Nutrition research in emergencies

An investigation of the feasibility of an ENN research workshop

Pilot study report

By

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### Abbreviations and Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>AAH</td>
<td>Action Against Hunger</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACF</td>
<td>Action Contre le Faim</td>
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<td>AGRE</td>
<td>Advisory Group on Research in Emergencies (EHA, WHO)</td>
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<td>AIMES</td>
<td>Annual Impact Monitoring and Evaluation System</td>
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<td>ALNAP</td>
<td>Active Learning Network on Accountability and Performance</td>
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<td>BARA</td>
<td>Bureau of Applied research in Anthropology</td>
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<td>Care-E</td>
<td>Care Ethiopia</td>
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<td>Care-B</td>
<td>Care Burundi</td>
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<td>CBTF</td>
<td>Community based therapeutic feeding</td>
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<td>CCF</td>
<td>Christian Children’s Fund</td>
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<td>CDC</td>
<td>Centres for Disease Control and Classification</td>
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<td>CICH</td>
<td>Centre for International Child Health</td>
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<td>CIRAD</td>
<td>Centre de coopération internationale en recherche agronomique pour le développement</td>
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<td>Concern WW</td>
<td>Concern Worldwide</td>
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<td>CRS</td>
<td>Catholic Relief Services</td>
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<td>DMI</td>
<td>Disaster Mitigation Institute</td>
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<td>EHA</td>
<td>Department of Emergency and Humanitarian Action (WHO)</td>
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<td>ENCU</td>
<td>Emergency Nutrition Coordination Unit</td>
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<td>ENN</td>
<td>Emergency Nutrition Network</td>
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<td>FANTA</td>
<td>Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance</td>
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<td>FAM</td>
<td>Food Aid Management</td>
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<td>FSA</td>
<td>Food Standards Authority</td>
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<td>GNP</td>
<td>Gross National Product</td>
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<td>HA-IERB</td>
<td>Global Humanitarian Aid-Independent Ethical Review Board</td>
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<td>HAP</td>
<td>Humanitarian Accountability Project</td>
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<td>HEA</td>
<td>Household Economy Approach</td>
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<td>HIF</td>
<td>Health Information Forum</td>
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<td>HINARI</td>
<td>Health InterNetwork Access to Research Initiative</td>
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<td>HPN</td>
<td>Humanitarian Practice Network</td>
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<td>HQ</td>
<td>Headquarters</td>
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<td>ICH</td>
<td>Institute of Child Health (London)</td>
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<td>IDS</td>
<td>Institute of Development Studies</td>
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<td>IFRC</td>
<td>International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies</td>
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<td>IHE</td>
<td>International Health Exchange</td>
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<td>INASP</td>
<td>International Network for Availability of Scientific Publications</td>
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<tr>
<td>LSHTM</td>
<td>London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine</td>
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<td>LQAS</td>
<td>Lot Quality Assurance Sampling</td>
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<td>MSF F</td>
<td>Medecins sans Frontieres - France</td>
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<td>MSF B</td>
<td>Medecins sans Frontieres - Belgium</td>
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<td>MSF H</td>
<td>Medecins sans Frontieres - Holland</td>
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<td>MSF S</td>
<td>Medecins sans Frontieres - Sweden</td>
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<td>MUAC</td>
<td>Mid upper arm circumference</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-governmental organisation</td>
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<td>ODI</td>
<td>Overseas Development Institute</td>
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<td>OXFAM GB</td>
<td>Oxfam Great Britian</td>
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<td>PERI</td>
<td>Programme for the Enhancement of Research Information</td>
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<td>PHLS</td>
<td>Partnership and Household Livelihood Security Unit, Care</td>
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<td>PVO</td>
<td>Private Voluntary Organisation</td>
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SC UK  Save the Children – United Kingdom
SEPASAL  Survey of Economic Plants for Arid and Semi-Arid Lands
SFP  Supplementary Feeding Programme
TALC  Teaching-aids At Low Cost
TALL  Technology-assisted Lifelong Learning
TCD  Trinity College Dublin
TFC  Therapeutic Feeding Centre
UNHCR  United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF  United Nations Children’s Fund
US  United States
USAID  United States Agency for International Development
WFP  World Food Programme
WHO  World Health Organisation
Executive summary

