



THE INFLUENCE OF MARKET SUPPORT INTERVENTIONS ON HOUSEHOLD FOOD SECURITY

About this executive summary

This is the executive summary of an independent evidence synthesis commissioned by the Humanitarian Evidence Programme – a partnership between Oxfam GB and Feinstein International Center at the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy, Tufts University, funded by aid from the United Kingdom (UK) government through the Humanitarian Innovation and Evidence Programme at the Department for International Development. The views and opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of Oxfam, Feinstein or the UK government. The database, website and academic journals searches took place between June and August 2016.

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The full version of the synthesis, which forms part of a series covering child protection, market support, mental health, nutrition, pastoralist livelihoods, shelter, urban contexts and water, sanitation and hygiene, can be accessed from:

- <https://www.gov.uk/dfid-research-outputs>
- <http://fic.tufts.edu/research-item/the-humanitarian-evidence-program/>
- <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/our-work/humanitarian/humanitarian-evidence-programme>

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There is growing consensus on the need to consider and support markets as part of humanitarian responses. It is assumed that this support will increase the impact of responses – yet to date such assumptions are rarely supported by data and strong evidence. This evidence synthesis, commissioned by the Humanitarian Evidence Programme¹ and carried out by a team of independent and multidisciplinary consultants, represents the first ever attempt to **identify, synthesize and evaluate the existing evidence on the influence of market support interventions on household food security in humanitarian crises**. It aims to:

- verify the quality of existing evidence
- help researchers identify the strengths and weaknesses in such evidence, and thus recognize potential improvements and opportunities for future research
- assist practitioners and policy makers in evaluating the impact of choices and investments based on the evidence, and assessment of this evidence.

Definitions and scope

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).

The primary research question is: **What is the influence of market support interventions on household food security in humanitarian crises?**

The focus on food security enabled a deeper understanding of the available findings and subsequently more pertinent, focused and detailed analysis. Furthermore, there is more experience of market support interventions in the food security sector.

The evidence synthesis process entailed the following steps.

- Developing a rigorous, peer-reviewed protocol for the synthesis methodology aligned with a published guidance note for evidence synthesis in the humanitarian field (Krystalli and Ott, 2015).
- Comprehensive screening of existing research and documentation as per the defined protocol.
- Selecting those studies that met the minimum quality criteria set out in the protocol² for detailed analysis.
- Analysing the strength of these studies and their findings.

¹ The Humanitarian Evidence Programme is a partnership between Oxfam GB and the Feinstein International Center at Tufts University. It is funded by the UK government's Department for International Development (DFID) through the Humanitarian Innovation and Evidence Programme.

² These include the type of study and its methodology; type of programme participant and the context; type of intervention; and type of outcomes measured. Full details are provided in Section 2.2 of this report.

- Synthesizing and assessing the quality of the evidence in response to the following seven secondary research questions.
 - What are the project parameters that drive the inclusion and exclusion of market support interventions in humanitarian crises?
 - What are the potential barriers and enablers to market support interventions (contextual and institutional ones)?
 - What effects of market support interventions are measured?
 - What is the influence of interventions supporting traders on household food security in humanitarian crises?
 - What is the influence of interventions supporting market services and infrastructures on household food security in humanitarian crises?
 - Who are the main actors targeted for market support activities? Are there any specific exclusion factors?
 - What are the gaps in research evidence on market support approaches?

As part of the process, the research team first developed a **theory of change** for how market support interventions may lead to improved household food security (Figure 0.1).

