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1 INTRODUCTION

Institutional constraints are frequently the rock on which the good intentions implicit in linking relief and development (LRD) founder. All too often, recommendations to improve such links implicitly presume institutional capacities in government, donor agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and local organizations which bear no relation to what is available or possible in the medium-term.

This article explores the constraints in public institutions at national level and in civil society institutions at local level, taking the specific example of famine induced by the shock of drought in sub-Saharan Africa. It is important to note that LRD may be an inappropriate institutional objective in some circumstances, such as when a disaster is exceptional. Nor is it always the desired institutional aim, given the bureaucratic structures and budgeting arrangements of many donor agencies which consciously seek to separate development from relief. But in the case of one particular aspect of LRD, famine mitigation, the case for improved institutional performance is strong.

At least three current debates in development have direct implications for institutional dimensions to famine mitigation: the promotion of good government; the pursuit of new forms of public administration; and subsidiarity as a means of bridging the divide between macro- and micro- level planning and implementation. Building especially on the principle of subsidiarity, the article concludes that the greatest opportunities for overcoming institutional constraints are at the intermediate, or meso stage where possibilities exist to merge the strengths of macro-level institutions with opportunities afforded by local level ones.

2 THE PLACE OF FAMINE MITIGATION IN LINKING RELIEF AND DEVELOPMENT

Both local and national institutions involved in famine mitigation can be analysed using a framework based on the actors involved and four stages of relief and development (see OFDA 1990). Indigenous

strategies and external interventions may be conflicting or complementary. The four stages are as follows:

- 1 **preparedness** (information and diagnosis, contingency planning and post-crisis evaluation);
- 2 **mitigation** (insurance strategies/interventions, accumulation and diversification undertaken before a shock);
- 3 **relief** (concurrent strategies/interventions undertaken whilst a crisis is underway, but if planned for in advance, these can be part of mitigation activities);
- 4 **rehabilitation** (rehabilitation or recovery strategies/interventions undertaken once conditions begin to return to normal, but again, planned for in advance).

Neither the relationship between these stages, nor progression through them, is linear. In situations where the threat of famine is endemic, the stages are best conceptualized as part of a continuous cycle in which shocks or vibrations are part of the 'normal' portfolio of types of change. The LRD cycle needs to be understood within the broader development continuum, implicit in which are overlapping time frames and the simultaneous pursuit of different activities of varying duration. Preparedness is taken as the starting point because it refers to those informational and diagnostic activities which of necessity underpin subsequent stages. However, relief may also run concurrently with mitigation and, to be effective, rehabilitation would link onto anterior mitigation activities and inform preparedness for subsequent episodes of famine. The objective of these four stages is not, therefore, to create artificial barriers around sets of activities which may be almost indistinguishable on the ground, but instead to indicate that the motivation for and timing and sequencing of interventions is of critical importance in forging links between relief and development.

Actors in this process operate at three levels: the micro-level (individuals/households in livelihood systems; community institutions and organizations); the meso-level (district or provincial government;

NGOs); and the macro-level (national government; international donors). Using these components, a matrix for analysing institutional, as well as other components of the relief/development cycle can be constructed, as shown in Table 1, which also gives illustrative examples of the kinds of local level

responses and national level policy instruments which might be located in the cells.

Policy instruments operate in different parts of the matrix. For example, community-based safety nets have only very localized effects, and when functioning

Table 1: Matrix for linking relief and development, with examples of local responses and policy instruments

