June 2005

Humanitarian Policy Group

HPG Background Paper

Relief assistance at the margins: meanings and perceptions of 'dependency' in northern Kenya

Jeremy Lind, doctoral student,
Department of Geography,
Kings College, London

Dependency and relief: a critical analysis

A research study by the Humanitarian Policy Group

odi

Britain's leading independent think-tank on **international development** and **humanitarian issues**

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

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

Email: hpg@odi.org.uk
Websites: www.odi.org.uk/hpg
and www.odihpn.org

About this paper

This background paper forms part of a study by the Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) at the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) on dependency in humanitarian aid. It focuses on the different meanings of dependency as the term is used in the context of northern Kenya, a dryland region inhabited chiefly by pastoralist peoples.

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

Overseas Development Institute, London, 2005.

Contents

Acronyms 3

1. Introduction 4
   - 1.1 Pastoralist livelihoods and protracted relief in northern Kenya 4
   - 1.2 Methodology 5
   - 1.3 Structure of the report 6

2. Summary of meanings of dependency in northern Kenya 7

3. The pastoralist context for emergency response 9
   - 3.1 Contextual considerations 9
   - 3.2 Depending on relief assistance 10

4. Concerning dependency: institutions for emergency response 12
   - 4.1 Questioning the 'erosion of dependency' 12
   - 4.2 The political administrative system 13
   - 4.3 Operational agencies 13

5. Systemic dependency: the limitations of relief assistance 16
   - 5.1 'Drought then food aid' 16
   - 5.2 The 2004-2005 emergency response 17
   - 5.3 Beyond 'drought then food aid' thinking 17

6. Relief assistance after 80 years: the case of Turkana District 19
   - 6.1 Relief assistance past and present 19
   - 6.2 Poverty and vulnerability 20
   - 6.3 Dependency, dependence, and disincentives: what is the evidence? 21

6.3.1 Dependency syndrome 22
6.3.2 Disincentive effects 23
6.3.3 Perceptions and feelings about receiving relief assistance 25
6.3.4 Key points 26

7. Discussion and conclusions 28

Bibliography 30

Endnotes 31

Acronyms

ALRMP	Arid Lands Resource Management Project
ASAL	Arid and semi-arid land
CAHW	Community animal health worker
CFW	Cash for work
DSG	District Steering Group
EMOP	Emergency operation
GOK	Government of Kenya
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
KFSM	Kenya Food Security Meeting
KFSSG	Kenya Food Security Steering Group
Ksh	Kenya shilling
LWF	Lutheran World Federation
MT	Metric tons
TLU	Tropical livestock unit
TRP	Turkana Rehabilitation Project
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WFP	World Food Programme

1. Introduction

It is not always clear what is meant by 'dependency'. The fact that dependency is notional makes it difficult to pin down its precise meaning. It refers to many issues and concerns. Despite the common usage of the term in aid discourse, there is no specific policy debate on the issue, its meanings and the implications of dependency arguments. However, an understated dialogue on dependency runs through discussions and debates on a spectrum of other relief-related issues.

Dependency is an important issue for the Kenyan government. The dominant sentiment in Nairobi is that relief assistance is not sustainable, has not helped people to become less vulnerable and has not reduced risks.[1] 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, 2004b). Reduction of dependency on food aid is a policy objective. A shift from emergency relief to disaster risk reduction in drought-affected areas is envisioned in the draft National Disaster Management Policy. 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.

Many aid and donor agencies visited for this study share similar concerns. There is an overriding impression that relief assistance referring foremost to food aid has not achieved enough, and that it cannot do enough with regard to moving people beyond a need for aid. It will be explained in this study that an important way in which dependency is discussed in Kenya is in reference to the hypothetical limitations of relief assistance.

Broadly, meanings of dependency in Kenya can be clustered into three main categories. A first category refers to the insufficiencies of relief assistance, explained above. One meaning of dependency related to this category is dependence on relief as a defining characteristic of destitute peoples. A second category refers to the impacts of relief assistance. Concerns for the disincentive effects of relief assistance, the existence of dependency syndrome among aid recipients, and more general feelings and perceptions around the experience of receiving relief can be grouped under this category. A final category of meanings refers to the assorted practices and interests inherent to institutions involved in relief assistance. Included in this category is the presumed predominance of relief assistance in aid agencies as a way of sustaining programmes, and the apparent ease with which donors support food distributions above longer-term projects involving non-food resources. Another type of 'dependency' falling under this category is the abuse of food aid resources by government officials responsible for their distribution.

1.1 Pastoralist livelihoods and protracted relief in northern Kenya

This study explores the different meanings of dependency as the term is used in the context of northern Kenya, a large dryland region inhabited chiefly by pastoralist peoples. Livestock herders in the region are noted for having a high resilience to shocks. They have well-developed strategies for coping with drought. However, extreme poverty has also been a prominent feature of pastoralist communities in northern Kenya for some time. As early as the middle 1980s, following a complex emergency in the region, one expert argued that poverty and dependence were becoming a permanent condition for many herders (Hogg, 1985).

The effectiveness of coping responses by northern Kenya pastoralists was questioned by some humanitarian sources interviewed for this study and who are familiar with the area. There is an impression among some observers of the region that the 'sawtooth pattern' of herd growth has weakened over time, with fewer spikes and wider and more frequent troughs. The relief problem is typically framed

as a drought crisis. However, although recurrent drought is a major factor, the situation is more chronic and complex. Large areas of northern Kenya are affected by armed violence linked to livestock raiding and banditry. Political instability, animal disease epidemics, human disease and pest invasions have affected the region in recent years.

The low reliability of pastoralism in the recent past has encouraged a steady shift away from having herds as the mainstay of pastoralist livelihoods. There is a concurrent trend towards diversification. However, many of the things that livestock keepers do for survival, such as brewing, burning charcoal and fetching water for a fee, generate only nominal levels of income. Compounding the problem is that entire social networks have been impoverished, meaning that it is far more difficult to reconstitute herd losses through customary social relations. In short, pastoralists have not been able to compensate for the loss of their recuperative powers brought about by the communal loss of livestock herds.

There is a protracted relief situation in parts of northern Kenya. A long history of receiving relief assistance is superimposed over the situation of deteriorating livelihoods. A strong undercurrent in discussions on dependency in this region is a moral dilemma facing aid and donor agencies involved in providing relief assistance to northern Kenya pastoralists: how to respond appropriately and adequately to save lives and livelihoods in a situation that evolves from the failure of the government (and aid agencies, according to some experts) in this politically and economically marginalised region?

1.2 Methodology

The report is based around discussions on dependency with government officials, researchers, senior and field-level staff of operational agencies, and officials with various UN and donor agencies. A literature review was also conducted on relief assistance to pastoralists in Kenya to assess the ways in which dependency is an

issue. Assorted documentation including evaluations and impact assessments of relief interventions and strategy documents of different operational and donor agencies were collected and reviewed. Interviews and focus group discussions were held in Turkana District on different dependency concerns and problems relating to relief assistance more broadly.

The views presented in this report are drawn from these interviews, discussions and readings. This is not a comprehensive review of dependency issues in Kenya, but reflects the findings of the research outlined here.

1.3 Structure of the report

Section 2 is a summary overview of the main meanings of dependency in northern Kenya. Section 3 outlines several contextual factors that affect examination of dependency concerns in pastoralist areas. Dependence on relief assistance is explored as one way in which dependency is discussed in Kenya.

Sections 4 and 5 explore meanings of dependency concerning institutions involved in relief assistance. Section 4 considers how the practices and interests of such institutions are discussed in terms of dependency. Dependency referring to the thinking and response of institutions for relief assistance are examined in section 5.

Section 6 is a case study of the various ways in which dependency features as a concern in Turkana District, in north-western Kenya bordering Uganda and southern Sudan, where relief assistance has been provided for over 80 years. Evidence and experiences from this particular aid context are considered as a way of reviewing different dependency concerns.

The significance of discussions on dependency for how relief agencies think about and respond to emergencies is the focus of section 7.

2. Summary of meanings of dependency in northern Kenya

Dependency is used in discussions of humanitarian assistance in Kenya to describe a number of inter-related but distinct concerns. This section summarises the main meanings of dependency as a way of introducing these concerns. These concerns are examined in greater detail in subsequent sections. The meanings of dependency outlined here are drawn from interviews conducted for this study.

A concern for increasing levels of destitution among northern Kenya pastoralists is one way in which dependency is discussed. Two related issues were highlighted by sources interviewed for this study. One issue is the viability of pastoralist systems. There is measured concern for the future of pastoralism in its current state. A dominant perception is 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 steadily 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 needs in northern Kenya. One source likened the current situation of northern Kenya pastoralists to 'an Ethiopia waiting to happen'.[2] Already, some believe that relief assistance is (barely) sustaining a system that has collapsed.