Over the past decade, there has been a concerted effort to improve active learning and sharing within the humanitarian sector. In the nutrition sector, research has led to significant advances in emergency programming, however there remains a considerable shortfall in the evidence base of emergency interventions. Opportunities to engage in formal research activities are not often capitalised upon, while informal operational data is typically underused and poorly shared within the sector. The ENN capture much relevant research, evaluation and programmatic experiences through the preparation and publication of Field Exchange. However, due to the periodicity of publication, limited staffing capacity and lack of direct contact with the regions, the ENN cannot be exhaustive in this process. Furthermore, the production of Field Exchange and modus operandi of ENN has not been geared to helping agencies devise research protocols or assist in the collation and analysis of on-going data collection.

Recognising the need for complementary initiatives to minimise this information loss within the nutrition sector, a preliminary proposal was developed by the ENN aimed at prompting and sharing research in the emergency food and nutrition sector amongst humanitarian agencies. Such an initiative would involve supporting agencies to undertake analysis, write up and dissemination of research and would culminate in a trade fair / research workshop. In order to investigate the viability of the proposed ENN workshop, a pilot study was undertaken to determine research activity within a cross-section of humanitarian agencies, to identify obstacles to research and to participation in an ENN workshop initiative, and to identify the resources necessary to implement the project.

Between March and September 2002, a cross-section of humanitarian agencies and academics were targeted with a questionnaire on research interests and activity, supported by phone and email contact. From 22 agency contacts, eight questionnaires were returned, significant feedback given by four agencies, and reasons for incomplete information offered by six agencies. Amongst academics, fifteen questionnaires were returned, while a further 26 of those contacted gave significant email and/or telephone feedback. As the study progressed, potentially relevant initiatives, institutions and individuals were identified and investigated. A web-based literary search for evidence to support the proposal, to identify any complementary initiatives, and to investigate issues raised by the respondents was also carried out.

Overall, the agency and academic response to the proposed research initiative was positive and welcomed. This study confirmed that a substantial amount of formal and informal research exists in the emergency food and nutrition sector, at various stages of completion. Such research includes unanalysed or underused data sets from project monitoring, qualitative surveys, programme reviews, evaluation findings, and protocol-led research. Research findings were more often shared internally or with a limited external network of contacts, and less frequently entered the wider public domain. Agencies typically relied on routine data collection and retrospective analysis to answer research questions, while recognised opportunities for planned operational research were not capitalised upon.

A number of significant, but surmountable, obstacles were identified which may at least partly account for poor information sharing and research processes within aid organisations. These included lack of designated funding, time constraints, lack of expertise, lack of processes within agencies to encourage data analysis or ‘deeper’ reflection on programme implementation and problem solving, and poor capacity and confidence in statistical analysis, the publication process, and writing up of these findings. Dilemmas over the ethics of research in emergencies were a concern of many agencies, whilst information sensitivity – both politically and in terms of
securing donor funding- also discouraged open information sharing. Both academics and agency staff expressed concerns regarding the quality of accumulated data, which currently impedes analysis and may detract from embarking on new initiatives. Agencies who responded were willing to share research findings in an ENN forum, but the majority felt that they should have the ultimate say over how and whether information was used.

Experienced technical assistance was available and forthcoming from academics in a wide variety of nutrition areas, and which complemented the operational activities and research interests of the agency respondents. Availability and costs varied, depending on the nature of the work, whether university funding could be secured, the involvement of students and the significance of the work (e.g. peer review publication). Many felt it was critical that academics were involved with agencies in the early stages of research planning. All who responded would be willing to share research findings in an ENN forum, and did not envisage this interfering with the publication process.

Based on the findings of this study, the proposed ENN research workshop is a viable and necessary project. Strategies to deal with the practical constraints to emergency research activity are necessary, taking into account the individual, agency and sectoral issues that may encourage or impede information sharing. Whilst funding is critical to supporting any research activity, funds alone are unlikely to be sufficient stimulus for research initiation and information sharing. For agencies to actively engage in an open forum of information exchange, and for academics to gain an early foothold and a more directive role in operational research, a further catalyst is required. Given the ENN’s “neutral” position in the aid sector and active involvement in emergency nutrition, an ENN research initiative could prove the peer-lead catalyst of change required to stimulate open and equal knowledge sharing amongst agencies in the nutrition sector.