STAGES	ACTORS					
	MICRO		MESO		MACRO	
	Individuals & Households	Communities	District or Provincial Government	NGOs	National Government	International Donors
PREPAREDNESS Information & diagnosis	Use indigenous knowledge e.g. weather forecasts	Exploit local information networks e.g. traders	Derive EWS indicators from local knowledge	Train local people in dissemination of information	Set up famine EWS & use information from local level	Support famine EWS & use information it provides
Contingency planning	Gauge & identify how to improve resilience of livelihoods to shocks	Pursue traditional NRM practices with in-built safety nets	Support active local contingency plan	Develop & resource off-the-shelf flexible response options	Manage national food security reserve	Provide food aid for national food security reserve
Post-crisis evaluation	Assess which coping strategies no longer work	Assess health of local moral economy	Assess effectiveness of contingency plan	Assess flexible response options	Assess impact of emergency measures	Assess donor response
MITIGATION Insurance strategies/ interventions	Diversify production & sources of income	Build up communal cereal stores & other savings	Invest in food marketing infrastructure & creation of off-farm employment	Support relevant local institutions & train staff	Invest in primary health care & clean water provision	Fund agricultural research into drought resistant crops
RELIEF Concurrent strategies/ community	Change migration routes, use food aid in risk management plan	Loan seed & food within community	Maintain livestock prices	Set up local supplementary feeding capacity	Activate national public works scheme	Provide timely additional food aid and cash for a variety of uses
REHABILITATION Recovery strategies/ interventions	Shift from cattle to goats	Loan animals for restocking within community	Subsidize loans or gifts to reconstitute assets	Support provision of new tools, seeds, herds	Implement temporary tax holiday	Support macro-economy to weather cost of crisis

properly, are largely independent of the wider policy environment. On the other hand, macroeconomic tools (e.g. market interventions to stabilize food prices), are concentrated in the hands of government. Effective famine prevention is likely to comprise a mixture of policies and interventions linking different parts of the matrix. Preparedness (planning ahead) is an essential prerequisite if the quite complex range of responses which this implies are to be successfully implemented.

There is great variation between countries in the relative capacity of different actors. Varying agro-ecological and politico-economic conditions require that efforts be concentrated in different parts of the matrix for particular countries. Where local response capacity is already highly evolved, it should be strengthened; elsewhere, reinforcing the role of the state may be more appropriate. Just as the capacity of actors varies, so too will the appropriateness of particular components in the matrix. Where drought and other shocks are frequent occurrences, emphasis on preparedness and mitigation is indicated. Where these occur say once every 50 years, relief measures may be more sensible, with much less comprehensive preparedness and mitigation, the premium for such insurance being too high. The framework is not, therefore, intended to be a hard and fast structure imposed across a range of widely differing situations, but as a tool for helping to identify those cells which should be accorded priority in a given context.

3 INSTITUTIONAL CONSTRAINTS TO FAMINE MITIGATION

There is a critical difference between the response of poor people to the risk of famine and that of macro-level public institutions. Whereas the latter tend to separate relief from development, and to regard relief as exceptional and plan for it in isolation from wider development concerns, vulnerable people continuously balance their own relief needs with longer-term development ones. As a result, poor people in marginal environments are consummate risk managers: they know what is happening and have highly developed portfolios of strategies to plan for and mitigate adverse consequences of shocks, to cope when crisis hits and to recover - in part at least - once conditions return to normal.

Civil society organizations and institutions (e.g. herders associations, traditional natural resource management arrangements, informal cooperatives), have

evolved to reflect and service the risk management of vulnerable people. Underpinned by a complex set of local institutional arrangements, the trade-off between relief and development works, up to a point, but the most vulnerable households and communities in sub-Saharan Africa may be reaching a threshold, beyond which their livelihoods cannot be secured. Activities pursued by local communities and institutions provide a starting point for identifying ways of reinforcing what people do already, but the obstacles to so doing should not be underestimated. Reciprocal ties within communities, for example, become more exploitative as times get harder; and institutional safety nets break down as recourse to outsiders, to the market and to inhabital sources of income intensifies (Davies 1993).