A second meaning of dependency refers to the market price effects induced by the infusion of relief assistance. The evidence is mixed in the disincentive literature on whether the distribution of food aid depresses the price of locally-produced and traded cereals. Moreover, most studies on the possible disincentive effects of food aid examine agrarian contexts and are based largely on agrarian assumptions. However, these assumptions need to be reconsidered for pastoralist areas where most livelihoods derive from keeping animals, which are then bartered or sold for imported cereals depending on need, as well as the food preferences of particular households. This will be discussed in greater detail in the following section. Still, there are 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 gratuitous 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 (CAHW) and other private animal health providers that sell drugs to livestock keepers.[3]

Dependency is 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 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 base. A notable example of this is the strategic distribution of food aid during the electoral process to exercise influence over the outcome of the vote.[4] Politicians are also accused of profiting from the distribution of relief assistance by using their trucks to carry relief supplies. Further, transporters that carry food for the school feeding programme are accused of taxing school principals.[5] District administrative officials including District Commissioners, District Officers and Chiefs who are responsible for overseeing the distribution of government relief assistance are also alleged to intercept a considerable volume of food aid prior to it being distributed, and then selling it on local markets.[6]

A fourth meaning of dependency refers to a bundle of assorted practices and presumed tendencies of operational agencies that are involved in the distribution of relief assistance. One practice that is labelled as dependency is cross-subsidisation of programmes through relief. However, with the exception of a large US NGO, most international NGOs operating in Kenya no longer cross-subsidise. Even so, international NGOs involved in relief distribution charge large fees for distributing WFP food aid, according to a humanitarian official who is familiar with negotiations between the WFP and operational agencies.[7] Officials with NGOs that distribute relief assistance counter that, in many emergencies, they must seek complementary funds

since WFP budgets pay less than it costs to distribute food aid. There is an impression among some officials that were interviewed for this study that operating agencies seek repute by responding to emergencies. Some sources suggest that the desire to be recognised is driving the struggle between different operational agencies to be the appointed lead agency under the distribution system in Kenya of WFP food aid resources. Finally, members of the pastoralist communities that receive relief contest the hiring practices of NGOs that distribute food aid. Several Turkana sources speak against the hiring of non-Turkana as field staff in emergency operations. These various practices and tendencies are examples of the dependency of operational agencies on the continuing distribution of relief assistance.

A more complex meaning of dependency that emerges from interviews carried out for this study is how aid institutions think and respond to the problems of pastoralists. There is systemic dependence on emergency aid as a response to food crises in pastoralist areas. Operating agencies are criticised for prioritising emergency responses in their programme of activities to the neglect of longer-term approaches and interventions. There is a widespread view that is most strongly expressed by pastoralists themselves that pastoralist areas are marginalised by the government and not incorporated into the main political and economic currents of contemporary Kenya. The Kenya government is accused of a reductionist approach in dealing with the complicated problems in the pastoralist north and of falling back on 'guns and food aid' as a standard response. Donors and UN agencies that supported highly mechanised irrigation schemes in Turkana and Isiolo districts in northern Kenya in the 1970s and 1980s are accused of failing to understand the development context unique to pastoralist areas, and of inadvertently increasing dependence on technologies that were neither sustainable nor appropriate. Many humanitarian actors that were interviewed express frustration with what one official calls '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 in its history received a multi-annual funding commitment.

These different concerns are framed in the language of dependency. The following sections will explore in greater depth the multiple meanings of dependency as they feature in debates on relief assistance in Kenya.

3. The pastoralist context for emergency relief

3.1 Contextual considerations

Dependency arguments are commonly based on agrarian assumptions and experiences of distributing relief assistance in farming areas. Examination of dependency concerns in pastoralist areas must be grounded on different assumptions that take into consideration the particularities of vulnerability and food crises in such areas. A few specific points are made here and their implications for agencies doing relief assistance in pastoralist areas. The practical implications are based on Oxfam GB's long experience in distributing relief assistance to pastoralists in Turkana and Wajir Districts in northern Kenya.

An overriding point is the high mobility of pastoralist people and locational separation of members of pastoralist households. Operational agencies distributing relief in pastoralist areas must contend with the uncertain movements of people with herds, and who are in search of survival activities. Double registration and undercoverage (errors of targeting that feature in some discussions on dependency) are problems faced by operational agencies distributing food to herders. People may not remain in one location for the duration of the targeting, registration and distribution process, or long enough to complete work obligations under food for work schemes.

Oxfam has tried to work with pastoralist mobility by allowing nomadic herders to transfer their names from one distribution centre to another and using food monitors to follow the movements of pastoralist beneficiaries (Buchanan-Smith, 1993). In Turkana, Oxfam food monitors give advance notice to pastoralist communities before undertaking targeting and registration of beneficiaries to allow information to spread and give time for distant people to return.[8] To the extent that it is possible, they also give advance notice of food distributions.

A second point related to pastoralist mobility is that productive assets (animals for milking and bleeding) may be far from the main camp where vulnerable members such as the elderly, young children and pregnant women reside for the duration of the grazing round. Customarily some lactating animals are kept at the main camp. But these may be few and unproductive during drought conditions. Most animals are moved to satellite camps to distant areas where pasture, browse and water are available.

Assets may also be locked or shifted in social transactions. Due to labour constraints or reciprocal obligations, animals may be kept with extended family members and stock associates. These same social contacts may also chase old claims and request the return of their animals during an emergency to make ends meet.

For this reason, in a relief intervention lasting from 1992 to 1995, Oxfam based targeting criteria in Turkana District on a broader definition of vulnerability that encompassed even those households that have animals. The reasoning that informed Oxfam's targeting was that significant pressure was exerted on wealthier households to support poorer households, threatening to collapse the already depleted general resource base in animals (Bush, 1994). Oxfam argued that food distribution should support the pastoralist economy by protecting the remaining livestock (Jaspars et al., 1997). The economic objective of Oxfam's emergency intervention meant that all those who were at risk of depleting their core livestock

herd were targeted in the food distribution. The objective of Oxfam's food distribution to provide general economic support conflicted with WFP's aim to only provide food aid for nutritional purposes to save lives. According to WFP, only the destitute or most needy should receive relief based on nutritional and health indicators (Jaspars et al., 1997). A concern that wide coverage would cause dependency in the beneficiary population was an important line of argument for those who opposed Oxfam, including the WFP (Buchanan-Smith, 1993: 34). Oxfam felt that food distribution should promote the long-term independence of the community by preventing asset depletion and supporting the natural expansion of livestock herds. Since Oxfam worked with larger beneficiary figures than WFP, it had to supplement WFP food with locally purchased maize in order to fulfill the economic objective of its food distribution (*ibid.*: 13). A 1993 evaluation found that the objective of Oxfam's relief intervention to protect livelihoods was a real strength and closer to local people's priorities (*ibid.*: 45).

A point noted elsewhere is that the collapse into famine for livestock keepers can be sudden (*ibid.*: 3). 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 manage small manifestations to prevent a system from collapsing.[9] It makes little sense to wait and provide relief after someone is already destitute when early intervention can pre-empt distress coping strategies, it is thought (*ibid.*: 18.).

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 core 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.

An important lesson from Oxfam's emergency intervention in Turkana in the early 1990s was that the extent that pastoralists could use food for economic support was contingent on a generous ration being provided for a sustained period of time (Bush, 1994). The implication of the long time it takes for livestock keepers to recover from drought shocks is that relief assistance may need to be provided over a more sustained period until herders rebuild their herds to a point of reasonable food security (Bush, 1994; Buchanan-Smith and Barton, 1999). It may also be necessary to give larger amounts of relief, since restocking is costly and because poor households may still be in a situation of needing 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).

3.2 Depending on relief assistance

An important form of dependency revealed in discussions with agencies and government departments visited for this study is dependence on relief assistance by many northern Kenya pastoralists to meet their food needs. This section examines this meaning of dependency as a way of expanding on this study's focus on dependency concerns in pastoralist contexts. Food crises are not a new phenomenon in northern Kenya. But humanitarian officials interviewed for this study worry that the number judged to be in need of food aid in the region is increasing. The problem is typically framed in terms of increasing vulnerability and severe poverty caused by converging catastrophes.

