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Contingency planning for food crises

A puzzle of existing approaches

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Abstract

In late August 2012, a G20 conference call was organised to assess the current food price developments and the possibility of another subsequent food crisis in East Africa. This event signalled increased awareness of the risk of food insecurity in the face of accelerating food prices. Despite sufficiently early alerts in past crises, the international community has repeatedly failed to trigger fast response.

This is exactly where contingency planning comes into play as a management tool aiming to ameliorate disaster management by improving preparedness. Pivotal elements are the identification of potential threats, the development of crisis scenarios and finally the implementation of concrete measures.

This paper aims at presenting the general model of contingency planning and of giving a comprehensive overview on different existing approaches already implemented. These approaches may differ according to their complexity: they either serve as complete comprehensive planning or focus only on some elements like information and early warning. Selected cases will be those used by the EU and the US as major actors for food security.

This overview contributes to the recently initiated strategy at international level to improve the coordination of different systems informing on market developments and on food security: the G20 just started such an idea at the FAO level to get more insights in existing systems.

1. Introduction

The world's food situation is facing some general changes leading to both increased and more volatile price, especially in terms of sudden price peaks:

The past century was characterised by excess supply caused by high rates of technological progress resulting in reduced prices. But since the Millennium's start the price pattern has changed: at demand's side growing population and economic development have increased the food consumption especially of dairy and beef which raises the demand of grain as feeding stuff. At the same time, supply has declined not only as a consequence of diminishing productivity rates, but also due to increasing energy costs. The latter have increased additionally the demand for agricultural commodities as an energy source (agrofuels).

For these reasons, at present demand has exceeded supply in international food markets. As a consequence, not only have prices overly risen but there is and will be a tendency for higher volatility especially in terms of peaks. These appear more frequently in times of decreasing stocks when an anyhow inelastic agricultural market cannot be relaxed by additional supply. The resulting price peaks make especially poor households vulnerable to the risk of food insecurity.

This phenomenon of food insecurity is addressed and defined by relevant international Organisations like the World Health Organization (WHO) by using its counterpart, namely food security: Food security exists "when all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life".[1] This definition points to the three pillars of food security: food availability, food access and food use, thus covering physical and economic access (defined by food prices and income) as well as the overall quality aspect of nutritional and health care requirements (food needs are more complex if the disease status is critical).

The described increasing risk of food price peaks refers to the economic dimension of food access: high foods prices similar to income losses render it impossible for poor households and poor countries to meet their nutritional needs.

This type of food risks especially needs systems to be prepared for responses as price peaks may appear very sudden within only some days as having taken place in the latest

[1] World Health Organization, *Food Security*, <http://www.who.int/trade/glossary/story028/en/#>, (re-

past.

The recent era of more frequent food crises

In the past 5 years several phases of famines appeared named as food or food price crises:[2]

- In the *2008 food crisis* prices rose up to 100 percent within few weeks. It has been estimated that this peak led to additional 110 million people living in poverty and further 44 million people in hunger, summing up to one billion hungry people.[3] In the aftermath of this crisis the global food aid architecture has been revitalised and donors and UN agencies increased their funding and operations. However, all the newly delivered amounts sum up to much less than the FAO has calculated to be relevant for solving hunger sustainably, i.e. 83 billion $ per year.[4]
- The *price explosion in the beginning of 2011* led to the historically highest level ever of the FAO price index since its monitoring.[5] This critical situation attracted even more political attention than the crisis before as it played a role in the beginning of the Arab Spring via public demonstrations against high food prices ("food riots"). Since then, the discourse on food crises was no longer limited to agricultural experts but became an issue of international security. However, the later famine in East Africa in summer 2012 could not have been prevented.
- *In 2012*, severe droughts in the United States of America (USA) as well as poor harvests from the Black Sea breadbasket have again caused a worrying rise of global food prices. US maize harvest has failed badly, losing more than twice as much as expected. Maize and wheat prices went up alarmingly high and since maize stocks were nearly emptied, any additional cut in supply by harvest failures or political export restrictions could have prompted further dramatic price increases - what finally did not happen.[6]

trieved on 12 August 2012).

[2] United Nations News Centre, »When a Food Security Crisis Becomes a Famine«, 21 July 2011, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=39113#> (retrieved on 12 August 2012).

[3] UNEP, *The environmental food crisis – The environment's role in averting future food crises. A UNEP Rapid Response Assessment*, United Nations Environment Programme, 2009, p. 13, <http://www.unep.org/pdf/foodcrisis_lores.pdf>.