If interventions by public institutions are to succeed in meeting the needs of local people, they need to complement strategies pursued at household and community level which are both capable of and worth reinforcing, as indicated in Table 1. This necessitates a decentralized, incremental and participatory approach, yet there is little input by vulnerable people into decision-making and implementation about famine mitigation and relief. Building on civil society institutions also requires realism about the often unequal and highly stratified nature of such institutions.

Institutional attempts to manage risk at the macro level are characterized by a quite different set of concerns from those of vulnerable people. Response is reactive not proactive. If contingency plans exist, there is no guarantee that they will be used. When an emergency response is launched, food aid dominates and there are few examples of tried and tested flexible response options. Constraints in public institutions to famine mitigation via the route of reinforcing what people already do are manifold. They can be summarized under the following headings:

3.1 Institutional appropriateness and flexibility

No single institutional arrangement for more effective famine mitigation would be appropriate to all countries. Opinions are divided as to whether purpose-built units are best, or whether the emphasis should be on co-ordinating existing structures more effectively. Getting the right institutional arrangements cannot be divorced from the priorities set by contingency planning. Each part of the relief/development cycle requires different institutional

arrangements and types of resources. These are rarely available either in sufficient quantity, or of the required variety and flexibility, to fulfil the multiple tasks of a phased and appropriate set of institutional responses. Rigid institutional divisions between sectors further undermine the capacity of institutions involved to respond in the most appropriate manner. For example, inadequate primary health care and the inability to respond quickly to emergency health problems can cancel out the benefits of emergency food aid.

3.2 Resource availability and entitlement

Related to this is the competition for access to and uses for scarce resources. Resources for relief are easier to come by than those for development in the current climate of declining aid budgets, in which the proportion of relief expenditure is nevertheless rising. The diversion of resources from development to relief can have ripple effects throughout the policy agendas of both donors and governments, and people on the development side will seek to protect their shrinking access to resources through institutional channels. This can actively conspire against improved famine mitigation. Furthermore, there are severe domestic political conflicts of interest in redirecting scarce resources to highly vulnerable but marginal groups, often living in low potential areas, precisely those which would benefit most from improved preparedness and mitigation. Donors too are often reluctant to invest in such places.

3.3 Planning time frames

Famine mitigation necessitates that institutional capacities accommodate varying time horizons for planning and implementation of the different stages. Institutions can either consciously block this (as in the case of the need to allocate resources within financial years, irrespective of the seasonality of emergencies in the recipient country); or do so more indirectly, because they lack the flexibility to gear up certain parts of the institutional machinery and then to wind them down again on an as-needed basis. Institutions are rarely capable of responding to the concerns of vulnerable people to balance short-term consumption requirements against longer term livelihood protection. The overwhelming tendency for public relief institutions is to concentrate on the very short-term. Early warning systems (EWS) are a good case in point, which almost always emphasize the current agricultural year and are rarely capable of taking the longer term view

about the implications of successive dry years for the likelihood and severity of famine, and the difficulties in recovering from it.

3.4 Planning capacity

The often very ambitious goals of famine mitigation are rarely explicitly linked to existing weak planning capacities which characterize much of sub-Saharan Africa. The notion of competent national authorities is highly problematic, not least because of the ambiguity concerning who exercises power over, and who has responsibility for and legitimacy in, the different aspects of famine mitigation. Although donors will need to continue to support planning capacity in the medium-term, this should not be confused with responsibility, which must be firmly vested in national government hands, implying the abandonment of political and economic conditionality. Reinforcing indigenous capabilities is a tall order given that national planning capacities are often chronically weak and very difficult to build up in a hurry. The problems are made worse by institutional amnesia and failure to learn from past mistakes, including the costs of not being prepared. Relief operations are evaluated according to their own internal logic and need to be justified retrospectively, tending to obfuscate lessons that could be learned. Evaluations of the failure to respond early and effectively are rare; post-crisis evaluations of the impact on livelihoods even more so (Riely 1991).