The state of some pastoralists in northern Kenya characterised by the loss of coping capacities, inability to lift out of a situation of deep poverty and dependence on food aid compares with the situation of destitution observed in other parts of the Horn of

Africa region. A recent study on destitution in the Ethiopian highlands by Sharp et al. (2003) provides a working definition of destitution that could easily describe the situation for many pastoralists in northern Kenya. They define destitution as:

> *[A] state of extreme poverty that results from the pursuit of 'unsustainable livelihoods', meaning that a series of livelihood shocks and/or negative trends or 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* [original emphasis].

A concern that pastoralists are increasingly dependent on relief assistance ties into another meaning of dependency emphasised by some sources, which is dependence of livelihoods on livestock-keeping. This was discussed in terms of high levels of vulnerability compounded by a lack of options for pastoralists to fall back on when there is a shock. Several sources questioned the viability and sustainability of current pastoralist systems, and stressed the need for alternative livelihoods.[10]

4. Concerning dependency: institutions for emergency response

4.1 Questioning the 'erosion of dependency'

Recent changes in the institutional framework for emergency response in Kenya entail enhancing the overall coordination of food security information and responses and positioning the government at the centre of response to food crises. The changes that were implemented prior to the launch of the 1999–2001 response to the drought emergency included reorienting the Kenya Food Security Meeting (KFSM) and establishing the Kenya Food Security Steering Group (KFSSG). The KFSM is a national-level grouping of organisations involved in food security that meet monthly to share information and agree on approaches to various issues. The KFSSG is a technical advisory group to the KFSM that provides guidelines on methods and

approaches for coordination of early-warning information and appropriate responses to emergencies (KFSSG, n. d.).

Prior to the establishment of these food security structures there was ineffectual coordination of early-warning information and relief assistance. The changes in the institutional framework for emergency response are credited with enhancing inter-agency cooperation and coordination at the national level, improving trust between the Kenyan government and donors, and eliminating the parallel donor/NGO and government relief response systems (KFSSG, n. d.). An official involved in coordinating food security information explained that, since the KFSM speaks with one voice, donors have greater confidence in beneficiary numbers and are more willing to fund appeals.[11]

A further aim of the reforms was to provide a framework through which the Kenyan government responds to the needs of its people, which it did by assuming a central role in the response to the 1999–2001 drought emergency (Akililu and Wekesa, 2002). In the late 1990s, even before the changes were instituted, it was observed that the government was demonstrating greater commitment and political will to respond to emergencies (Buchanan-Smith and Barton, 1999). The democratisation process, the effective lobbying role of parliamentary groups and MPs, and a critical media are identified as reasons why the Kenyan government is assuming improved leadership in the realm of relief response (Akililu and Wekesa, 2002; Buchanan and Barton, 1999). More generally, some interpret the recent political transition in Kenya and a renewed commitment by the new government to address its problems as evidence of the 'erosion of African dependency' (Freeman, 2005).

However, several inter-related challenges raised by people interviewed during research for this study counter this suggestion. Crucially, there is an impression among some donors visited for this study that the KFSM is not completely free of political influence or strong enough to resist such pressures.[12] The appeal for the

2004–2005 emergency operation (EMOP) has provided a focal point for donors who worry that needs assessment and the establishment of beneficiary numbers have been unduly influenced by politicians. This relates to a more general view, expressed strongly by various aid officials interviewed, that the lessons learned in responding to the 1999–2001 emergency have been lost and that the current EMOP has been mishandled.

Compounding these challenges is the fact that relations between the Kenyan government and donors have worsened considerably over allegations of high-level corruption in the government. A famine relief contract worth an estimated 500 million Kenyan shillings is among the cases covered in a dossier presented by the UK High Commissioner to the Kenyan President in February 2005.[13]

The remaining part of this section will explore problems in the apparatus for emergency response in Kenya that are catalogued as forms of 'dependency'.

4.2 Dependency in the political-administrative system

The political and administrative system is an important focus in discussions on dependency in northern Kenya. Various people in government and non-governmental agencies visited for this study charge that officials in political and administrative structures personally benefit from the diversion and sale of government food aid that is channelled through district administrations. This method of enrichment is described as a form of dependency. There is no tracking of government food aid distributed outside of an emergency appeal. District Commissioners who take ultimate responsibility for the distribution of government food aid at the district level are accused of personal involvement by intercepting food aid and selling it through their personal networks of traders and shop owners.[14] The complicity of local councilors and MPs is sought by sharing out food aid supplies that have been diverted. A further way that politicians benefit is by hiring out their trucks to haul

food aid from the National Cereals Board Warehouse in each district to final distribution points.

It is also alleged that elected officials depend on food aid as a resource to extend patronage and gain political support. A senior aid agency staffer with long experience in the region commented that food aid manipulates the political contract between the Kenyan government and pastoralist populations.[15] Little else than food aid is expected or asked for. The use of relief assistance to reinforce patronage structures was routine under the regime of the former President Daniel arap Moi. Food aid was distributed strategically to influence the outcome of the electoral process. One example of this mentioned by several officials visited for this study was the distribution of food aid in the Turkana South constituency in December 2002, days before the general election. The importance of food aid in the political process is evident in the role assumed by MPs who lobby for greater quantities of food aid for their respective constituencies and criticise as slow or inadequate the response of the government and aid agencies that distribute relief.

4.3 Dependency in operational agencies

The system for distributing relief assistance in Kenya is known as the 'lead agency' system, whereby one operational agency is identified in each district to coordinate distribution of aid with other NGOs working under the direction of the lead agency. The District Steering Group (DSG) identifies the lead agency on a district-by-district basis. The DSG is a district-level grouping chaired by the District Commissioner. Its members include the heads of line departments and NGOs operating in the district. The operational agency selected by the DSG negotiates directly with the WFP on the contractual terms for distributing food aid.

In some districts there are struggles between operational agencies to attain the role of lead agency. Officials in different UN and aid agencies that were visited for this study explain that competition between different operational agencies is one factor

that delayed the launch of the emergency operation in Turkana and Marsabit districts in 2004. Tensions surrounding identification of the lead agency have had a corrosive effect on inter-agency working relations in some instances. One humanitarian source claimed that NGOs derive financial benefits from being the lead agency.[16] Operational agencies are also accused of using their role as lead agency to maximise what they can earn out of distributing relief assistance. Also at stake is national and international repute as the agency seen to be taking the lead in responding to a particular emergency.

Different officials interviewed for this study regard problems with the lead agency system as a manifestation of dependency in aid organisations. Some suggest that some NGOs rely on responding to emergencies to sustain their wider operations. A Turkana researcher interviewed for this study contends that NGOs involved in relief assistance are benefiting from the context of recurring catastrophe in northern Kenya.[17] Some worry that humanitarian agencies may scale up needs to cover for reductions in project and programme food aid. Recognising the existence of such concerns, Washington officials in USAID's Food for Peace Office have instigated a dialogue with NGO heads on being more accountable and programming more effectively to promote livelihoods and decrease food aid dependency.[18] Despite these concerns, there is broad acknowledgment of needs and the important role of aid agencies in helping to meet them. In northern Kenya, aid agencies have the technical expertise (and some the historical experience) to respond to food crises, as well as better developed systems and procedures for transparency, reporting and accountability in comparison to the district administrative apparatuses that are the government structures responsible for responding to emergencies.

There is an impression among some aid agency staff that WFP is dependent on food aid.[19] Some speak negatively of the WFP making business out of emergency appeals. A contrasting view expressed by one agency visited for this study is that traditional positions on food aid are reversed in Kenya. It was argued that WFP and USAID's

Office for Food for Peace emphasise moderation in the use of food aid in responding to emergencies, and it is NGOs that advocate for increased rations and distribution of food aid over a longer period. Although the Kenyan government is showing greater resolve to respond to emergencies, some humanitarians believe that it is still up to NGOs to raise the alarm and instigate the process of emergency response in Kenya.[20] Few question the need for a strong civil society to advocate around humanitarian issues such as ensuring adequate coverage, timeliness of an intervention, sufficient ration sizes and quality of the food basket. Rather, it is the appropriateness of food aid interventions in some emergencies that is critically questioned, with some aid officials stressing that NGOs must come up with a package of activities and resources linked to a clear exit strategy to address food crises as an alternative to food aid.

Another way in which dependency is discussed by some aid agency staff familiar with northern Kenya is that the government uses NGOs to abrogate its full responsibility to respond to the problems and development needs of pastoralists. By substituting for the government's inaction, operational agencies are indirectly contributing to the marginalisation of pastoralist areas by the government, according to one source interviewed for this study.[21] A field staff member for an international NGO involved in relief in Turkana claimed that, by providing a minimum safety net, NGOs are covering the government's development failures.[22] The implication from some officials was that NGOs risk perpetuating dependence on relief assistance by substituting for the government's role.

