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## THE INFLUENCE OF MARKET SUPPORT INTERVENTIONS ON HOUSEHOLD FOOD SECURITY

### About this evidence brief

This evidence brief provides an overview of *The influence of market support interventions on household food security* – an evidence synthesis published in March 2017 by the Humanitarian Evidence Programme and carried out by a team of independent and multidisciplinary consultants. It summarizes key findings in response to the research questions identified, indicates the country contexts from which evidence is drawn, outlines the methodology, highlights research gaps and provides references to the original literature.

The brief aims to assist policymakers, practitioners and researchers in assessing the available evidence in this field. It does not provide advice on which interventions or approaches are more or less appropriate in any given context. The varied and varying nature of crisis, vulnerability, goals of humanitarian programming, local conditions and quality of available data make the evidence highly contextual. *The views and opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of Oxfam, Feinstein or the UK government.*

### Objectives of the evidence synthesis

The evidence synthesis represents the first ever attempt to apply systematic review methodology to identify, synthesize and evaluate the existing evidence on the influence of market support interventions on household food security in humanitarian crises. The synthesis identified seven sub-questions.

### About the evidence synthesis

The protocol, full synthesis and executive summary on which this evidence brief is based are available from [Feinstein International Center](#), [Oxfam Policy & Practice](#) and [UK government](#) websites. Citation:

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### About the Humanitarian Evidence Programme

The Humanitarian Evidence Programme is a partnership between Oxfam GB and the Feinstein International Center at the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy, Tufts University. It is funded by the United Kingdom (UK) government's Department for International Development (DFID) through the Humanitarian Innovation and Evidence Programme.

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**Figure 1: The influence of market support interventions on household food security in humanitarian crises. Source: The research team**

Findings	Interventions supporting the finding (total=7)	Location
Market support interventions positively influence the food security of crisis-affected households	5	Ethiopia Philippines Haiti
Sufficient coverage of targeted market actors is required to ensure an impact on household food security	5	Pakistan Philippines Ethiopia
Market support interventions improve the income of targeted market actors	7	Pakistan Philippines Ethiopia Haiti
Market support interventions that are part of an integrated approach have a positive influence on household food security	7	Pakistan Philippines Ethiopia Haiti
Market support interventions that are complemented with vouchers can positively influence the food security of targeted and non-targeted households	2	Philippines Haiti

## Findings

### Market support interventions do positively influence the food security of disaster-affected households

Five of the seven interventions included in the evidence synthesis demonstrate a positive influence on the food security of disaster-affected households. Of these, two studies provide the most robust evidence of influence on household food security in which more than one food-security-related indicator is applied. In one of the five studies the indicator includes a pre-crisis comparison. In the remaining examples, proxy indicators illustrating household outcomes on food security were required.

**The timing of market support interventions is critical.** One intervention did not positively influence food security outcomes for disaster-affected households, principally as market support activities were being implemented one year after the disaster, when households were already meeting their food needs and most traders had already re-established themselves.

### Sufficient coverage of targeted market actors is required to ensure an impact on household food security

Five of the seven interventions reference the importance of ensuring sufficient coverage of market actors for programmes to have the intended household-level outcomes. The problems associated with market actor coverage and the impact this can have on positive household outcomes, including food security, are highlighted in one study. Another recommends that programmes are designed inclusively, and are open to all traders of similar type in an area. Other studies acknowledge efforts to gain sufficient market actor coverage.

#### Definitions

**Market support interventions** are activities that support existing market systems to improve the situation of crisis-affected populations. **They are a form of market-based programming.**

This synthesis looks at **market support interventions** targeting market actors, service or infrastructure providers that sell or buy products and services that are ultimately available to consumers.

It sets out to compare and analyse evidence of the impacts of such interventions to reduce negative coping mechanisms and improve the **food security of crisis-affected populations in humanitarian settings.**

**Food security** 'exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life' (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2006, p. 1).

### Market support interventions improve the income of targeted market actors

Evidence from all seven included interventions illustrates that the supported market actors increased their income and by proxy (it is assumed in some studies), their own food security. Studies do not however provide details on how the market actors used the income generated through the intervention. One study looks at a number of intra-dependent market actors along the same critical market chain. In this study increases in income are seen throughout the whole market system. This programme benefited from the elaboration of market system baselines and subsequent analysis to enable the identification of key market actors and from a longer timeframe, and this evidence of income was seen two years after the activity was implemented.

### **Market support interventions can be part of an integrated programme approach, potentially increasing their positive influence on household food security**

All of the interventions included in the evidence synthesis were part of a wider programme, tending to be designed as small sub-components of larger complex programmes. There is some evidence that such an approach is beneficial for household-level outcomes. In one study, support to small retailers was part of a wider food security and livelihood programme that was in turn integrated with shelter, water and sanitation interventions. Evaluation indicates that beneficiaries have a positive opinion of this integrated approach since it provided a complete package to meet all post-disaster needs.