3.5 Implementation capacity

Implementation capacity must be considerable if response is to be flexible and appropriate, but is invariably highly constrained both within the organizations of the different actors involved and between the actors themselves. On the relief side, there is a lack of synchronization between domestic and international relief systems. National institutional constraints are exacerbated by the tendency for donors and NGOs to set up parallel structures in order to deliver relief as fast as possible once a crisis is underway. Strengthening institutional capacity is not usually regarded as pressing a priority as meeting humanitarian goals. This approach can have deleterious consequences not only for the relief operation itself, but also for fragile local developmental institutions. Far from improving institutional capacity for the implementation of subsequent development activities, emergency operations frequently undermine it (Buchanan-Smith 1990).

3.6 Sustaining institutional activity

If institutional capacity and activity are to be strong and flexible enough to withstand the pressures of relief and to successfully link relief and development, they must be continually reinforced, in times of plenty as well as dearth. This implies training of personnel; field testing flexible responses in advance of emergencies and designing interventions that can be taken 'off-the-shelf' when needed; updating plans and evaluating activities; pre-positioning or advance allocation of resources that will enable timely response; and involving affected people. The roots of poor rehabilitation are grounded in unsuccessful relief and mitigation.

3.7 Consistency with other policies

If policies to mitigate famine, or to link relief and development in other ways, conflict with wider policy objectives, conscious or unconscious tactics within institutions will seek to undermine them. A clear example is the separation of relief and development budgets in donor agencies, which addresses the policy objective of regarding famines as distinct emergencies, not to be confused with normal development; but which also makes it almost impossible to pursue coherent policies over time in areas afflicted by recurrent emergencies. At national level, the burden of taxation and other forms of state extraction from the community can offset many of the benefits of safety nets and other state insurance mechanisms, especially if such demands are made when the value of assets which poor people have to sell plummets. Yet, few African governments can afford tax holidays, even if these often happen by default as famine prone people cannot pay. A further example comes from the division of labour between the public and private sectors. Although it may be a policy objective to reinforce the private sector, over-reliance on it can spell disaster. In food emergencies in sub-Saharan Africa, there is a general over-dependence on often newly liberalized and rather weak private cereal trading sectors in the face of substantial production failures which can undermine the efforts of public institutions.

3.8 Political factors disguised as institutional constraints

Domestic and external political factors are frequently confused with institutional constraints. Political conditionality imposed by donors on recipient governments often seeks to drive a wedge between relief and development, most obviously when a government is barred from receiving anything other

than humanitarian aid. Nationally, there are also major political issues within institutions. Corruption, for example, is often identified as being a key stumbling block within weak institutional structures in developing countries, attributed to the need to protect certain class interests. But in the case of civil servants trying to raise income to a minimum level to support dependants, for example, no amount of improved institutional capacity will do much to tackle 'corruption' unless living wages are paid on a regular basis or alternative forms of political control are exercised over this group. One of the most justified criticisms by governments of foreign NGOs is that they inflate salary expectations amongst local staff during emergencies and so drain the most competent people from the civil service and further fuel dissatisfaction amongst those remaining in public institutions.

3.9 Institutional constraints and conflict

All institutional weaknesses are exacerbated by ailing economies, political instability and/or war. The particular institutional constraints encountered in situations where famine and conflict combine need to be mentioned, although a thorough analysis of them is beyond the scope of this short article. They fall into two categories: those which exist anyway but which are grossly exaggerated by conflict (e.g. poor logistics); and those which are a direct outcome of the conflict (e.g. diversion of already scarce and fragile institutional resources towards the war effort). At the level of civil society institutions, conflict can have damaging consequences, not least when communities are fragmented and scattered or long-standing conflicts within them are fuelled by external forces. Rebuilding civil society after a period of conflict can be a long and uncertain task, but without it rehabilitation efforts are likely to founder.

4 INSTITUTIONAL REFORM IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

The institutional problems of famine mitigation are familiar in the wider debates in sub-Saharan Africa about good government, public administration and subsidiarity. Recent developments in these fields also suggest some ways forward for famine mitigation.