This section has explored how the practices and interests intrinsic to specific institutions for relief assistance are viewed in terms of dependency. The following section examines how the thinking and response of such institutions to complex emergencies are understood as another type of dependency.

5. Systemic dependency: the limitations of relief assistance

5.1 'Drought then food aid'

Another meaning of dependency taken from interviews carried out for this study is in terms of how institutions think about and respond to problems. Two related themes emerge from the interviews. A first theme is that the perennial need for relief assistance by growing numbers of northern Kenyan pastoralists signifies development failures in the region. A second theme is that reliance on food distributions as a response to food crises in these areas shows the failure of humanitarians to engage in a greater range of activities and use a greater range of non-food resources. NGOs are accused of emphasising emergency response in their operations rather than adopting longer-term approaches. Some suggest that operational agencies rush to provide food aid in response to a presumably acute situation, without linking the distribution of relief to a clear exit strategy.

A senior aid agency official explained that institutions get dependent on certain modes of response.[23] 'Drought then food aid' thinking dominates the policy and institutional framework for emergency response, in the view of some agencies that were visited. The same observation was made in a recent review of livestock-related interventions in the 1999–2001 emergency response in Kenya (Aklilu and Wekesa, 2002). Some believe that the dominance of food relief meant that limited donor funds were available for non-food drought mitigation efforts.

Assessment of the problem in northern Kenya as a 'drought' is disputed. Some diagnose the problem in this region as one of deep poverty caused by marginalisation and underdevelopment (Lind, 2003; Buchanan-Smith and Lind, 2005). The situation of chronic food insecurity in parts of northern Kenya is born out of the failure of the Kenyan government and some operational agencies to make development investments in this politically and economically marginal part of the

country, it is thought. Food crises in this region are a manifestation of a livelihood system under pressure, and the lack of options for 'pastoralists in transition'. It follows that food aid may not be the most appropriate response to the food insecurity problems in northern Kenya. Food aid merely keeps people alive in a state of destitution. Section 6 will consider a related view that food aid is a disincentive for the very poor to transition into alternative livelihoods.

The implication is that, in contexts characterised by high levels of destitution, food aid perpetuates dependence on relief assistance. The authors of the review mentioned above reach the same conclusion: 'when food aid is used after all other household assets are depleted, it becomes counterproductive, creating dependency and eroding local initiative and coping capacity' (*ibid.*: 33). Food aid, it is argued, does not assist recovery or enhance the recuperative powers of destitute pastoralists. In this sense, 'systemic dependency' refers to the supposed limitations of relief assistance. One humanitarian source involved in food aid distributions in northern Kenya claimed that, besides saving lives, the impact of decades of food aid in the region amount to the creation of few assets and poor infrastructural improvements. An important finding of a recent review of food aid is that it can rarely enable people to lift themselves out of poverty and chronic vulnerability (Barrett and Maxwell, forthcoming). Adding to this, the authors of the review note that an emphasis on food aid sometimes competes with the longer-term perspective needed for overcoming the causes of food insecurity.

Humanitarians interviewed for this study were well aware of this critique, but counter that it challenges the established nature and mandate of relief assistance, which is to save lives. Various officials contend that dependency claims are used to divert attention from development failures in northern Kenya.

5.2 The 2004–2005 emergency response

Debates around the 2004–2005 EMOP have raised concerns over systemic dependency, referring to how institutions think about and respond to problems. The six-month EMOP was intended to run from August 2004 to January 2005, following the disaster declaration by the Kenyan President in July 2004. By early September, donors had pledged only 80,000MT of food out of the estimated 156,000MT required (Kenya Food Security Report, 8 September 2004). WFP was only able to start out with an abridged distribution in October in priority districts, including Turkana, Marsabit, Mandera, Wajir, Samburu and Isiolo in the north, which made up 40% of the total beneficiaries nationally. By early November only 66% of the total requirement of food had been resourced (Kenya Food Security Report, 9 November 2004).

Officials interviewed for this study referred to many reasons for the slow and lukewarm response to the disaster declaration. A factor of great importance that ties into discussion of systemic dependency is that many donors questioned the severity of the drought. To begin, some donors do not trust the quality of the early-warning data that is gathered and interpreted by the government's Arid Lands Resource Management Project (ALRMP). The prospect of food aid biases the monthly drought monitoring bulletins prepared by ALRMP for ASAL districts, according to one UN official.[24] Some donors also felt that political pressures influenced the calculation of those judged to be in need of food aid.

Beyond doubts over the quality of the food security information that informed the disaster declaration, some donors believed that the appeal was covering chronic needs. This judgment was confirmed by a statement made by the WFP Country Director for Kenya in response to the shortfall in food aid to cover needs in the 2005 food crisis: '[t]he debilitating impact of a prolonged dry spell, compounded by chronic poverty, means that in many regions thousands of families are too poor to have enough to eat' (IRIN, 2005). Previously, a concern that food aid was being used to cover chronic needs had influenced decisions within some aid agencies on the appropriate type and scale of relief intervention. An evaluation of a 1996 emergency

intervention by Oxfam in Turkana District explained: '[t]he proposal for renewed intervention [in 1996 after an intervention that lasted from 1992 to 1995] raised questions about whether the situation was really an emergency, and how to respond without getting into large scale food distribution again. Continued food insecurity after four years of food distribution, also highlighted the need for alternative interventions to promote access to food' (Jaspars et al., 1997: 3). There was a perception by some Oxfam staff that the problems were long-term, and that it was the responsibility of the government and not Oxfam to implement basic welfare support programmes (*ibid.*: 6).

There is greater recognition among aid officials in Nairobi that chronic food insecurity is the more serious problem. A European donor interviewed for this study commented that, 30 years ago, pastoralists would have managed without relief assistance in a drought of a similar magnitude to the one observed in 2004 and 2005.[25] Some food crises in northern Kenya are not necessarily linked to variations in rainfall. Once the chronic and structural characteristics of food insecurity are appreciated, the fundamental question becomes what interventions are appropriate to address food crises of this sort.[26]

5.3 Beyond 'drought then food aid' thinking

There is significant interest and discussion in aid circles in Nairobi on approaches and activities to reduce the primacy and predominance of food aid distributions in response to pastoralist food crises. There is a perception in many agencies visited for this study that resources committed to food distributions could be used more efficiently in other ways, and with greater impact on the livestock economy. This was observed in the estimated $2.5 million funding of livestock-related interventions in the 1999–2001 emergency response (Aklilu and Wekesa, 2002). Some donor and aid agency officials interviewed expressed an interest in voucher and cash interventions, linked to a clear exit strategy, as alternatives to food aid for improving livelihoods. According to an evaluation of an Oxfam relief programme in Wajir District, the cost of

delivering one adult monthly ration of food relief was 525Ksh compared to 450Ksh for an equivalent monthly ration through cash for work (Buchanan-Smith and Barton, 1999: 37). The ICRC is piloting a voucher intervention for animal health services in southern Turkana District. While NGOs are acquiring greater experience running cash for work projects, and are enlarging their capacities to implement larger cash interventions, in most emergencies they cannot be done as quickly or on as large a scale as food aid responses. Interest was also expressed in adopting cost recovery as a principle in emergency animal health interventions, in order to avoid market price effects that would adversely affect community animal health workers.

Currently there are inter-agency discussions and input into a proposed National Drought Management Contingency Fund. A team of consultants was working on a feasibility study at the time of writing. It is envisioned that funds will be provided to implement activities contained in contingency plans prepared by ASAL districts. The establishment of a contingency fund is linked to donor interest in making available the resources for authorities responsible for drought management to quickly respond to early-warning indicators pointing to drought. Early intervention is regarded as one way to prevent damaging coping strategies, and thus reduce the scale of emergency response and help endogenous livelihood recovery. District-level contingency accounts are proposed in the government's draft National Disaster Management Policy. The concept of the contingency fund is also included in the draft ASAL policy.

6. Relief assistance after 80 years: the case of Turkana District

6.1 Relief assistance past and present

The first recorded distribution of relief assistance in Turkana occurred in 1934. Relief assistance in colonial Turkana District consisted of transport subsidies for commercial imports of cereals, the distribution of free cereals to registered inhabitants of 'paupers' camps' and to destitute people living near to towns, and payment in kind to workers on public workfare projects such as locust eradication

campaigns. The scale of colonial relief interventions in Turkana was typically small and coverage was low.