### **Market support interventions that are complemented with vouchers can influence the food security of targeted households**

Two of the seven interventions used vouchers at household level to complement the support provided to market actors. This was to ensure that market actors would be guaranteed some business, especially where an investment was also required on the side of the market actor. For example, in the case of cash grants provided to blacksmiths, households were provided with vouchers for a range of agricultural inputs, including tools, at an input fair. Although the available data from these studies is limited, there does appear to be a positive influence on food security of targeted households. With the limited evidence available it is not possible to say how voucher- and cash-based interventions compare.

### **Some parameters drive the inclusion and exclusion of market support interventions in humanitarian crises**

The research points to several factors that influence whether market support interventions are included or excluded in humanitarian response: organizational interest and capacity; use of response analysis processes based on the findings of market assessments; the availability and flexibility of funding; and a willingness to try new approaches that look beyond traditional response activities.

### **Barriers and enablers to market support interventions**

Significantly, this evidence synthesis found that most of the barriers to market support interventions were institutional rather than contextual – specifically, poor recognition of the role that market actors play in enabling economic recovery and meeting the needs of affected populations, and that market actors need support themselves to maximize outcomes for affected people.

A range of institutional enabling factors are identified, including:

- the recognition of the role market actors play in meeting the needs of affected populations and enabling economic recovery
- that government and donor policies enable the implementation of market support interventions
- programme management decision-making flexibility
- organizational capacity to consider market-based approaches at leadership, technical and operational levels and the level to which organizations have institutionalized market support interventions
- organizational learning from implementing such interventions and the willingness to openly examine failures
- programme design being informed by robust analysis that acknowledges the role of markets in the lives of affected households
- the significance of multi-sectoral sensitivity in understanding household needs
- the correct identification of market actors, as informed by interconnection to household needs
- the timing and timeliness of market support interventions.

## **Methodology**

Database, website and academic journal searches were conducted between June and August 2016. In total, 6,216 records were obtained through keyword searches from 25 online sources, and 65 from key informants.

During the first stage 6,046 studies were excluded as they did not present the outcomes of market support interventions on household food security. The full text for the remaining 148 studies was then screened.

Of the 148 studies screened, 7 were eligible for inclusion in the full analysis and synthesis of evidence. Of these:

- all are in English
- all were published after 2008 (and five of seven since 2014)
- six employ qualitative research methods and one uses mixed (quantitative and qualitative) methods
- of the included studies, two are evaluations, two are international non-governmental organization (INGO) case study briefings, one is a peer-reviewed journal article, one is a rapid review and one is a working paper.

The seven eligible studies focused on market support interventions that:

- were in response to humanitarian crises of varying lengths – the shortest being under six months and the longest over five years
- were parts of larger humanitarian programmes
- were implemented by INGOs, in contexts where multiple agencies and government entities were providing assistance
- took place in Ethiopia (three), Haiti (one), Pakistan (one) and the Philippines (two) – two low income and two middle income countries
- were in response to both slow-onset drought and rapid-onset disasters (floods, earthquake and a super typhoon) (three and four studies respectively)
- took place in rural or urban/peri-urban contexts (four and three studies respectively)
- engaged a range of market actors including livestock traders, animal healthcare providers, shelter material traders, blacksmiths and *sari-sari* (grocery) store owners
- engaged with a range of populations, with varied connections to local markets, including livestock-owning pastoralists, small business owners and vulnerable households provided with vouchers to access products and services.

## Research gaps

The volume of evidence on the outcomes of market support interventions on household food security in humanitarian crises is extremely limited and the overall quality weak. Of the 148 fully screened studies, 141 were excluded because:

- they did not report on the outcomes of market support interventions that aimed to improve food security or reduce negative coping mechanisms (80/141)
- they used interventions outside the scope of this research – mostly ‘market sensitive’ approaches such as cash transfer programming rather than ‘market support’ (46/141)
- they did not report on an intervention – mostly in the case of market assessment reports (12/141)
- they did not mention that findings were based on data collected from project stakeholders (3/141).

Of the seven included studies:

- only one clearly states coverage of the programme (in this particular case, 5,405 households)
- none records intervention costs
- none clearly states the timing of the intervention.

The authors observed research and evidence gaps relating to the following key questions.

- Are market support interventions more effective as part of an integrated programme, or stand-alone?
- What is the cost-benefit of different market support interventions and how do we define this?
- What are the lessons learned from the market system approaches that are applicable in humanitarian contexts?
- How could organizations’ compliance, risk analysis and procurement systems be modified to facilitate better engagement with smaller-scale traders and market actors in disaster contexts?
- How are the potential positive and negative effects of market support interventions best measured in humanitarian settings?
- To what extent could humanitarian practices be positively influenced by market stakeholders’ inputs?

## Further considerations

The authors observed that the following factors could be contributing to a lack of market-based programming:

- the lack of funding available for market support interventions, and the inflexibility of funding
- low quality and narrow scope of market assessments and market monitoring
- the market ‘blindness’ of many humanitarian interventions which, despite always using and having an impact on a market system, do not consistently (at best) maximize or (at worst) redress these impacts of humanitarian programme activities on markets
- the disconnect between humanitarian infrastructure support programmes and household outcomes
- the limited investment in market infrastructure support activities, both before and during crises.



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