4.1 Good government

The good government agenda has sought to understand why it is that the economic doctrine of structural adjustment and liberalization has failed to

deliver what it promised in sub-Saharan Africa (see Moore 1993). It has three main components. First, it is concerned with institutional and civil service reform, particularly an emphasis on formal government channels rather than wider issues of governance, improvement of the performance and efficiency of public institutions, and decentralization of those institutions. Famine mitigation implicitly advocates all of these. Second, the good government agenda is concerned with support for civil society institutions. Better linking of relief and development will necessitate a reinforcement of civil society institutions, closer to where the action is, just as much as improved performance of public ones. Third, the agenda is concerned with the need for greater accountability, critical as a means of exerting pressure on the various actors involved in LRD to improve their performance. Current accountability in relief operations is not to the poor and destitute, but instead to those who claim to act in their interests: donors and their constituents; NGOs; or (often unaccountable) governments. The correlation between accountable government and effective public action has been identified as a central element in preventing famine in India (Drèze and Sen 1989).

This list indicates the magnitude of the task at hand when trying to link relief and development. Much of what goes wrong in emergencies is a reflection of wider institutional constraints which operate under normal circumstances, even though they may then have less devastating and visible consequences. The solutions proposed by the good government agenda are concerned with changes in attitudes and ideologies as much as with concrete proposals to improve the functioning of public institutions. They presuppose that better government is the desired outcome of all participating parties, which currently fail to practise it. Equally, not all actors share the view that the institutional barriers to famine mitigation should be overcome: donors may justify institutional separation on grounds of the exceptional nature of emergencies; governments may do so to maximize overall aid receipts; and NGOs may wish to protect their funding sources from both the emergency and development budgets of donors, and so not to encourage too much blurring of the two.

4.2 New forms of public administration

New forms of public administration also have direct implications for the institutional aspects of famine mitigation. These were initially informed by public

choice theory, which suggested that state administrators, far from being dutiful servants of the public weal, in fact had their own individual interests, which they pursued at the cost of the taxpayer or citizen (Murray 1993a: 1).

At least three models of public institutions are criticized by the new approach (Moore 1993). First, is the justified critique of the Weberian assumption that administrative systems can be insulated from social and political relations in which they are embedded. The Weberian rational bureaucratic machine is a far cry from the reality of how bureaucracies involved in relief and/or development operate, especially given that it is most effective when performing routine and predictable functions; and is least so in a climate of uncertainty, when creativity is needed and when an ability to learn from mistakes is indicated (*ibid.*: 68). It is particularly inappropriate as a model when political interests are being fought over within and between bureaucracies, often the case in relief operations, when several bureaucracies with vastly differing resource bases are pursuing distinct and often competing objectives.

The second criticism is of approaches to public administration derived from private sector models, which regard organizations, operating in competitive environments, as 'communities'. Again, this approach does not well reflect how public institutions involved in relief or development operate. Assumptions about relationships of mutuality and solidarity, of a climate of creativity, flexibility, commitment and direct support, brought about by highly skilled managers are almost entirely alien to these institutions and to the climate of crisis which characterizes emergencies.

The third criticism is of models which regard organizations as disguised self-interest; in other words, that the energy and resources of formal institutions are used to pursue the personal goals of staff. These models are too simplistic adequately to explain the complexity of institutional operations in either relief or development contexts, with their cocktail of humanitarian, political and financial - as well as self-interested - motives.