The first large-scale distribution of free food aid by the government with the support of international organisations such as Oxfam began in response to the drought in 1960 and 1961. Several relief centres were established in the district. In Lodwar, the district administrative centre, an estimated 30,000 people were receiving relief assistance in 1961 and 1962 (Ecosystems, 1985: 1, 2). Intermittent distributions of food aid continued throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

An extensive relief operation was launched in the early 1980s in response to famine caused by a combination of drought and an outbreak of contagious caprine pleuro-pneumonia (CCPP), an animal disease. Livestock raiding also posed serious challenges. Tensions between the Turkana and the neighbouring Karimojong tribe in Uganda restricted the customary movements of Turkana herds to drought grazing reserves in Uganda.[27] The situation of famine was compounded by a cholera epidemic in some settlements in northern Turkana. Large numbers of distressed pastoralists had been drawn to settlements where the Diocese of Lodwar had established feeding and medical centres for severely malnourished children at the onset of the crisis. Relief continued to be distributed only in towns and settlements due to a variety of logistical difficulties (Buchanan-Smith, 1993: 4). At the height of the emergency operation in 1982 and 1983, around 85,000 people, about half the Turkana District population, were receiving relief assistance in famine camps (Ecosystems, 1985). Relief assistance through food for work continued to be provided up to 1986, but in continuously decreasing quantity and magnitude. Political pressures forestalled cutting aid off earlier than was proposed by the Turkana Rehabilitation Project (TRP), a government initiative that coordinated the relief effort from late in 1980.

A 1985 evaluation claimed that the camps had prolonged dependence on food aid by failing to provide alternative income-generating activities for the camp inhabitants (*ibid.*). Although TRP assumed coordination of a relief operation that was already centred mainly in towns and settlements, it was criticised for institutionalising the camps by continuing to provide relief through them (*ibid.*). Elsewhere, it is noted that the recovery of livestock herds following the drought happened more quickly and was more complete in southern Turkana, where no camps were established during the emergency operation, than in northern Turkana (McCabe, 1990).

The legacy of the camps continues to influence agency thinking and responses today. As early as 1984, when food aid was still being distributed on a large scale in Turkana, Oxfam and the WFP piloted a restocking programme as a way of re-establishing the pastoral sector. The programme was informed by an understanding that outside interventions that contributed to sedentarisation had made the Turkana population more not less vulnerable to drought (Hogg, 1985). One senior aid agency official interviewed for this study claimed that the camps revealed the limitations of how agencies managed relief by creating dependency on relief assistance.[28] Drawing lessons from the camps, a donor official stressed that aid agencies must ensure that relief to pastoralists does not create disincentives for herders who receive relief assistance to return to pastoralism.[29] OFDA seeks to avoid the creation of famine camps by providing relief to people where they live, so that they can continue with their customary survival activities while receiving relief assistance.[30] Some progress has been made in this regard in Turkana District. In 1994, grain sub-stores were created at decentralised locations throughout the district under the administration of operational agencies, to improve their logistic capacities to distribute food aid where pastoralists live and move.

Food distributions have become institutionalised in Turkana since the complex emergency and relief intervention of the early 1980s. There is an apparent trend towards longer and more consistent relief interventions. Since 1991, there have been

three major relief operations in Turkana supported by UN agencies and international donors, the most recent being the EMOP coordinated by WFP, beginning in October 2004 and continuing into 2005. The core of these emergency operations was the blanket distribution of food aid. Turkana received the highest level of funding in the EMOP that ran from February 2000 until September 2002 (Aklilu and Wekesa, 2002). Although food aid was the principal response, there was an unprecedented level of livestock-related interventions as well, including destocking/restocking, supplementary livestock feeds, cross-border peace initiatives, emergency veterinary programmes and transport subsidies to traders to increase off-take rates (*ibid.*).

In addition to emergency operations in response to an official disaster declaration, the Kenyan government and various operational agencies have undertaken a gamut of other emergency responses, from the distribution of free food to therapeutic feeding programmes, workfare schemes and cash and voucher interventions. Taken together, relief assistance has been provided nearly continuously in Turkana District since 1999.

6.2 Poverty and vulnerability

Turkana people define absolute poverty as the condition of being without livestock herds (Broch-Due, 1999). Being 'poorer' is the condition of possessing fewer livestock, and thus a diminished capacity to provide for the needs of household members and to invest in social relations of importance (Buchanan Smith and Lind, 2004).

Those who receive food aid in Turkana can be divided very broadly into two groups. One group consists of the poorer that possess few livestock, typically no more than a residual herd, and have low capacities to cope with shocks. A small herd is not able to produce sufficient quantities of milk in the short wet season, and for the long dry season, lasting up to ten months, the herd may stop producing milk altogether. In this situation, household members revert to survival activities and 'fall-back' sources

of food. Dependence on food aid among other survival activities is largely due to the depletion of a household's asset base of livestock. The pressure to sell animals increases for households whose herds have been greatly diminished by drought, raids and other shocks. The dilemma facing the poorest households is that, while their cash needs are perhaps greatest, the depletion of the herd has removed their capacity to earn income (*ibid.*)

A second group is made up of the destitute who are unable to meet their food needs without external support. Jaspars et al. (1997: 12) observe that some Turkana people live continuously on the edge of disaster. Famine processes are greatly accelerated for this group even before a relief intervention begins. A 1985 assessment found that 31% of the Turkana population were either not supported by the pastoral economy, or would not be supported for very long in the event of a drought (*ibid.*). Many Turkana were still recovering or simply surviving the aftermath of the 1979–81 crisis at the time the assessment was conducted. The implication drawn by the authors of the assessment was that there was a need for food aid to support the population of destitute Turkana who would otherwise face extreme hardship if it were to be withdrawn. Jaspars et al. note that the use of food aid to promote food security among destitute and malnourished communities can only have a short-term impact (Jaspars et al., 1997: 26).

The estimated per capita Tropical Livestock Unit (TLU) of the Turkana has decreased, although up-to-date data are missing. During the 1990–92 drought alone, the TLU per person ratio in Turkana dropped from 4.9 in 1990 to 1.4 in 1993. (Four TLU is estimated to be the bare subsistence level for pastoralists, although some consider this too low.[31]) Since then, there have been two multi-year droughts in Turkana, as well as significant livestock losses due to raiding and banditry.

Recent poverty data from the Kenya Central Bureau of Statistics suggest the wide extent and severe depth of poverty in Turkana. An estimated 62% of all inhabitants

of Turkana live below the monetary poverty line for rural Kenya of 1,239Ksh per month (or around £10 UK sterling) (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2003). The poverty gap, a measurement of the depth of poverty, is 26% for Turkana District, one of the highest percentages in Kenya (*ibid.*). In other words, monthly income levels are 26% below the monetary poverty line, suggesting the extremity of poverty experienced by many in the district. Casual observation and discussions with Turkana during the course of fieldwork carried out for this study suggest that, for many people, income levels are far below the mean poverty line for Turkana District.

The high levels and depth of poverty in Turkana give some indication of the severity of food security problems in the district. Nutrition data compiled by UNICEF and Oxfam (Table 1) shows that levels of malnutrition in Turkana are consistently high. An important qualification is that the malnutrition data presented in Table 1 represent the situation in March, which is the peak dry season when family herds have migrated to distant borderlands and malnutrition rates are typically higher. In many years, malnutrition rates in Turkana during the dry season are above the emergency threshold of 15% established in the UNICEF/WFP 'Guidelines for Selective Feeding Programmes'. Wide inter-annual variations suggest that a significant proportion of the population is faced with continuous threats to its food security and nutrition. The data also show that many people have failed to recover from the 1999–2001 drought.

