations and institutions. Although it may call on external bodies to support its initiatives, the project is conceived and run by the community, and the aid organisation participates in the population's projects

Source: ALNAP Global Study 2003

people, for being dependent on aid and therefore failing to maintain the assets once built.

As we have seen, aid workers also often label beneficiaries as lazy or uncooperative, and the way in which aid is often delivered encourages people to portray themselves as passive and vulnerable. This often seems to create a vicious circle: in the face of beneficiary passivity and attempts to cheat the system, aid agencies try to develop ways to control populations and systems to stamp out abuse. The other way of approaching this is to argue that relief actors need to make greater efforts to involve beneficiaries in the provision of assistance; in other words, for relief to be more participatory and accountable.

Whilst there have long been calls for greater participation in the delivery of relief assistance, actual progress at field level has been slow (ALNAP Global Study 2003). The literature on participation shows that it can take place at many different levels. Table 3 presents a typology of different types and levels of participation in humanitarian action.

Humanitarian assistance often demands participation through material incentives or through the supply of materials, but genuinely interactive participation remains rare, and efforts at keeping affected populations well-informed about assistance options and entitlements are often inadequate.

To address dependency, in the sense of breaking the cycle of passivity, relief providers would have to make real changes in the way in which relief is delivered. Efforts are being made in this respect, for example through commitments to implement humanitarian accountability principles through the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership. But devolving greater responsibility to recipients for the management of relief assistance implies genuine shifts in the power relationship between relief providers and recipients, which challenge in fundamental ways the paternalistic attitudes that still underpin much relief assistance.

It also implies a need for agencies to understand much more deeply how relief is viewed within local societies, and to make efforts to embed the provision of assistance into local social and political contracts. Humanitarian assistance as it is currently delivered is often divorced from any sense of local accountability, and viewed as entirely external.

For instance, in Sudan Duffield et al. (2000) found that:

relief items are generally regarded as not belonging to anybody and stealing from them is not as disgraceful as stealing local grain from someone's house. The local legal system does not contain mechanisms to deal with theft of relief goods. Theft of relief items therefore falls into a different moral category from other types of theft and traditional methods of social punishment do not apply in the same way. When someone is accused of stealing relief items, they may respond according to the following logic: 'So what, did I steal from your mother's house'? (Duffield et al 2000: 182).

There is also a sense in which dependency in relief is linked to the often neglected humanitarian principle of dignity. Recipients of aid often identify the way in which relief is delivered and whether or not it respects people's dignity as a key factor in whether they feel dependent in a negative and humiliating sense, or whether aid is viewed as a respectful demonstration of common humanity. For example, a civilian interviewed for the Duffield et al. (2000) study commented:

Well to say that western aid is all we have got, I cannot emphasise that enough. But to expect aid agencies to lift all the problems would be absurd. All I can say is that the aid agencies have the will and the sympathy for our people. They are not just here to save their conscience as has been suggested by sceptics. I know that the people of south Sudan appreciate the respect and humanity that come with these relief supplies. It is the supplies without respect for our dignity that truly makes us feel like hungry dogs fighting over a useless piece of bone (Duffield et al. 2000: 180).

Twenty years ago, Clark (1985) criticised the use of the commonly-used term 'dependency syndrome' for implying maladaptive behaviour, and argued that 'in fact such thinking and behaviour might alternatively be viewed as rational, adaptive behaviour in the face of a powerful system which rewards dependency' (Clark 1985: 4). His suggested solution was to work towards greater refugee participation, not a new idea, but one where the 'difficulty lies in translating the policy stance of UNHCR and the lessons learned from these individual cases into the kinds of systematic changes at the field level that will make participatory approaches an accepted norm'. Twenty years on, the difficulty still appears to lie in translating good intentions around participation into concrete action.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

This report has argued that the way in which we talk about relief and its consequences matters. Dependency as a concept reveals much about the attitudes and assumptions that underpin how humanitarian aid is delivered. This is important for practical reasons because the amount of relief that people receive has been reduced without justification, or because there has been a premature shift to developmental approaches.

The focus of humanitarian action should be saving lives and alleviating suffering in situations where people's lives and livelihoods are under acute threat, and local capacities to cope with crisis are being overwhelmed. In this situation, being able to depend on receiving assistance should be seen as a good thing. The focus should not be on avoiding dependence, but on providing sufficiently reliable and transparent assistance so that those who most need it understand what they are entitled to, and can rely on it as part of their own efforts to survive and recover from crisis.