On the basis of these findings, a proposal is being finalised to support an ENN-led research workshop. To initiate and give impetus to the initiative, a consultative meeting will be held by ENN within six months of this report, to establish contact between interested agencies and academics and to identify research opportunities, with a view to establishing a scheduled plan of activity.
1.0 Background

Over the past decade, there has been a concerted effort to improve active learning and sharing within the humanitarian sector, with increasing emphasis on the quality of humanitarian assistance\(^1\). The Sphere Project, the Humanitarian Accountability Project (HAP), ALNAP\(^2\), and the WHO/EHA\(^3\)-based Advisory Group on Research in Emergencies (AGRE) are just some of the ongoing initiatives involving both humanitarian actors and academics. In the nutrition sector, research has led to significant advances in emergency programming. A wealth of academic work on the nature, causes, influences and impact of starvation and famine has amassed\(^4\)\(^5\)\(^6\)\(^7\), which continues to inform humanitarian strategies to prevent, prepare, and respond to complex emergency situations. Current therapeutic feeding protocols have a considerable basis in research\(^8\)\(^9\)\(^10\)\(^11\), and have significantly contributed to improved outcomes in the management of malnutrition. Operational research in the field of adult malnutrition\(^12\), infant feeding in emergencies\(^13\)\(^14\), and community therapeutic feeding\(^15\), have not only contributed to sectoral knowledge, but continue to guide\(^16\), and challenge\(^17\), emergency programming.

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\(^2\) Active Learning Network on Accountability and Performance (ALNAP)

\(^3\) World Health Organisation/Department of Emergency and Humanitarian Action


\(^8\) Golden MHN. Briend A. Treatment of malnutrition in refugee camps. Lancet 1993;342:360


Despite progress, however, there remains a considerable shortfall in the evidence base of emergency interventions and an identified need for operational research. In the nutrition sector, lack of operational research have limited the formulation and applicability of guidelines, and has determined that there are still significant gaps in terms of best practice. Humanitarian agencies typically hold vast amounts of raw data and ‘first level’ analysis in the form of agency reports, field notes, ‘sit reps’, and more formal evaluations, which rarely enter the public domain. Many lessons learned are not widely shared, even within organisations, and many internal evaluations never make their way into external fora. Failure to collate, analyse and formally share data that has been collected during project/programme implementation may be considered as lost opportunity to contribute to what is often a poor knowledge base amongst implementing agencies. Emergency operations offer considerable opportunities to modify data collection, where research questions can be posed and answered, but few agencies employ such forward research planning.

Many factors may militate against the use and dissemination of agency research and evaluation findings. Fundamentally, there is a lack of time and resources during emergencies to conduct research. Agencies often lack the processes to encourage data analysis or ‘deeper’ reflection on programme implementation and problem solving. Findings that demonstrate ‘poor’ programme performance or may be sensitive in the context of an ongoing emergency programme may also impede open sharing.

The process of instigating research projects in the emergency food and nutrition sector is largely ad hoc and often driven by the vision and enthusiasm of a few individuals, with little private sector involvement to drive research initiatives. Where research and evaluation findings are written up and published, publications may not be widely read by, or available to, other agencies. There are only a small number of humanitarian agencies which have established formal links with academic and research bodies in order to strengthen research and evaluation capacity, e.g. MSF-Epicentre, ACF-Scientific Committee. Apart from inter-agency fora, there are no large-scale expert/specialist fora at which research findings can be presented and discussed, and which can provide an environment for identifying and encouraging future research initiatives or for refining guidelines based upon research and evaluation findings.

Attempts, and progress, have been made to improve communication between nutritionists, field workers and policy makers. A successful three-year run of NGONUT - a moderated e-mail exchange of ideas, question and answers between nutritionists – paved the way for the development of NutritionNET, a web-based interactive platform to encourage more extensive information exchange and dynamic debate. However even within this forum, a desire to access information far exceeds the willingness to share it.