Table 1: Rates of Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) in Turkana District[32]

% GAM by month and year	2000	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Divisions covered by each survey	Mar	Aug	Feb/Mar	Feb/Mar	Mar	Mar	Mar
Katilu, Kainuk		31.6 [2]	10.2 [4]	12.7 [5]	24.0 [6]	20.1 [6]	
Loima, Turkwell		43.1 [2]	12.0 [2]	11.8 [6]	22.4 [6]	23.3 [6]	
Lokichar, Lokori & Lomello		29.6 [2]	13.1 [4]	19.4 [4]	32.8 [4]	23.1 [4]	
Lokichokio, Kakuma, &		33.6 [2]	13.5 [2]	11.4 [3]	18.9 [1]	16.8 [1]	19.2 [1]

Oropoi							
Lokituang Sub district (Kaleeng, Kibish, Lapur, Lokitaung)	21.3 [1]	34.4 [2]	9.9 [1]	11.0 [1]	27.6 [1]	34.4 [1]	22.1 [1]
Annual average	**21.3**	**34.5**	**11.9**	**14.6**	**25.1**	**24.6**	**20.7**

[1] Oxfam GB, [2] UNICEF/UNICEF & partners, [3] LWF/AMREF, [4] World Vision, [5] NCCK, [6] CCF

6.3 Dependency, dependence and disincentives: what is the evidence?

This section reviews evidence of different dependency concerns. The evidence is based on fieldwork carried out in January 2005 in northern Turkana District. A total of 40 interviews were done using a checklist of open-ended questions in four different places. An equal number of men and women were interviewed at each location. Lowarengak is a small fishing village on Lake Turkana. It hosts a population of internally displaced Turkana people from Todoyang, which is a settlement located on the Ethiopian border some 50km north of Lowarengak. Many came in 1994 following a raid by Merille pastoralists from Ethiopia. A second site, Loruth, is a small settlement far from main roads and market centres. It is inhabited by people displaced by raids and associated armed violence, and is served by one Somali trader. Lokitaung, the third site, is a small town that was originally established as an administrative outpost during colonial rule. Interviews were carried out with members of a destitute village located within Lokitaung. The fourth site, Ngikwakais, is a village on the edge of Kakuma. It is inhabited by destitute pastoralists displaced by armed violence and drought. Kakuma is a large town with a developed market centre and shops, and is home to a large refugee camp run by the UNHCR.

Fieldwork was conducted while Oxfam GB and Lutheran World Federation (LWF) had been distributing free food aid in northern Turkana as part of the WFP-coordinated emergency operation. Every person that was interviewed was receiving food aid, although this was not an explicit criteria used to identify respondents.

6.3.1 Dependency syndrome

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 Loruth complained of an 'eat and wait' attitude among some community members. The existence of such views in remote communities like Loruth 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 is often being described in Loruth and other communities visited for this study is people who temporarily reduce their involvement in an assortment of arduous survival activities when relief assistance is distributed. It is notable that several women, who customarily undertake survival activities such as burning charcoal and collecting and selling bundles of fuelwood, describe 'rest' as one of the ways that relief assistance improves their lives.

Contrasting evidence on the possible existence of dependency syndrome comes from people's responses to questions concerning the reliability of relief assistance and other problems around aid. The percentage of those who reported that relief assistance is reliable is 53%. But responses indicate that people refer both to the consistency of aid distributions as well as to being sure about the amount of assistance they will receive. It is not always clear, therefore, whether people refer to being able to count on aid being distributed or of being sure of the size and composition of their ration. Some of those who report that relief assistance is unreliable, for example, also say that they are sure of how much assistance they will receive prior to distribution. In part this reflects efforts by Oxfam to enhance transparency in food distributions by giving beneficiaries advance notice of the size and content of the relief food basket. Oxfam food monitors and village relief committees are informed of the date of food delivery and ration size in advance. Beneficiaries are subsequently informed of the distribution date and, on the day of

distribution, they are told the ration size (Jaspars, 2000). Several women who were interviewed likened aid to an opportunity, in other words something unexpected and helpful but which otherwise cannot be counted on.

The problems around relief assistance reported by Turkana who were interviewed suggest that, for most households, relief assistance is insufficient in amount to be depended upon exclusively. For distributions under an emergency operation (EMOP), the KFSSG in consultation with the District Steering Group (DSG) decides the percentage to be covered per administrative division on the basis of national food security assessments. There is some redelegation back to districts whereby the DSG in consultation with WFP can reprioritise assistance to the most vulnerable communities within a targeted division.[33]

Under-coverage is the most frequently reported problem with relief assistance, mentioned by 68% of all people interviewed. The implication inferred by several people that report this problem is that rations are diminished because they are shared out with household and community members who are not registered. Jaspars et al. (1997) observe the same in their evaluation of a 1996 relief intervention by Oxfam. They note that the targeted populations did not benefit from the full rations intended for them since they shared their rations with the unregistered. Lentz and Barrett (2004) found that pastoralist communities in northern Kenya have consistently opted for uniform distributions, with each household entitled to an identical ration, under the community-based targeting system that is used in Kenya. Sharing out rations after distribution to the unregistered is one of many ways that Turkana communities get around the percentage figure to be registered set by the KFSSG. Other ways are to register more households, setting a maximum household size and reducing rations but registering more people.[34] 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.

The problem of undercoverage ties into the small size of rations, which is the second most frequently reported (45% of people interviewed for this study mentioned it). This key finding tallies with the Lentz and Barrett study, which concludes that food aid volumes are very modest. They found that only 30% of Kenyan pastoralist households derived more than one-quarter of their income from food aid during the drought crisis in 2000 and 2001. The daily per capita food aid values were only $0.03 per person per day.

Overall, the inadequacy of relief assistance for most Turkana pastoralist households points to the necessity of finding other forms of support. People interviewed for this study refer to a portfolio of coping strategies, which are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Coping strategies in northern Turkana District

Gather wild foods	Provide cheap labour (adults)
Collect and sell fuelwood	Send children to provide labour
Collect debts	Brewing
Credit from shopkeepers	Petty trade (tobacco)
Migration to distant grazing areas	Receive and give small gifts
Slaughter livestock	Relief assistance
Sell livestock	Begging from family and friends
Bleed livestock	Reduce meals or go without

6.3.2 Disincentive effects

This section considers four possible types of disincentive effects of relief assistance:

- market price effects;
- effects on people's engagement in other activities;
- effects on people's willingness to contribute labour to development projects; and
- effects on livelihood diversification and the transition out of livestock-keeping.

These are considered in turn below.

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. The receipt of food aid can imply that beneficiary households have less need to sell animals for food, meaning that fewer animals are offered for sale leading to an increase in livestock prices.

However, there are noteworthy differences in local perceptions of the market price effects of food distributions. In Lowarengak and Loruth, men reported no decrease in grain prices during and after food distributions. They complained that 'exploitative' traders and shopkeepers kept prices high at all times. Women on the other hand claimed that grain prices decrease. But they also explained that many shopkeepers hold onto cereal stocks during food distributions when prices are low, as well as buying relief cereal from beneficiaries for resale at a later time when cereal prices rebound. They also complained that shopkeepers during some food distributions increase the price of cooking oil, beans, sugar and salt that are not included in the relief food basket. In Ngikwakais, women that were interviewed note that price fluctuations in cereals bear little relation to relief food distributions. Men that were interviewed in Lokitaung observe that distributions of food aid have little impact on livestock prices, which remain low due to the few traders that buy livestock in the area.

These perceptions and observations show the importance of contextual factors, and suggest that there is not always a neat causation between food distributions and changes in market prices.

A second type of disincentive is the effect of relief assistance on people's engagement in other livelihood and income-generating activities. This presumes the existence of work options. However, it is the very 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 interviewed (73%) claim that the receipt of relief assistance does not impact on their involvement in other work activities. Several people emphasised that they must continue with their normal activities because relief rations are inadequate. Earlier, it was observed that some aid recipients scale back their involvement in a range of survival activities during food distributions. But many of these activities, such as burning charcoal, collecting and selling bundles of fuelwood and brewing, generate only small amounts of income or food. Further, they can have negative environmental and health consequences. Some women in Ngikwakais complained of chest problems and breathing difficulties that they associate with laborious work.

Another type of disincentive is the effect on people's willingness to contribute labour to development projects. In Lokitaung and Ngikwakais people will not contribute to development projects without being paid, according to all but one of 20 respondents. Pastoralists that were interviewed in these communities are destitute. It is questionable whether they have available labour to contribute to community development projects. In contrast, 65% of people interviewed in Loruth and Lowarengak expressed a willingness to contribute to development projects, although many were also very poor. There is nothing conclusive in people's responses to explain the variation in people's willingness. One possible reason is that, because Loruth and Lowarengak are smaller communities, it is easier for administrative officials to intimidate people into participating in public works projects. In contrast, officials have less control over town populations such as in Ngikwakais (Kakuma) and Lokitaung.

A fourth type of disincentive is the effect of aid distributions on livelihood diversification and the transition out of livestock-keeping. Some officials interviewed indicate that the government and aid agencies are fostering a chronic system through the perennial distribution of food aid. Relief assistance is viewed as a disincentive to people shifting out of livestock-keeping into alternative livelihoods. This argument raises an issue of causality, for it implies that Turkana are vulnerable (in part) because they receive relief aid. However, it risks simplifying the causes of vulnerability that lead some pastoralists to depend on relief assistance. Some factors include chronic insecurity (violence), underdevelopment, natural disasters, marginalisation, poor representation of pastoralists in government and ineffectual political institutions.