[4] FAO, »How to Feed the World in 2050, High-level Expert forum«, <http://www.fao.org/wsfs/forum2050/wsfs-forum/en/>.

[5] This index compromises indices for single product groups like for cereals, meat, dairy, oil and fat and sugar. FAO Food Price Index October 2012, <http://www.fao.org/worldfoodsituation/wfs-home/foodpricesindex/en/> (retrieved on 5 November 2012).

[6] Steve Wiggins/Sharada Keats, *Food Price Update*: June - August 13, 2012, ODI, 13 August 2012, <http://www.odi.org.uk/resources/docs/7778.pdf> (retrieved on 2 September 2012).

Need for better contingency planning: Permanent failing in being prepared

Several warning and alert mechanisms were in place in the latest crises, however warning as such is not sufficient: In the example of the famine in East Africa in 2011 five regional early warning systems[7] have been operating in the region, but hardly alerted the international community in a timely and precise manner.[8] A positive example was the US system that communicated its first alert as early as August 2010, followed by a second warning six months later, this time stating that "substantial assistance programs should be implemented to address current and expected food insecurity".[9]

However, no sufficient and fast help has started. Therefore the bottom line seems to be insufficient policy action in response to the alarm and not the warning system as such. Such an idea of improving the responses setting is at heart of contingency planning systems.

[7] *FEWS NET*: Famine Early Warning System of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID); *FSNWG*: The Food Security and Nutrition Working Group is an information sharing platform set up Save the Children, IFRC, OXFAM, World Vision, FEWSNET, OCHA, WFP and FAO; *IPC*: International Planning Committee for Food Security; *GIEWS*: Global Information and Early Warning System from the FAO; *HEWSweb*: Humanitarian Early Warning Service of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC).

[8] Mija-Tesse Ververs, »The East African Food Crisis: Did Regional Early Warning Systems Function?«, in: *The Journal of Nutrition*, 142 (November 2011) 1, p. 2 <http://www.disasterriskreduction.net/fileadmin/user_upload/drought/docs/The%20Journal%20of%20Nutrition_EAfrica%20food%20crisis%20 (Nov%202011).pdf> (retrieved on 11 August 2012).

[9] Ibid, p. 1.

2. Reducing food crises by contingency planning

2.1 Overall idea and guidelines

Contingency planning as explicitly developed tool has a long tradition in security and military contexts, e.g. during the Cold War. They are very often part of a Government's strategic and as well secret positioning as they not only signal a Nation's priorities but as well its vulnerability. The U.S. developed such a plan on bunkers under the Eisenhower administration which was refreshed after the terroristic attacks of 9/11. [10]

For food crises contingency planning has been so far applied for rather limited operational issues like delivering food aid. In the broader context of humanitarian assistance the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) serves as primary mechanism for inter-agency coordination of humanitarian assistance addresses key UN and non-UN humanitarian partners. It has developed an overall model for contingency planning for humanitarian purposes.

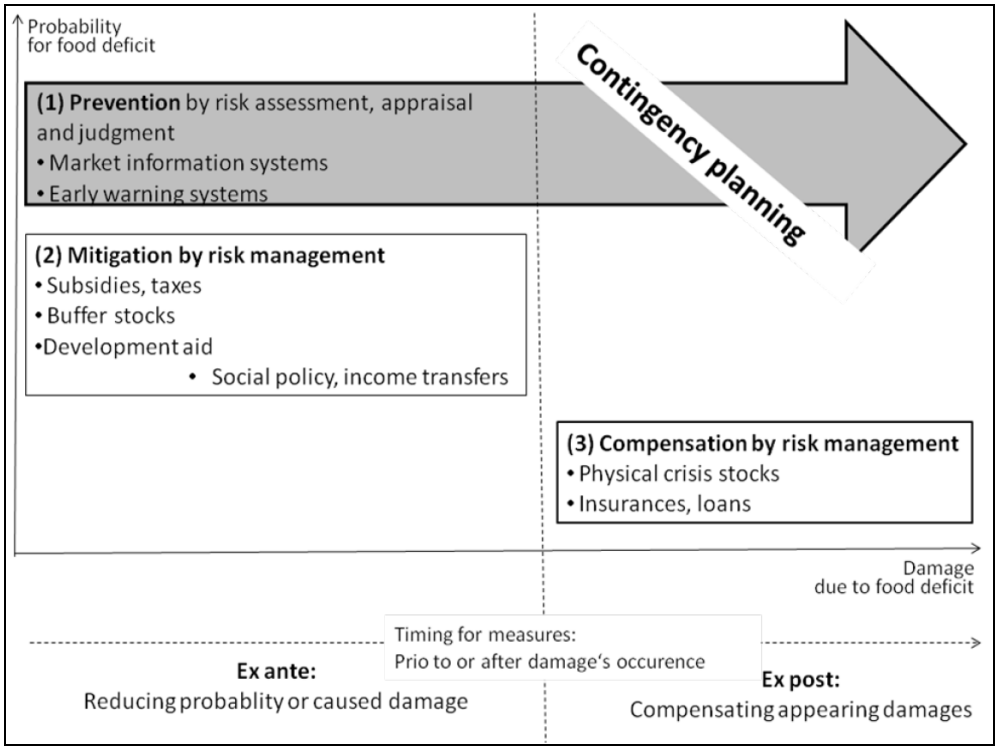
In times of expecting more frequent food risks by price peaks contingency planning may play a new and increasingly relevant role. It should not only be limited to operational aspects but can support an overall awareness, it integrates different steps in managing crisis, and it even may integrate different administrative levels.