The overwhelming message from advocates of new forms of public administration is that traditional models can neither adequately describe how public bureaucracies operate, nor usefully indicate how they can realistically be reformed. Solutions need to

start with what is available rather than what is desirable and to build on strengths rather than become bogged down by weaknesses. New forms of public administration emphasize strategies rather than plans; flat hierarchies rather than pyramidal ones; organization as learning rather than as instrument; user centred systems rather than ones based on passive consumers; and systems which are open to the interplay between internal and external factors rather than internally oriented (Murray 1993b: 81). Much of this resonates with the agenda of famine mitigation, but these objectives should not hide the fact that many African countries may need first to (re)create a public service which meets minimal 'Weberian' requirements to establish overall competence and accountability (Moore 1993: 74), before more complex and appropriate systems can be achieved. Paradoxically, overcoming institutional constraints to LRD may therefore necessitate the establishment of a minimal level of apparently old style bureaucracies before these can then be reformed to respond to the complex needs of LRD.

4.3 Subsidiarity: merging the macro and the micro

This dilemma leads directly to the idea of subsidiarity, as a means of carving out an institutional half-way house between new forms of public administration on the one hand and Weberian bureaucracies on the other. Subsidiarity refers to the allocation of policy-making decisions and implementation tasks to the lowest possible administrative level. It does not imply mandatory decentralization of all decision-making and tasks, but instead suggests that these should be carried out closest to the user or beneficiary as is feasible (Swift 1994). Thus, decisions by multi-lateral donors regarding global allocations of food aid cannot reasonably be decentralized to the level of recipient countries or regions within them; but decision-taking about the timing, targeting and nature of relief and how it links up with local development initiatives can and should be.

The case for subsidiarity rests on two planks: first is that international and national institutions are unlikely to be able to reform sufficiently fully to meet the multiplicity of tasks inherent in comprehensive relief and development management. Their comparative advantage lies in creating the (material and political) conditions under which institutions closer to the ground can react. Second is that the greatest scope for building on what already exists and functions reasonably well in the realm of famine

mitigation is at local level, within the parameters of civil society. This capacity is, however, under stress and limited in its ability to mitigate disasters, so requires reinforcement from public institutions. For such support to be appropriate and efficient, it is likely to occur at sub-national not national level.

5 POLICY OPTIONS

Mitigation and relief strategies do not always fail and it is useful to consider what has worked. Table 2 summarizes common interventions used in successful episodes of famine mitigation in a number of countries, where drought has historically been associated with famine but no longer is (India, Bangladesh, Botswana, Kenya, Cap Verde and Zimbabwe). Table 2 also shows the institutional implications of successful mitigation activities, indicating the areas on which institutional capacity building needs to focus. Obviously, such an exercise would need to be carried out on a country-by-country basis, but in starting from what has worked in the past, institutional priorities can be identified. It is important to note that some of the implications relate to wider political and economic factors, which cannot be addressed by institutional reform and/or capacity building alone. Perhaps most important of these is the absence of armed conflict.

A major drawback of the proliferation of policy tools for famine prevention is how to set priorities in conditions of resource scarcity. Weak planning capacities risk being spoilt for choice by the array of instruments. The choice of appropriate mixes of interventions can be assessed according to criteria of: scale; consistency with wider policy; speed; cost-effectiveness; sustainability; equity; and, critically, institutional feasibility. The principal lessons for effective food security planning are also relevant to famine mitigation: integrated planning but independent implementation; the importance of a bias toward action over planning; the value of risk-taking and innovation; and the importance of addressing explicitly the need for new modes of organization in multi-disciplinary team-work (Maxwell 1990: 6).

In practice, however, decisions about how to intervene are all too often taken on an ad hoc basis, influenced by what particular donors or NGOs want or are able to do, with little overall strategy to coordinate interventions. Coordinated contingency planning is the way to avoid this, but little attention