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, 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. One senior aid agency official with several years of experience working with pastoralists argued that the challenge for government and aid agencies is to enlarge access to information and education so that pastoralist peoples themselves can reach informed decisions and contribute to debates concerning the direction of their livelihoods.[35]

6.3.3 Perceptions and feelings about receiving relief assistance

Debates on dependency are often removed from the perceptions and feelings of recipients about receiving relief assistance. Turkana pastoralists that were interviewed for this study were questioned about perceptions of their own

dependence on relief aid as well as intangible impacts of assistance in terms of how people feel about receiving aid.

Turkana that were interviewed indicate that relief assistance has a measurable yet meagre impact on their livelihoods. Most people claim that they are a 'little dependent' (56%), 23% report they are 'somewhat dependent' while 21% consider that they are 'very dependent'. No one believes they are 'not dependent' on aid. These findings are based on a small sample, but they back up a more general conclusion, which is that most Turkana are neither wholly dependent on food aid nor independent at all times of external support to meet their food needs. It is not clear how severe morbidity and mortality rates would be if relief assistance were reduced. Biophysical studies have shown the Turkana to be capable of surviving for long periods on energy intakes below generally accepted minimum levels (Ecosystems, 1985: 8, 18). Yet some level of assistance is clearly required.

There is an assortment of views on what it feels like to receive relief assistance. Several people that were interviewed expressed a sort of indifference mixed with resignation of the need for some type of help. Several people also expressed a feeling of dignity and a renewed sense of worth. Typically, this was explained as being spared the need to beg, depending on extended family members, friends and even refugees, and being able to give gifts and assist others. These were also reported as some of the benefits of relief assistance (Table 3). Some Turkana pastoralists also voiced feelings of shame and regret. A Turkana woman commented: 'I feel guilt 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.'[36] One man likened relief assistance to a 'parent' that provides children with food.

Table 3: Positive impacts of relief assistance in northern Turkana

Reduces hunger	Prevents sale of animals
Sustains life	Prevents distress migration
Improves nutrition ('less illness'/ 'improves body condition')	Increases ability to save other sources of income
Gives strength and energy	Reduces need to beg from family, friends and refugees (in Kakuma camp)
Psychological relief (less need to worry about where to get food)	Increases ability to give gifts
Rest (reduces time spent on survival activities)	Money to buy animals (CFW)
Acquire knowledge (food for education)	Money to buy household items (CFW)
Reduces need to do business with exploitative traders and shopkeepers	Money to pay school fees (CFW)
	Money to buy medicine (CFW)

6.3.4 Key points

This section provides a list of key points drawn from the Turkana case study that tie into wider debates on dependency.

- There are mixed perceptions of the reliability of relief assistance. However, many Turkana recipients regard relief aid as an opportunity, in other words something that is unexpected and helpful, but that otherwise cannot be counted on.
- The amount of relief assistance that most households receive is inadequate to meet their many livelihood needs.
- The inadequacy of relief means that people must find other means of support.
- Relief assistance is not a disincentive to livelihood diversification. Rather, relief assistance is absorbed into household specific diversification strategies that already exist.
- Food distributions improve pastoralists' terms of trade by causing grain prices to decline and the price of livestock to increase.

- Distributions of relief assistance can affect people's involvement in other activities, but typically these impacts are minor and involve very poor people that receive relief, reducing their involvement in strenuous survival tasks.
- Most people will not contribute freely to development projects. But this appears to be more a factor of extreme poverty, rather than a disincentive effect of relief assistance.
- The views of recipients on receiving assistance are mixed, ranging from feeling dignified to feelings of shame and indifference.
- Most Turkana are not wholly dependent on food aid or independent at all times from the need for relief assistance.

7. Discussion and conclusions

The study has examined a range of meanings and perceptions of dependency as it is used in discussions of relief assistance in northern Kenya. This section considers the significance of these meanings for how relief agencies think about and respond to emergencies. The term 'dependency' covers a bundle of distinct concerns. These include:

- Dependence on relief assistance, which is discussed in terms of increasing vulnerability and severe poverty or destitution. Dependency is also used to discuss over-reliance on livestock-keeping and the current state of pastoralist systems.
- Disincentives of relief assistance such as the market price effects of food distributions, which can be positive for pastoralists who barter or sell animals for grains, and impacts of aid on pastoralists' initiative in undertaking their own livelihood activities.
- Diversion of food aid by administrative authorities that are responsible for distributing government relief. Dependency is also used to discuss concerns that public transfers of food aid are interwoven with local political-economic networks and patronage structures.

- Assorted practices and interests intrinsic to specific institutions for relief assistance, which ostensibly gain financial rewards and repute through emergency responses.
- Systemic dependency, which refers to how institutions think about and respond to emergencies. For many agency staff, the presumed predominance of 'drought then food aid' thinking encapsulates what are considered to be the limitations of relief assistance.

Dependency should be an important concern for agencies involved in relief assistance since it is used so widely to discuss concerns over the management, effectiveness and appropriateness of aid. In Kenya, dependency is used to characterise the inadequacies of relief assistance, the practices, interests and actions of agencies that do relief, as well as concerns for disincentives and longer-term behavioural changes in people who receive relief assistance. The wide range of uses of the term shows that there is no single agreed dependency problem to be addressed in aid policy, programming and action.

Another key point is that the outcomes of poorly managed aid resources are often what are being characterised as 'dependency'. Specifically, what is sometimes described as dependency is poorly designed and implemented relief operations, which means that aid does not have its intended impact of preventing further asset depletion and the slide into destitution. The language of dependency is also used to give expression to the negative perception of relief assistance as a resource subject to manipulation and predation by political-administrative structures. Changes to the institutional framework for emergency response have improved the coordination of food security information and responses to food crises in Kenya. However, further inter-agency dialogue and effort is needed to address negative attitudes toward relief assistance. First, confidence in early-warning information and the impression of some donors that the number of those judged to be in need of assistance remain unduly influenced by political pressures are difficult issues that should be openly

discussed and addressed. The slow and inadequate response of donors to some food crises relates directly to issues of trust and confidence in the system of information gathering and interpretation. Second, the findings of this report support the efforts of some donors and operational agencies to establish a contingency fund or similar mechanism through which funds could be rapidly disbursed to support activities intended to pre-empt further asset depletion and negative coping strategies by pastoralists. The effectiveness of systems for early warning and emergency preparedness hinge on the availability of funds to support timely and rapid actions. Finally, the Kenyan government must also develop new systems to better track its food aid supplies in order to minimise diversion and other abuse of food aid, which contribute to negative perceptions of relief assistance overall.

Although there have been considerable improvements in the coordination of relief responses in Kenya, many officials interviewed for this study express concern that the actions of relief agencies and government offices still do not form a coherent whole. Up to now there has been no policy framework to guide the interventions of such bodies. In the past, this meant that agencies worked at cross-purposes. For example, different views over the objectives of relief operations in Turkana and Samburu districts in the early 1990s led to disagreement between WFP and NGOs over targeting criteria and beneficiary numbers, with implications for ration rates (Buchanan-Smith, 1993). The draft national policies on arid lands and disaster management can give much-needed direction to relief interventions in northern Kenya. Aid agencies can fill a crucial role through advocacy, awareness-raising and capacity-building around policy changes that seek to improve the use of scarce aid resources.

Another key point involves dependency in communities where relief assistance is distributed. Dependency arguments are a slippery basis on which to make decisions with regard to determining aid volumes or the modalities for transferring relief assistance. Outside of the disincentive literature, there are few evidence-based

examinations of the issue that explore market price effects of food distributions. However, this study finds that, despite receiving relief assistance for over 80 years, there is little evidence to suggest that there is an over-dependence on relief aid in Turkana District. The same conclusion was reached in a review done in the early 1990s of food aid distributions in the area:

> *pastoralists living in a risky environment where relief is never assured and is usually available in a very sporadic way, are extremely unlikely to become over-dependent on this unreliable resource [food aid] over which they have no control, especially during a relief operation which is unlikely to last much longer than about eighteen months* (*ibid.*: 34).

Studies on distributions of relief assistance to pastoralists do not support reductions in aid to livestock-keepers on the basis of concerns that relief assistance causes dependency. Relief assistance, which is provided predominately in the form of food aid, is meeting genuine humanitarian needs and then only insufficiently, as the Turkana case shows. Increasing rates of destitution indicate the failure of the aid system to provide enough food and other types of relief assistance to prevent asset depletion. There is a case for greater and more sustained support, an argument supported in the past by different operational agencies. In the 1990s, Oxfam advocated for greater volumes of food aid and longer distribution periods in Turkana and Wajir districts as a way of supporting the pastoralist economy and livelihoods.