In the frame of a food risk governance cycle contingency planning may combine typically isolated measures affecting different phases in the overall process of a crisis (Figure 1):

- *Ex-ante measures* affect food insecurity before it happens. They may be (1) prevention measures in order to reduce the probability of food risks: If alerts of early warning systems effectively trigger response, they can deal immediately with food shortages before they become a crisis. As well measures like subsidies or buffer stocks may limit the outbreak of a crisis. (2) Mitigation instruments are applied to reduce the damage that may result once a crisis has materialized. Examples are income transfers to households.
- *Ex-post instruments* are (3) compensating measures in place after a crisis has appeared. Popular measures are emergency reliefs or insurances addressing the

damages.

Figure 1: Contingency planning in the context of other approaches



Source: Own compilation

Contingency planning can be seen as tool that may address all the stages within the process of food crisis' development: Hereby it starts at the phase of risk assessment, appraisal and judgement using information systems on market development (e.g. harvests assessments) and early warning. The latter interpret the market information developments in terms of identifying food crisis' vulnerability in regions, countries or for households. Finally contingency planning ends with triggering risk management measures with different instruments like stocks.

Phases of contingency planning

Referring to food crises major actors for contingency plans are those involved in humanitarian and food aid and food crises such as WFP, FAO and the American Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET). They are involved in developing contingency planning standards. As early as 2002, WFP published its contingency planning guidelines compatible to the IASC guidelines that it helped to develop.[11]

[10] »A nation challenged: The contingency plan; Bunker System of Cold War Is Back in Use After Sept. 11«, *New York Times*, 2 March 2002.
[11] Everett M. Ressler et al., *Strategic Evaluation of WFP's Contingency Planning 2002-2008. Final Report.* Commissioned by the Office of Evaluation of the World Food Programme, 2009, p. 9-10.

Although the two models have developed different terminologies for the different steps, their approaches are nonetheless very similar (figure 2). However, the WFP does not address explicitly the phase of preparation.

(1) Preparation

The principal value of contingency planning is to resolve potential problems ahead of time by developing crucial working relationships, coordination mechanisms and by setting common standards.[12] Within the preparation period the humanitarian agencies and organisations are coordinated and the Resident/Humanitarian Coordinators ensure commitment of their respective organisations to the planning exercise. A steering group of senior decision makers, responsible for the overall strategy, as well as a contingency planning working group on a technical level shall be established.[13] After having taken stock of previous emergency responses and existing management and response systems, the process moves on to the analysis phase.[14]

(2) Analysis

To prepare food responses it is relevant to understand all influencing factors and threats to food security. Therefore a broad analysis of all hazards potentially affecting the country or region should be carried out.[15] Those hazards can then be prioritised by means of a two-dimensional risk analysis, which considers both the probability of a hazard occurring and the potential impact or damage expected from the respective hazards.[16] Developing scenarios can also help to analyse the impacts of identified hazards as well as different ways they might unfold.[17] Scenarios outline possible humanitarian consequences of a crisis. They specify for example the possible number of people affected the time span and location. It is then for planners to determine what kind and what quantity of assistance would be needed in each scenario, permitting thus to prepare for potential contingencies.[18] The most common approach for building scenarios in this area is described by Brown as "best, most likely and worst case scenario approach". In the case of