Figure 0.1: Theory of change: The influence of market support interventions on food security. Source: The research team

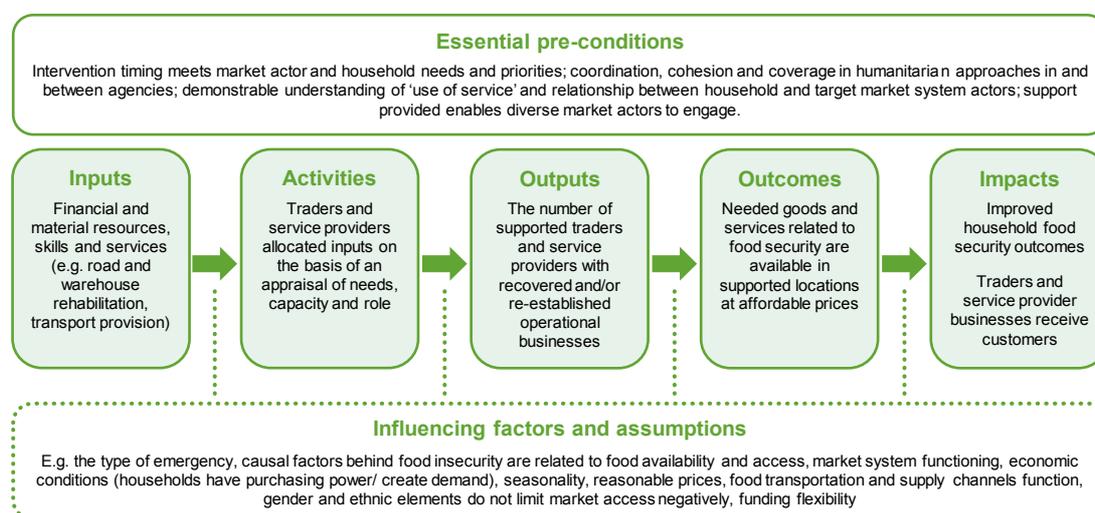


Figure 0.1 illustrates how providing a range of **inputs** (financial, material, technical and services) and **activities** to market actors, services and infrastructure providers contributes to improving **outputs** for the markets crisis-affected populations rely on (by recovering, expanding or building market capacity in some way). This contributes to **outcomes and impacts at the household and market actor level**: it ensures that the goods and services crisis-affected people need are available, at affordable prices, while providing markets and service providers with customers and restoring or improving the affected population's pre-crisis situation. For the scope of this evidence synthesis, the relevant household-level improvement is reduced household food insecurity or reduced use of negative coping mechanisms (e.g. selling productive assets).

What evidence was eligible for synthesis?

In total, 6,216 records were obtained through keyword searches from 25 online sources, and 65 from key informants.³ 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 studies⁴ was then screened. As highlighted, only seven records were eligible for inclusion in the full analysis and synthesis of evidence as per the quality criteria agreed in the protocol.

³ The database, website and academic journals searches took place between June and August 2016.

⁴ Taking into account that some records were duplications and the full text for five records could not be obtained.

Of the seven eligible studies:

- all are published in English
- all were published since 2008 (and 5/7 since 2014), even though the search extended back to 1990
- six employ qualitative research methods and one uses mixed (quantitative and qualitative) methods
- one is a peer-reviewed journal article. It is also noted that one is a rapid review; one is a working paper; two are international non-governmental organizations (INGO) case study briefings; and two are evaluations.

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.

What is the influence of market support interventions on household food security in humanitarian crises?

While individual studies suggest that market support interventions have a positive influence on household food security and also trader income, the evidence is very limited in analytical rigor and in the diversity of examples, contexts or scale of intervention. The research team used proxy indicators (such as increased income, use of funds and beneficiary opinion) to measure intervention effect in the instances where evidence was lacking. Of 148 documents that were screened in detail, only 7 met the protocol's criteria for inclusion.

Indeed, a major finding of this evidence synthesis is the lack of evidence, both in quantity and quality. Given the lack of diversity in evidence, the team was not able to conduct a meta-analysis but instead reports on each individual study in a narrative format. The team also encountered circular referencing repeatedly in the included studies, which further brings into question both the rigour and assurance over the level of primary data collected.

The findings are summarized in Figure 0.2. Given the limited quantity and quality of suitable evidence, these findings should be viewed as exploratory only and in need of verifying through further research, as recommended in the report's conclusions.

Figure 0.2: 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

With reference to the research question and despite the limited available evidence in this field, the research indicates the following findings.