There is resignation and creeping support among aid officials in Kenya to provide protracted relief assistance to manage the deepening and widening poverty among certain pastoralist communities in the north of the country. A perception underlying this trend is that the current system of appeals is harmful to timely and adequate emergency responses. A European donor interviewed for this study observes that the aid system must prepare for the eventuality of moving into a situation in which chronic support will be given to livestock-keeping communities.[37] Donors and aid

agencies must explore funding mechanisms and programming approaches that will enable chronic needs to be addressed. Establishment of a contingency fund to support rapid interventions is one dimension of this. Another dimension is further experimentation with non-food alternatives through some type of social protection programme. A 1997 evaluation of an Oxfam relief intervention in Turkana District found that 'the food distribution had no lasting impact on food security or self-sufficiency' and recommended that food aid have some element of economic or livelihood support (Jaspars et al., 1997: 26). Aklilu and Wekesa (2001) find there were significant socio-economic benefits from the livestock-related interventions undertaken during the multi-agency response to the 1999–2001 drought emergency. The experiences demonstrate that aid agencies can lead the way in identifying more effective approaches by diversifying their responses to food crises in northern Kenya.

Many officials are closely following the implementation of the new national safety nets programme in neighbouring Ethiopia as a way of learning lessons that may inform the design of a social protection scheme supported by multi-annual funding commitments for northern Kenya pastoralists. Insurance schemes that protect herders and livestock traders against shocks are incorporated into the draft national ASAL policy. Aid agencies can play an advocacy role by promoting these and other policy and institutional reforms that seek to provide a minimum level of assistance to marginal communities.

Bibliography

Acacia Consultants Ltd. with Rural Focus Ltd. (2003) 'End of project review of Oxfam GB's 2001-2002 drought recovery programme in Turkana and Wajir Districts of northern Kenya.' Draft. Nairobi.

Aklilu, Yacob and Mike Wekesa (2002) *Drought, Livestock and Livelihoods: Lessons from the 1999–2001 Emergency Response in the Pastoral Sector in Kenya*, Humanitarian Practice Network, Network Paper 40. London: ODI.

Barrett, Chris and Dan Maxwell (forthcoming) *Food Aid after Fifty Years: Rethinking Food Aid*. London: Routledge.

Birch, Isobel and Halima Shuria (2001) *Perspectives on Pastoral Development: A Casebook from Kenya*. Oxford: Oxfam.

Broch-Due, V. (1999) 'Remembered Cattle, Forgotten People: The Morality of Exchange and the Exclusion of the Turkana Poor', in D. Anderson and V. Broch-Due (eds) *The Poor Are Not Us: Poverty and Pastoralism in Eastern Africa*. London: James Currey.

Buchanan-Smith, Margaret (1993) 'A Review of Oxfam's Approach to Relief Food Distribution in Samburu and Turkana Districts of Kenya, 1992/3'. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies.

Buchanan-Smith, Margaret and David Barton (1999) 'Evaluation of the Wajir Relief Programme: 1996–1998'. Report to Oxfam GB. Nairobi: Mimeo.

Buchanan-Smith, Margaret and Jeremy Lind (2005) *Armed Violence and Poverty in Northern Kenya: A Case Study for the Armed Violence and Poverty Initiative*. University of Bradford, Centre for International Cooperation and Security, Department of Peace Studies.

Bush, Jennifer (1994) *The Role of Food Aid in Drought and Recovery: Oxfam's North Turkana (Kenya) Drought Relief Programme, 1992/1994*. Nairobi: Oxfam. Mimeo.

Central Bureau of Statistics (2003) *Geographic Dimensions of Well-being in Kenya: Where Are the Poor?, Vol. 1*. Nairobi: Ministry of Planning and National Development.

Ecosystems Limited (1985) *Turkana District Resources Survey, 1982–84: Main Report*. Turkana Rehabilitation Project (Development Support Unit). Nairobi: Ministry of Energy and Rural Development.

Freeman, Constance (2005) 'The Erosion of African Dependency', lecture to the Museum Society of Kenya, Nairobi, 19 January 2005.

Hogg, Richard (1985) *Restocking Pastoralists in Kenya: A Strategy for Relief and Rehabilitation*. London: Pastoral Development Network, ODI.

IRIN (2005) 'Two Million in Need of Food Aid – WFP', 26 April 2005.

Jaspars, Susanne et al. (1997) 'People on the Edge: An Evaluation of Oxfam's Emergency Intervention in Turkana, March–August 1996'. Oxfam. Mimeo.

Jaspars, Susanne (2000) 'Report of Visit to Turkana: Rapid Assessment of Effectiveness and Impact of Food Distribution and Recommendations for Future Actions. Oxfam. Mimeo.

KFSSG (n.d.) 'National-level Food Security and Drought Management Co-ordination structures'. Mimeo.

Kenya Food Security Report – September 8, 2004. Nairobi: FEWS-Net, WFP, Ministry of Agriculture and ALRMP.

Kenya Food Security Report – November 9, 2004. Nairobi: FEWS-Net, WFP, Ministry of Agriculture and ALRMP.

Lentz, Erin and Chris Barrett (2004) 'Food Aid Among East African Pastoralists'. Research Brief. Davis, CA: Pastoral Risk Management Project (PARIMA), Global Livestock Collaborative Research Support Program.

Lind, Jeremy (2003) 'Adaptation, Conflict and Cooperation in Pastoralist East Africa: A Case Study of South Turkana, Kenya', *Journal of Conflict, Security and Development*, 3: 315–34.

McCabe, J. Terrence (1990) 'Success and Failure: The Breakdown of Traditional Drought Coping Institutions Among the Pastoral Turkana of Kenya', *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 25: pp. 146–60.

Republic of Kenya (2004a) *National Disaster Management Policy*. Nairobi: Office of the President.

Republic of Kenya (2004b) 'National Policy for the Sustainable Development of the Arid and Semi Arid Lands of Kenya'. Fifth draft. Nairobi. Mimeo.

Endnotes

[1] Interview with senior government official, Nairobi. 25 January 2005.

[2] Interview with UN official, Nairobi, 1 February 2005.

[3] Interview with donor official, Nairobi, 5 January 2005.

[4] Interview with NGO official, Nairobi, 19 January 2005.

[5] Interview with NGO official, Nairobi, 4 February 2005.

[6] Interview with NGO field staffer, Lodwar, 13 January 2005.

[7] Interview with UN officials, Nairobi, 20 January 2005.

[8] Interview with NGO field staff, January 13, 2005. Lodwar.

[9] Interview with donor official, Nairobi. February 8, 2005. 22l.

[10] Interviews.

[11] Interview with NGO official, Nairobi, 21 January 2005.

[12] Interview with donor official, Nairobi, 8 February 2005.

[13] *Daily Nation*, 16 February 2005.

[14] Interviews with NGO field staff, Lodwar, 13 and 14 January 2005.

[15] Interview with NGO official, Nairobi, 7 February 2005.

[16] Interview with humanitarian official, Nairobi, 21 January 2005.

[17] Interview with researcher, Nairobi, 19 January 2005.

[18] Interview with donor officials, Nairobi, 21 January 2005.

[19] Interview with UN official, Nairobi, 1 February 2005.

[20] Interview with NGO official, Nairobi, 2 February 2005.

[21] Interview with researcher, Nairobi, 19 January 2005.

[22] Interview with NGO field staff, Lokitaung, 14 January 2005.

[23] Interview with NGO official, Nairobi, 7 February 2005.

[24] Interview with UN officials, Nairobi, 20 January 2005.

[25] Interview with donor official, Nairobi, 8 February 2005.

[26] Interview with UN official, Nairobi, 1 February 2005.

[27] Interview with donor official, Nairobi, 8 February 2005.

[28] Interview with NGO official, Nairobi, 7 February 2005.

[29] Interview with donor official, Nairobi, 8 February 2005.

[30] Interview with donor official, Nairobi, 21 January 2005.

[31] This figure is debated. Some argue that a safer limit for subsistence pastoralism in Turkana is a ratio of six or seven (Ecosystems, 1985: 8, 18).

[32] Although malnutrition rates from different months are not comparable, GAM rates from August 2000 are included in this table since data from March of that year is not available for most divisions. GAM is a measurement of malnutrition among children.

[33] Personal communication with Josie Buxton, Oxfam Kenya Humanitarian Coordinator, 18 April 2005.

[34] Personal communication with Susanne Jaspars, Oxfam Food Security and Nutrition Coordinator, 15 March 2005.

[35] Interview with NGO official, Nairobi, 7 February 2005.

[36] Interview with beneficiary, Loruth, 13 January 2005.

[37] Interview with donor official, Nairobi, 8 February 2005.