The ENN capture much relevant research, evaluation and programmatic experiences through the preparation and publication of Field Exchange. However, due to the periodicity of publication, limited staffing capacity and lack of direct contact with the regions, the ENN cannot be

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21 http://www.nutritionnet.net
exhaustive in this process. Furthermore, the production of Field Exchange and modus operandi of ENN has not been geared to helping agencies devise research protocols or assist in the collation and analysis of on-going data collection.

Complementary measures are needed to minimise the loss of key information to the wider humanitarian community. Considering this, a preliminary proposal was developed by ENN aimed at prompting and sharing research in the emergency food and nutrition sector amongst humanitarian agencies. Such an initiative would involve supporting agencies to undertake analysis, write up and dissemination of research (where appropriate through a mentoring system with recognised institutions and academics), and would culminate in a trade fair / research workshop. It was envisaged that such a workshop would provide a forum for the exchange of research and evaluation findings, and encourage the initiation of new research by agencies. The mixture of agency personnel, researchers and academics at such a meeting could provide a fertile ground for research ideas, and for identifying practical means of funding and implementing the research. Furthermore, if the fora became institutionalised (i.e. meetings held regularly) it may serve to direct participating agencies towards giving greater priority to analysis, research and evaluation during emergency programmes.

The grounds for this proposal, however, are based on a number of assumptions. Firstly it assumes that poorly disseminated research and evaluation findings actually exist within agencies and that further analysis of existing underused data would contribute to existing knowledge. Secondly, it assumes that gaps exist where programming would benefit from operational research. Finally, such an initiative would require that collaboration between agencies and technical experts and academics were well received, practical and possible. In order to investigate the viability of the proposed ENN workshop, a pilot study was undertaken to:

i) Determine the extent to which research exists in various stages of completion within a cross-section of humanitarian agencies

ii) Classify agency research in terms of methodology

iii) Examine the range of subjects that the research opportunities address and classify subject areas

iv) Identify obstacles to undertaking and completing research faced by agencies

v) Identify any obstacles to agencies participating in such a project

vi) Identify resources (technical support, cost person hours, etc) required to implement the project.

2.0 Methodology

The study was conducted by one researcher between March and September 2002. A cross-section of humanitarian agencies was targeted to include both medical and church-based organisations, those with development and emergency portfolios, United Nations agencies and both European and United States (US) based agencies. Using the ENN database of academic personnel, a cross-section of academics/technical experts was selected. As the study progressed, potentially relevant initiatives, institutions and individuals were identified through internet-base searches and feedback from respondents. These new ‘leads’ were also investigated. Details of the investigation, and a copy or link to the questionnaire, were included on the mailing lists of ALNAP, The Refugee Centre, Oxford and The Nutrition Society (UK).

Positive agency and academic response to the initial email and telephone contact was followed by a targeted questionnaire (see appendix 1 and 2). Further information and non-respondents were
followed up by phone and email. A full list of agency and academic contacts is included in appendix 3.

A web-based literary search for evidence to support the proposal, to identify any complementary initiatives, and to investigate issues raised by the respondents was also carried out.

2.1 NGO response
Twelve agencies were initially contacted by email outlining the nature of the investigation. With subsequent contacts, a total of seventeen agencies were contacted at headquarters level, and five at a regional/country level.

Overall, eight completed questionnaires were returned. In addition, significant feedback on research activity was provided by four agencies (SC UK, WFP, Oxfam, Concern), while six gave some information and reasons for the failed questionnaire return (Christian Aid, Care HQ, MSF F, MSF B, MSF Sweden, and IFRC). One respondent (Disaster Mitigation Institute) was not an operational agency, but was significantly involved in agency programme evaluation and data handling and so was included in the results.

Of those who failed to return questionnaires or to give significant feedback, limited time to do so was the main reason given. Often individuals contacted did not feel that they were in the position to fully respond, e.g. new post or more senior person not present, or did not have the information to hand (nor the time to gather it) that they felt was needed to furnish an adequate “agency” answer.