In situations of chronic emergency, where relief is required on a regular basis, agencies need to be concerned about the effects of that relief, and find ways in which assistance can strengthen livelihoods, as well as providing immediate relief. However, humanitarian aid has to operate under what could be called a precautionary principle. Rations should never be cut or relief withheld without solid evidence that the needs which prompted relief in the first place have been met. As Duffield et al. (2000) has argued, in Sudan a range of evidence suggested that aid had saved lives; conversely, this means that 'the inadequacy of relief deliveries has cost lives. Aid agencies have had to cover a vast territory with inadequate resources and, in 1998, the shortfall in emergency relief was deeply destructive'. This is not meant to imply that agencies should ignore the potentially negative effects of aid, but it certainly argues for caution about the label dependency, and about using concerns about dependency to justify reductions in relief. Having to depend on relief should surely be seen as a good reason for continuing to provide it.

Arguing that humanitarian relief should strive to be more transparent and accountable is hardly new, but progress beyond the rhetorical has been slow. As long as relief is seen by those who receive it as something delivered by outsiders, in a fickle and opaque manner, with little scope to understand let alone challenge the processes of selection and distribution, then depending on relief in the positive sense of being able to rely on it is unlikely. However, this attitude does encourage the sort of behaviour that is often interpreted as dependency in its negative sense – passivity

in the face of external assistance. Indeed, the very way in which aid is usually delivered encourages people to portray themselves as passive and vulnerable.

Relief from international aid agencies is, almost by definition, provided by an external organisation. Indeed, part of the rationale for intervention is that local capacities have been overwhelmed, and there is a need for external support. This forms part of some of the most fundamental criticisms levelled at the humanitarian system by De Waal (1997): that the international humanitarian system undermines the political contract to prevent famine between a state and its citizens. How to provide relief where political contracts have broken down, and the responsibility humanitarian agencies have for undermining accountability and trying to rebuild it, remains one of the central dilemmas faced by humanitarian actors. The right noises are being made about working through local partners where it is possible to do so, attempting to increase levels of participation and strengthen downward accountability, but more practical action is needed. There are also times, particularly in complex emergencies, when few local partners are available, and international agencies feel that they have to play a substitutory role. In these circumstances, how can one avoid delivering aid in such a way that it is poorly understood and promotes passivity? Perhaps part of the answer lies in much greater efforts to put into practice what has often been preached about transparency, participation and downwards accountability.

Often, people continue to need relief assistance because the fundamental causes of a crisis have not been dealt with. This report has argued that dependency frequently represents a way of blaming relief as one of the most visible symptoms of crisis, rather than the cause. Tackling dependency involves tackling root causes, whether this is resolving conflicts, addressing underlying poverty or tackling corrupt or predatory governance. But this is often not the responsibility of humanitarian actors. The central finding of the evaluation of the Rwanda response of 1994 – that humanitarian action is no substitute for political will – remains valid. The problem lies not with relief and its failings, but with the lack of other forms of international engagement with crises.

If we accept the need to reframe how we think about dependency, a wide-ranging set of implications follow. Some of these are not new: some, for instance, reinforce the need for greater investment in transparency and accountability, and better political economy analysis. Others

are potentially extensive, such as the scope for linking relief with longer-term social protection and welfare approaches. These are summarised in the bullet points below.

Ability to depend on relief

- Where acute risks to survival exist, aid agencies should, as a positive objective, aim to ensure that people are able to reliably depend on receiving assistance.
- Rather than seeing risks of dependence as a justification for reducing relief, agencies should aim to provide assistance early and generously, to enable people to maintain their livelihoods and prevent a slide into destitution.
- In order to be able to rely on relief assistance, people need to understand what they are entitled to. This reinforces arguments for investing more in improving the transparency of assistance.
- What we call dependency is often more likely to be people exploiting opaque systems. The better people understand what is on offer, and can participate in its management and delivery, the less likely they may be to subvert or abuse relief programmes.

Disincentive effects

- There is a need for concern about the potential negative

effects of aid and the possible disincentive effects of relief, particularly food aid, but these should not be assumed, and it is unhelpful to label them as dependency.

- The possibility of disincentive effects on agricultural production should not be seen as an argument for stopping or reducing relief if it is still needed.
- Disincentive effects are an argument for looking at the appropriateness of the assistance that is being provided, not whether it should be provided at all.
- There is a strong argument that relief actors should be more concerned with the possible disincentive effects of public works schemes.

Analysis and attitudes

- Rather than seeing dependency on relief in negative terms, we should be trying to understand the role that relief plays in the complex web of interdependencies that make up livelihoods under stress in crises.
- There is a need to investigate the attitudes of elites towards poor people, both within agencies and local partners.