Table 2: Common elements in cases of successful macro-level famine mitigation

ELEMENTS OF MITIGATION	INSTITUTIONAL IMPLICATIONS
Formal EWS backed up by free press & active political debate	Greater transparency of information (Political accountability)
Government plays predominant role; donors & NGOs in secondary position	Strong co-ordination & leadership by government, based on adequate planning capacity
Efficient system of food supply & distribution, with appropriate mixture of public & private measures	Portfolio of pre-planned responses & means of implementation
Commercial imports	Appropriate licensing &/or foreign exchange allocation system
Food aid available on time when needed	Planned food aid shipments & multi-annual pledging
Storage reserves work well	Small-scale storage (e.g. some pre-positioning of stocks) Co-operative management between government & donors of these reserves, if supplied by food aid
Traditional 'relief' measures important (e.g. direct feeding); but implemented before famine happens	Contingency planning, early response, pre-positioning of resources
Successful public works programmes	Dependent on effective local bureaucracy
No armed conflict	(Political stability)
Source: Based on Longhurst 1992	

is paid to the institutional relationships between the state, civil society institutions and NGOs. Increasingly, there is a tendency to see (foreign) NGOs as the answer to institutional constraints, at the extreme by-passing the state altogether in order to directly 'participate' with local institutions, raising serious questions about sustainability and accountability.

If interventions are to succeed, planners need to recognize the basis on which local people's choices are made: protecting future livelihoods is as (if not more) important than sustaining immediate consumption above the minimum for survival. Research into the characteristics and needs of famine-prone people is paying off, and a long list of potential methods of reinforcing local strategies now exists.¹

¹ This includes helping to adapt farming systems to drought with improved seeds and other inputs; diversifying production into household gardens; water harvesting; soil and water conservation;

a range of measures to protect livestock production and exchange; improved food storage; and diversifying off-farm income and employment opportunities (see OFDA 1990).

Systematic piloting of different options in a variety of localities to see what does and does not work is needed, as well as assessment of whether or not the economic and environmental sustainability of particular local strategies can be improved. Mitigation strategies which help to diversify sources of household income and so to spread risk, without relying on unsustainable natural resource exploitation (e.g. abusive wood cutting), are likely to be the starting point for effective reinforcement. Once this has been done, the institutional and resource implications for national and sub-national policies and programmes need to be explored. Enlisting the participation of famine-prone people in this process is essential: even apparently successful institutional initiatives to facilitate famine mitigation are based on inadequate consultation with and participation of vulnerable people, especially critical in situations where public institutions are relatively weak.

Progress on the wider agenda of good government would help to create the conditions under which the complex institutional needs of famine mitigation, and improved links between relief and development more generally, could be met. But it is highly unlikely that famine mitigation will be the catalyst for better government, often leaving institutions of government weaker and less ripe for reform in the aftermath of crisis than at the outset. Similarly, although the policy prescriptions emanating from new forms of public administration are clearly consistent with more effective famine mitigation, the important caveat is that in desperately weak public bureaucracies, it may be unrealistic to move directly to the kinds of approach advocated.

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Subsidiarity offers the greatest scope for merging the LRD agenda with wider policy concerns about institutional reform. Given the complexity of options, especially when local strategies are taken into account, and the institutional barriers which impede their effective implementation at national level, scope for merging micro level and macro level initiatives at the meso level needs to be explored. It is in this middle ground that local constraints and opportunities stand the greatest chance of being systematically addressed, closer to where crisis hits, but not entirely separate from national planning and resources. National famine prevention strategies, by their very nature, are incapable of being sufficiently finely tuned to fulfil this role. Subsidiarity seeks to address both the tendency for over-centralization of planning and resources, as well as the need to strengthen that which is worth strengthening.

In advocating an approach based on subsidiarity, the comparative advantage of existing institutions and the mismatch between the complexity of what is needed and current capacity must be tackled. Local institutions which underpin most community based strategies vary in their significance, capacity and potential: some may not be worth or capable of reinforcement. The same is true at national level. In both cases, a major drawback of the proliferation of institutions and plans is a lack of systematic documentation of what each component can and cannot do. A country-by-country inventory of existing local and national institutional capacity is an essential prerequisite for understanding and reinforcing local strategies.

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