[12] IASC, *Inter-Agency Contingency Planning Guidelines for Humanitarian Assistance*, Geneva: IASC, 2007, p. 23 <http://www.who.int/hac/network/interagency/ia_guidelines_dec2007.pdf> (retrieved on 5 November 2012).
[13] Ibid, pp. 12-13.
[14] Ibid., p. 14.
[15] Ibid., p. 15
[16] Ibid, p. 14.
[17] Ibid, p. 15.
[18] Molly E. Brown, *Famine Early Warning Systems and Remote Sensing Data*, Berlin: Springer, 2008, p. 222.

drought these were “no drought”, “moderate drought affecting one part of the country” and “severe drought affecting large areas of the country”.[19]

At this stage it is important to define common planning assumptions, which are the context in which organisations are likely to operate in case of emergency, for example regarding government capacities and characteristics of the population.[20] Returning to the role of early warning, triggers for emergencies must be identified and monitored to determine the moment at which response systems shall be activated.[21]

(3) Response planning

In the third phase objectives of the humanitarian response as well as the strategies for their attainment are determined. Furthermore, certain guiding principles, such as humanity, neutrality, accountability and participation of affected communities, shall be agreed upon.[22] Clear mechanisms for accountability and coordination must be put in place, setting out which sector/cluster groups are needed and who will be leading and participating in them.[23] Among others, it is also paramount to agree on arrangements for a coordinated mobilisation of resources.[24]

(4) Implementing preparedness

In the implementation phase, preparedness actions identified throughout the planning process should be subject to review. As well prioritisation and responsibilities should be assigned.[25] In this context it also appears useful to develop standards how key actions are to be carried out by each agency or organisation in the case of emergency.[26] Also, the output of the process, the final contingency plan, should be regularly updated, reviewed and modified according to information obtained from early warning system as well as following institutional changes.[27]

Despite of the effect of being better prepared the overall process leads to the positive side effect of building consensus between various stakeholders, such as governments, donors or NGOs by deliberating on an appropriate emergency response well ahead of

[19] Ibid., p. 223.
[20] IASC, *Inter-Agency Contingency Planning Guidelines for Humanitarian Assistance*, Geneva: IASC, 2007, p. 16 <http://www.who.int/hac/network/interagency/ia_guidelines_dec2007.pdf> (retrieved on 5 November 2012).
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid, p. 17.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid, p. 18.
[25] Ibid, p. 20.
[26] Ibid, p. 21.
[27] Ibid.

the actual occurrence of a crisis. Thereby a common understanding of each team member's problems, capabilities and objectives can be developed, allowing speeding up resource allocation and eventually emergency response.[28] Therefore, the process of contingency planning might be even more important than the plan itself.

Figure 2: Contingency planning phases in the humanitarian and food context

Humanitarian assistance (IASC)	**(1) Preparation**	**(2) Analysis**			**(3) Response Planning**	**(4) Implementing Preparedness**
Food assistance (WFP)	***Not explicitly covered***	**Hazard/ Risk Analysis**	**Contingency Prioritisation**	**Scenario-building**	**Preparation of Contingency Plan**	**Preparedness action and plan updating**
Example	Stock-taking of previous emergency responses, existing management and response systems	Natural phenomenon	Drought	Worst case: 10 million affected	Massive intervention required	Drought conditions improving, less widespread famine expected

Source: Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), *Inter-Agency Contingency Planning Guidelines for Humanitarian Assistance*, Geneva: IASC, 2007, p. 12 and WFP, *Contingency Planning Guidelines*, 2002, p. 10.

2.2 Existing implemented approaches

For an effective response, coordinated action across different planning types and various stakeholders is needed. In its guidelines, the WFP therefore argues that governments, local authorities, United Nations (UN) agencies, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and the communities themselves should be involved in the contingency planning process.[29] Whereas coordination, cooperation and division of labour are paramount, it is unavoidable different agencies elaborate separate contingency plans for the very same contingencies in the same regions.

[28] Molly E. Brown, *Famine Early Warning Systems and Remote Sensing Data*, Berlin: Springer, 2008, p. 222.
[29] WFP, *Contingency Planning Guidelines*, 2002, p. 4, <http://www.fews.net/docs/special/1000284.pdf>.

An overview on existing types supports to identify major differences and by that contributes to the idea of G20 to support first crisis' information systems as such, secondly, to improve their coordination and finally to react by cooperative responses.[30]

In general the major differences refer to the planning's completeness (Annex): Existing approaches are divided into a first- best case, which comprises a comprehensive contingency plan and a second-best option encompassing single sub-elements like monitoring and early warning without offering a complete system. Already for this level several systems exists by different actors addressing different spatial dimensions (world, region, country, households) and products (Annex). An improved early warning could be a basis for contingency plans as it is a platform to improve data reliability, timeliness and frequency.