Relief and social protection

- There is significant potential to explore ways to link relief with long-term social protection and welfare.

Annex 1

Dependency hypotheses

The table below suggests a series of hypotheses for analysing dependency. It sets out ways in which people might be dependent, and ways in which it might be possible to make a judgement about whether or not they actually were. The point being made is that there are a number of different ways in which depending on something can be viewed, and a number of different levels

at which dependency can be seen as an issue. It is helpful to think through these systematically. This could also be adapted to serve as a checklist of questions that should be asked in particular contexts by aid agencies as they consider the ways in which people are or are not dependent, and what this means for how aid should be provided.

Are people dependent?

People depend upon aid provision as a core part of their livelihood strategy

Dependent	Non-dependent
Aid contributes a significant part of a household's livelihood over an extended period	Aid makes up a relatively small part of a livelihood strategy and/or is intermittently provided
Some households may be unable to engage in productive activities due to disability, illness, old age, injury, death of parents	Household has enough able bodied members to engage in productive activities

Can people depend on relief?

In order to depend on aid people have to be able to rely on a regular provision and clearly understand their entitlements

Aid is being regularly delivered	Deliveries are irregular or one-off
People clearly understand what they are entitled to and when	Understanding of what they are entitled to is limited
Targeting criteria are clearly understood and fairly applied	Targeting criteria are opaque, poorly understood and haphazardly applied

Dependency and disincentives

People depend on aid and choose not to engage in other productive activities

Farmers plant less or invest less in agriculture (inputs or labour) due to lower needs for food or lower prices due to food aid	Livelihood strategies remain largely unaffected by aid – farmers continue to plant, maintain, harvest and market crops
Regular patterns of migration for work or casual labour are interrupted as there is reduced need for income	By securing subsistence for vulnerable members aid allows resumption of normal migration patterns
People invest less in key assets (e.g. water points, rebuilding houses) as it is assumed that there will be outside support for these activities	Aid enables greater investment in key areas by freeing up resources that would otherwise be spent on subsistence – e.g. enabling fertiliser purchase or restocking of livestock.
Participation in public works projects means that people have less labour available for other productive activities trapping them into ongoing dependence on aid	Improvements in food security in part from aid mean that people have more energy to engage in other productive activities.
Reduced reliance on other forms of support – remittances, help from family or neighbours	Aid enables people to exchange gifts or to restart credit networks, strengthening social relations.
Aid prevents negative or erosive coping strategies such as distress migration, sale of productive assets, prostitution	

Dependency at community level

At a community level people are less willing to participate in development activities without compensation due to an expectation that relief will continue to be provided freely.

Dependent	Non-dependent
<p>Reduced levels of participation in ongoing development activities following a relief intervention</p> <p>A culture develops in which aid is seen as a free and additional resource rather than something that requires community commitment of time or resources</p>	<p>Levels of participation remain the same or change due to perceptions of the usefulness of the development intervention.</p> <p>Participation reduces because the development intervention is not seen as a priority in the changed context.</p>

Aid agency and government dependency

Dependency at national level – countries that seem to be dependent on long-running relief programmes – North Korea, Ethiopia

<p>Relief aid makes up substantial proportions of national budgets or GDP</p> <p>Food aid makes up a substantial proportion of national level imports</p> <p>Relief erodes the political contract between a state and its citizens and allows governments to evade responsibilities</p> <p>Relief becomes embedded in the political economy of crises</p>	<p>Relief assistance is a small proportion of GDP or small in relation to development assistance</p> <p>Levels of food aid are small in comparison to commercial imports</p>
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Dependency at an aid agency level. Agencies that are dependent (in their current form) on continuing relief programmes and/or certain types of relief programmes

<p>Sizeable bureaucracies have developed to deliver relief (staff, assets, offices) and these seem very entrenched</p> <p>Relief budgets contribute key parts of organisational overhead costs at international headquarters or capital city level</p>	<p>Agencies are able to flexibly expand and contract staffing and capacity to respond to emergencies.</p> <p>Organisations core functions (headquarters, country offices) are met through regular donations not the administrative percentage of emergency relief budgets.</p>
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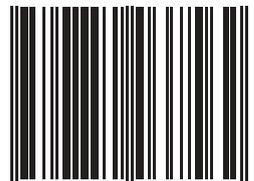
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Overseas Development Institute
111 Westminster Bridge Road
London SE1 7JD
United Kingdom

Tel. +44 (0) 20 7922 0300
Fax. +44 (0) 20 7922 0399

E-mail: hpg@odi.org.uk
Websites: www.odi.org.uk/hpg
and www.odihpn.org

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