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

Five of the seven interventions included in this report 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 comparison with the situation before the crisis. In the remaining examples, proxy indicators illustrating household outcomes on food security were required.

For such outcomes to be realized, **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 highlight the various efforts, with differing success, that were made by the programmes to gain sufficient coverage of market actors.

Market support interventions improve the income of targeted market actors

Evidence from all seven interventions included in this report illustrate that the supported market actors increased their income and by proxy (it is assumed in some studies), their own food security. Studies, however, do not provide details on how the market actors have 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 this evidence synthesis have been 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 crises: 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.

What's the state of the evidence?

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 for the following reasons.

- 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).

Among the seven included studies:

- Only one is identified as mixed methods (of triangulation design); the remaining six are qualitative studies.
- None are purely quantitative. One of the qualitative studies applies sampling methods for identifying households to include in participatory appraisal methods.⁵
- One paper is peer reviewed.
- Five look at the interventions of one single agency, with little regard or reflection of the interventions and activities of other agencies, and the broader sector in the crisis.
- Only two have clearly been authored by people external to and independent from the implementing agency in question.
- There is a significant lack of contextual breadth of evidence. Just seven actual intervention examples are included; these are from four countries (Pakistan, Haiti, Philippines and Ethiopia) and cover three disaster types (typhoon, earthquake and drought).
- There is a lack of household-outcome measurements in many, and a lack of data for measuring trader outcomes.
- Only one clearly states coverage of the programme (in this particular case, 5,405 households).
- Intervention costs are not clearly recorded in programme data of any study.
- Timing of the interventions is unclear.

Conclusions

Questions on the impact of market support interventions have dogged the humanitarian community since market analysis tools were first developed. Despite concerning limitations of available evidence, including its quantity, consistency of rigour and diversity, the evidence that has been included indicates that market support interventions have had a positive influence on the food security of targeted traders and households.

Noting the lack of robust evidence in this sector in relation to the primary research question, the authors highlight that the following factors could be contributing to a lack of market-based programming and evidence in this area.

Related to the lack of evidence:

⁵ Participatory appraisals provide a way of learning from, and alongside, community members in order to investigate, analyse and evaluate constraints and opportunities – and to make informed and timely decisions (Theis and Grady, 1991).

- the inadequacy and inconsistency of market support intervention programme evaluations, including, but not limited to: documentation practices, data collection, use of baselines and monitoring systems, importance of primary data, lack of independent and/or peer reviews, methodology appropriateness, and overall evidence rigour and subsequent analysis credibility.
- humanitarian agency scope of evidence gathering tends to focus on affected households and not consider market actors sufficiently, despite the crucial role that market actors may play in achieving programme objectives
- the inclusion of evidence in humanitarian programme response decision-making is not a consistent requirement, even less so when it comes to market-related evidence. As such, the same situation analysis can lead to multiple response designs; there is little accountability regarding coherence of responses by multiple agencies in the same location (Juillard, 2017)
- evidence gathering requires pre-programme planning to ensure the required systems and processes are included within the programme implementation plan and budget.

Related to the lack of interventions:

- 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.

As a result of this evidence synthesis and its findings, the authors have identified the following research and evidence gaps.

- 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 do we determine which market actors to work with in a market support intervention to achieve maximum impact on outcomes for affected populations, both in the immediate and medium term?
- Do conditionality and engagement conditions negatively impact smaller-scale traders and subsequent household food security outcomes?
- 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?

The findings of this synthesis report have been, understandably, limited by the availability and quality of evidence into market support interventions' influence on household food security in humanitarian crises. Yet, the current absence of this evidence is, in and of itself, a critical finding of this research. The evidence base needs to grow both in size (number of studies) and more importantly in quality to enable a more rigorous evidence synthesis and subsequent learning. The gaps identified, and recommendations for further research will, it is hoped, contribute to the continued evolution of thinking in this area of humanitarian practice. Indeed, the sector cannot afford to accept such an absence of evidence rigour on market support interventions if it is to meet continued and ever-increasing humanitarian needs.

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