2.2.1 Implementation at international level

At international level the 2008 crisis started several initiatives contributing to contingency planning:

- *WFP* pushed for further development and mainstreaming of contingency planning. With significant donor support, especially from the British Department for International Development (DfID)[31] this led to the above-mentioned contingency planning guidelines.[32] WFP prepared more than 125 contingency plans between 2002 and 2008 and participated in over 84 inter-agency contingency planning exercises. WFP's spending on contingency planning-related activities is roughly estimated to be no more than $5 million, which represents less than 0.1 percent of its annual budget.[33]
- The *G20* launched its action plan on food price volatility and agriculture, resulting in a global Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS). In addition to a joint secretariat responsible for the global market outlook, a "Global Food Market Information Group" is set up to collect and analyse food market information. Adequate policy responses shall be discussed in a Rapid Response Forum (RRF) composed of senior officials from the respective ministries.[34] This RRF can be interpreted as a

[30] G20, Ministerial Declaration, *Action Plan on food price Volatility*, Meeting of G20 Agricultural Ministers June 2011, p. 7ff.
[31] Everett M. Ressler et al., *Strategic Evaluation of WFP's Contingency Planning 2002-2008. Final Report*, Commissioned by the Office of Evaluation of the World Food Programme, 2009, p. 9.
[32] Ibid, p. 10.
[33] Ibid, pp. 34-35.
[34] Committee on World Food Security, *Description of the Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS)*, 37th Session, September 2011, <http://www.fao.org/docrep/meeting/023/mc144e.pdf> (re-

type of contingency planning body as its major idea is to coordinate political reactions in order to avoid counter-effects. In this context, France, the United States and Mexico initiated a G20 conference call at the end of August 2012 in order to assess the need of an international emergency meeting in response to the developments in summer 2012.[35] Such an emergency meeting is scheduled for deciding on coordinated responses. The group described the current situation of spiralling corn and soya bean markets and rising wheat prices as worrying, yet postponed the decision to call an emergency meeting.[36] Thus, still a first emergency meeting is missing.

- Although not directly referring to contingency planning the establishment of a jointly led new *Global Food Security Cluster* in 2010 should briefly be mentioned as its' objective is the development of guidance and support capacities as well as rapid response mechanisms. Introduced in 2005 in the course of the UN-led humanitarian reform, clusters should also strengthen coordination and enhance predictability and accountability. Through the recent integration of the former FAO-led Agriculture Cluster into this new Global Food Security Cluster, the FAO and WFP have expanded this approach. Ideally, this new food security cluster fosters the development of food assistance standards and guidelines and better integrates emergency responses with longer-term rehabilitation and development efforts.[37]
- The FAO also supports the development of *High Food Price Contingency Plans (HFPCPs)* in order to reduce price-induced food insecurity. This approach recommends a combination of increasing agricultural production and supporting households.[38] In country level contingency plans so-called productive safety nets are proposed to scale up food production and preserve the asset base, such as livestock, whilst also increasing sales and thereby income. If productive inputs such as seeds and fertilisers are distributed at the beginning of the cropping season, a positive impact can be observed – obviously contingent on favourable external conditions –

trieved on 13 August 2012).

[35] »World powers eye emergency food meeting; action doubted«, *Reuters*, 13 August 2012 <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/08/13/us-food-g20-call-idUSBRE87C0EI20120813> (retrieved on 21 August 2012).

[36] Javier Blas, »G20 points to 'worrying' food prices «, in: *Financial Times*, 18 August 2012 <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/3912f1e8-f12d-11e1-a553-00144feabdc0.html#axzz26HsDdiOP> (retrieved on 2 September 2012).

[37] Christopher B. Barrett et al., *Uniting on Food Assistance: The Case for Transatlantic Cooperation*, Sheffield: Routledge, December 2012, pp. 21-22.

[38] FAO, *High and Volatile Food Prices. FAO Support to Country Level Contingency Planning*, 2012, p. 5 <http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ISFP/HVFP_Publi.pdf> (retrieved on 5 November 2012).

from three to four months onwards.[39] Such measures are complemented by social safety nets, such as direct food distributions, to meet the most urgent needs of food insecure people.

2.2.2 Implementation at EU's and US' level

The EU and the US are of major relevance for contingency planning: both are relevant actors on the agricultural markets. By that they contribute to prices' developments like price peaks. Together, the two players accounted for 20 percent of the world's total food exports and for 15 percent of imports in 2011 making them to the largest trade block.[40] Additionally, they hold 20 percent of global wheat stock as most relevant parameter for price peaks' risk.[41] As well they are the major global food aid donors: The EU and its member states and the US make up for more than 60 percent of the overseas assistance to food producing sectors as well as to food aid.[42] They are therefore paramount both for the current state of food assistance and for the future development and implementation of new initiatives. Additionally, contingency planning may support their own planning on aid deliveries and budgetary activities. And finally due to their strong trade and market position they are relevant actors in international fora at WTO-level or in the G20 group which as well dominantly focus on agricultural issues.

Despite of this obvious relevant joint power the contingency approaches of the EU and the US differ – calling for improved coordination.

(1) Comprehensive contingency plans: the US ahead

At *EU-level* contingency planning is not featured prominently as far as explicit approaches concern (Annex), but its long-term budgeting requirements underline the necessity to clearly define triggers for specific expenditure. Indeed, there are several planning instruments destined for better distribution of EU funds, which, depend on a preceding needs analysis. One example is the budgetary planning of humanitarian assistance e.g. by the Global Needs Assessment. Hereby the most demanding countries are identified.[43] In principle, the EU addresses all stages of contingency planning, yet, these are covered by different systems. For example, DG Development and Cooperation's

[39] Ibid, p. 8.
[40] WTO database <http://stat.wto.org/StatisticalProgram/WSDBViewData.aspx?Language=E> (retrieved on 1 September 2012).
[41] UNComtrade Database on stocks.
[42] In 2010, OECD/ QWIDS Data.
[43] DG ECHO, *Global needs assessment*, <http://ec.europa.eu/echo/policies/needs_en.htm> (retrieved 27 October 2012).

(DG DEVCO) food facility does not cover a comprehensive approach. It only supports its development at international level, namely the FAO. Recently the EU stresses to improve and speed up responses on disasters by better needs analysis.[44] This may be part of an improved contingency planning.

At US-level the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) has a comprehensive role in the contingency planning process and is seen as a leading example. It's monitoring and early warning systems provide both an impetus for planning as well as a trigger for activating contingency plans. The FEWS NET is in line with the IASC contingency planning model (see figure 2).

(2) Information and early warning systems: long tradition in both EU and US

The EU is not only involved in developing monitoring systems via its cooperation with the FAO, but also uses and develops extensively own monitoring systems (Annex). For example, in 2011, E-AGRI, an advanced European E-agriculture service for crop monitoring was launched for Morocco and China.[45] Less prominent than FEWS NET, the EU runs a Monitoring Agricultural Resources Unit Mission (MARS) which focuses on crop production, agricultural activities and rural development and provides forecasts, early harvest's assessments and the scientific underpinning for monitoring and control systems. MARS regularly publishes a bulletin on food security in the Horn of Africa, including rainfall and vegetation analyses as well as information on terms of trade.[46] The EU moreover runs several web-based systems to facilitate response to natural catastrophes. For example, the EU's Global Disaster Alert and Coordination System (GDACS) is a cooperation framework under the UN's umbrella. It includes disaster information systems worldwide and aims at filling the information and coordination gap in the first phase after major disasters. It is thus a "system of systems" of existing disaster information management applications and produces alerts and impact estimations for disasters that possibly cause significant humanitarian impact and might therefore require international assistance.[47] The tool currently has about 14,000 subscribers from

[44] EU Commission, *Trade, growth and development, Tailoring trade and investment policies for those countries most in need*, Com(2012) 22 final.
[45] EC Joint Research Centre, *MARS E-Agri website*, <http://mars.jrc.ec.europa.eu/mars/Projects/E-AGRI> (retrieved on 27 October 2012).
[46] EC Joint Research Centre, *MARS website*, <http://mars.jrc.ec.europa.eu/mars> (retrieved on 27 October 2012).
[47] EC Joint Research Centre, *Global Disaster Alert and Coordination System (GDACS): Timely information for the emergency response and humanitarian communities*, 2012 <http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/jrc/downloads/jrc_rio20_global_disaster_alert_and_coordination_system_en.pdf> (retrieved on 2 October 2012).

governmental and non-governmental organisations worldwide.[48] Since the system focuses on natural hazards such as earthquakes, tsunamis, cyclones, floods and volcanoes, it does not specifically refer to food crises. However, such disasters of course can cause food crises.

The *US'* FEWS NET is the main early warning tool for food crises. In cooperation with the scientific agency of the US government (USGS - United States Geological Survey), the FEWS NET data portal provides access to geo-spatial data throughout the world. It does not only incorporate an interactive web-based mapping tool that allows users to visualise continental-scale climate data such as rainfall estimates, surface temperature and perceptible water data but also provides detailed assessment of climate trend for individual countries.

Both, EU's and US' monitoring and information systems tackle uncertainties by increasing the overall knowledge of arising determinants of crises. They thus aim at shifting possible events from the set of the so-called 'unknown unknowns' to the sphere of 'known unknowns'.[49] At the same time, when part of early warning schemes, information systems contribute to risk reduction by pointing at warning signs before crises unfold, potentially decreasing the probability of severe crises gaining full momentum as well as providing information for preparedness measures.

[48] GDAC website, <http://portal.gdacs.org/about/AboutGDACS/tabid/137/Default.aspx> (retrieved on 5 September 2012).

[49] As specific concepts of risk theories discussed in Marianne Beisheim/Bettina Rudloff/Kathrin Ulmer, *Risikogovernance: Umgang mit globalen und vernetzen Risiken*. Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, 2012 (Arbeitspapiere FG 8, 2012/Nr. 01).

3. Conclusion

Famines are as old as mankind and they continue to plague certain regions of the modern world. Analysing the tragic food price crises of the past decade, which mainly occurred in the Horn of Africa, one finds that insufficient warning do not seem to be the major cause for the millions of victims. Instead, an inability to quickly respond with appropriate measures to prevent or minimize the crisis from unfolding their full potential was identified as the major weakness of the international community and national authorities alike. Therefore, improving the whole process of preparing for crises, alerting alarm and triggering timely response appears to be crucial to protect vulnerable groups from the risk of food insecurity.

In this context, the EU and the US play a dominant role: they contribute to food market developments as major food producers – and by that influence food security. Moreover, both actors together account for almost two thirds of total food aid and have a strong voice in international agencies. Regarding contingency planning they follow different approaches and therefore a transatlantic cooperation may refer

- to better coordinate information and to increase accountability assignment and cooperation of their responsible organisations and
- to support concrete preparedness options like stocking-up on reserves which may be used in case of sudden price peals. For example, there is a G20 initiative called PREPARE which seeks to connect different food-related programmes (stocks, food aid measures) in a region vulnerable for food crises. This should be further supported by the large actors EU and US.

Contingency plans should not only be improved themselves but seen as part of an overall food security alliance bearing in mind as well the long-term perspectives instead of only reactive short-term options in face of food crises: Such an approach is addressed by the concept of “Linking relief, recovery and development” (LRRD). It started off as an UN initiative in the 1980s in the wake of increasing cases of natural disasters and violent conflicts. Recognising that systemic factors, poverty and political instability constitute and increase vulnerability of people towards natural disasters as well as in protracted crisis situations, the basic idea of the LRRD approach is to link short-term live-saving measures with long-term development efforts.

With specific respect to food security, the UN High Level Task Force on Global Food Security (HLTF) has developed a similar idea by proposing the parallel existence of short-term options and longer-term approaches ("Twin-track approach").[50]

As relevant donor countries, as relevant agricultural actors and relevant in international fora the EU and the US should support these ideas.

[50] UN High Level Task Force on Global Food Security, *Food and nutrition security: comprehensive framework for action – summary of the updated comprehensive framework for action*, August 2011, <http://un-foodsecurity.org/sites/default/files/OUTLINE_Summary%20UCFA_EN.pdf> (retrieved on 20 October 2012).

Appendix: Synopsis on existing information, early warning and contingency planning systems

Actor	Systems/ Products	Activities	Addressed elements of contingency planning	(Geographical) Coverage
Multilateral- international				
		Information and Early Warning		
FAO	Global Information Early Warning System (GIEWS), Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), Food and Agriculture Policy Decision Analysis (FAPDA)	Review world food supply and demand, provide early warnings of food crises in individual countries, assess world food situation, classification of food security in countries, information for and exchange of national policies	Analysis	Varying: global, regional, national and sub-national level
FAO/WFP	Crop and Food Security Assessment Missions (CFSAM)	Country level macro and micro level food security analyses to estimate future import/ assistance requirements	Analysis	Global
WFP	Vulnerability Analysis & Mapping (VAM), Food Security Monitoring System (FSMS), Emergency Food Security Assessment (EFSA), Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis (CFSVA), Economic Shock and Hunger Index (ESHI)	Assess vulnerability, care and supply situation, adaptation strategies, post-crisis assessment, impact of financial crises on vulnerability	Analysis	Many countries in risk of food insecurity

UNHCR/ WFP	Joint Assessment Missions (JAM)	Assess influx of refugees, food security of long-term refugees, lay groundwork for repatriation	Analysis	Developing countries hosting refugees
UNISDR	Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA)	Identification and assessment of disaster risks, promotion of early warning, evaluate national disaster risk plans	Analysis	Global
IFPRI	Excessive Food Price Variability Early Warning System	Early warning for global price spikes	Analysis	Global
Comprehensive Contingency Planning				
Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)	Inter-Agency Contingency Planning Guidelines For Humanitarian Assistance, Food Security Cluster	Guidance and forum for humanitarian inter-agency contingency planning, coordination of food and agricultural assistance under lead of FAO and WFP	Full process	Global
WFP	Internal Contingency Planning Guidelines	Development of WFP contingency plans on several levels, implementation of assistance (see also IASC)	Full process	Many countries in risk of food insecurity
FAO	Support to country-level contingency planning (HFPCPs)	Direct support to country-level contingency planning (see also IASC)	Full process	
G20-initiative/ Agricultural Mar-	Rapid Response Forum (RRF)	Automatic exchange of group of policy experts from the major producing and import-	Preparation, analysis, re-	Global

ket Information System (AMIS)		ing countries, response to food crisis alerts, receive and assess information from AMIS, provide policy guidance and mobilise political support for policy response and actions	sponse planning	
EU				
Information and Early Warning				
DG ECHO and United Nations	Global Disaster Alert and Coordination System (GDACS)	Localisation and damage assessment of natural disasters	Analysis	Global
DG ECHO	Common Emergency Communication and Information System (CECIS), Global needs assessment (GNA), Forgotten Crises Assessment (FCA), Food Insecurity Needs Assessment Template (FINAT)	Facilitation of exchange of information between different authorities, identification of vulnerable countries and countries in humanitarian crisis, identification of crises without adequate international assistance, in-depth analysis of food insecurity to identify need for adjusting budget allocations	Preparation, analysis, response planning. implementing preparedness (covers full process, yet, different stages are exercised by different systems)	EU, developing countries
European Commission: Joint Research Centre	Food Sec - Food Security and Food Aid, Monitoring Agricultural ResourceS (MARS) Unit: Global Monitoring for Food Security (GMFS)	Vulnerability assessments, information on cultivation and yield, identification of supply gap	Analysis	Global, focus on developing countries

Comprehensive Contingency Planning				
DG DEVCO	Food Facility	Financial support to partners' programmes for food security and agricultural development, including FAO country level contingency plans	Full process (via financial support of its implementing partners)	Developing countries
US				
Information and Early Warning				
U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)	Food Security Assessments	Food security assessments	Analysis	Various developing countries
Comprehensive Contingency Planning				
USAID	Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET)	Briefings on contingency and response-planning	Full process	Varying: Global, focus on Sub-Saharan Africa

*Both the USA and the EU contribute significantly to the budgets of WFP, FAO and other multinational actors as well as NGOs. Separate initiatives of EU Member States are not considered here.

Source: Based on World Bank, *Food Price Watch*, November 2011; G 20 Ministerial Declaration, *Action Plan on Food Price Volatility and Agriculture*, Meeting of G20 Agriculture Ministers, June 2011; WFP, *Understanding Food Security Analysis*, Factsheet, 2010; Jim Greenfield, Abdolreza Abbassian, *Strengthening Global Food Market Monitoring*, in: Adam Prakash (ed.), *Safeguarding Food Security in Volatile Global Markets*, Rome: FAO, 2011, p. 441-479; Christopher B. Barrett et al.(eds.), *Uniting on Food Assistance – The Case for Transatlantic Cooperation*, Milton Park: Routledge, 2012, p. 130-131.

List of abbreviations

AMIS	Agricultural Market Information System
DfID	Department for International Development (UK)
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FEWS NET	Famine Early Warning Systems Network
GDACS	Global Disaster Alert and Coordination System
HFPCP	High Food Price Contingency Plans
HLTF	High Level Task Force on Global Food Security
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
LLRD	Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development
MARS	Monitoring Agricultural ResourceS
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
RRF	Rapid Response Forum
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USA	United States of America
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USGS	United States Geological Survey