2.2 Academic response
Overall, fifteen academic questionnaires were returned, while a further 26 of those contacted gave significant email and/or telephone feedback. Meetings to discuss the project were held with departmental heads/directors of the Centre for International Child Health (CICH), Institute of Child Health, London; the Department of Biological Sciences at Oxford Brookes University, Oxford; The Refugee Centre, Oxford and the Centre for Humanitarian Assistance, Uppsala University, Sweden.

2.3 Definitions
The term research findings was broadly used to describe new findings based upon programme analysis or data collected during the course of an emergency programme/intervention.

*Formal research* refers to data collected specifically to answer a research question.

*Informal research* refers to nutrition data, qualitative information or evaluation findings that may exist within agencies and that through further analysis, write-up and dissemination could contribute to learning in the emergency food and nutrition sector.
3.0 Main findings

3.1 NGO perspective

Research activity
- Of the eight agencies who completed questionnaires, three agencies (37%) had been involved in formal research and six agencies (75%) in informal research, during the previous 12 months.

- Three agencies had plans to complete formal research and two to complete informal research within the next 12 months.

- Four agencies who did not return questionnaires, informally outlined their activities (SC UK, WFP, Oxfam, Concern WW). All were involved in informal research and two (WFP, Concern WW) were involved in formal research.

- Informal research activities largely consisted of evaluations or reviews of agency activities, tools or interventions, and qualitative investigations to address specific programming issues. Information was provided by four of the five agencies involved in formal research. Formal and informal research activities and plans, along with their implementing agencies, are outlined in table 1.

- A variety of schedules for handling current data and undertaking research were outlined, from none, to specific targets mainly in the coming 12 months. Three-quarters of respondents (six agencies) had data currently awaiting analysis, while five (62%) were collecting data with a view to analysis. Two agencies had plans to initiate research in the next 6-12 months. One agency (ACF/AAH) outlined a considerable research schedule, which is included in appendix 4.

- An extensive list of research needs in the emergency nutrition sector was given by respondents, and is outlined in table 2. The majority of respondents (6/8) had research questions they would like answered within their agency. In some cases, agencies held data which they felt, with further analysis, could answer some of their outstanding research questions.

- For five agencies, (CRS, DMI, Care E and Care B, ACF/AAH), internal distribution was the main method of distribution of research findings. This included those agencies involved in significant informal and formal research activity, and country offices. Otherwise, key findings were mainly distributed through informal or non-peer review mechanisms (ngonut, books, practice in the field, thesis), shared with implementing partners and donors, and less frequently, published in peer review journals (ACF). Four of the eight questionnaire respondents cited Field Exchange as one of the main routes of research dissemination. In some cases, headquarters staff were not aware of regional research activities, particularly where operations were devolved rather than managed from central headquarters.

- Half of the questionnaire respondents (4 agencies) currently had information which, they felt, could contribute to emergency nutrition knowledge (see table 3). All considered their current distribution network poor, which included two country offices. In addition, three individuals cited underreported and poorly distributed findings that they were aware of.
Three-quarters of agencies (6/8) reported having data which they felt, with further analysis, could contribute to knowledge in emergency nutrition (see table 4). These included both routine programme data and protocol-led research which had not been widely disseminated.

Six of the eight respondents had received internal support for their research activities, while six agencies had some sort of partnership or link with an external advisor or research institution (see table 5). Two of the agencies who responded (MSF-H, Care) were specifically working on internal information management, implementing strategies to improve information flows within the organisation and between headquarters and field teams.

Five of those who responded (71%) would consider operational research within their agency if technical assistance were available, while two would value input but already had some capacity within their organisation. In terms of specific type of assistance (see table 6), three agencies placed particular emphasis on write-up support, and three highlighted statistical analysis and assistance in the publication process as particular needs.

All respondents required funding for research. For any additional research activity, half of agencies (4) would require research personnel, and three would require supervisory personnel. Other suggested assistance included establishing networks of experienced researchers and practitioners in different specialist areas, and training of field staff in research.

Process of research within agencies
In some agencies, headquarters nutrition or technical staff both initiated and oversaw any research activities. In others, ideas and initiatives came from field workers, which were then developed at a HQ level as resources allowed. One agency described how recognition and support of research at higher levels within the agency had notably improved research activity. Agencies whose operational control was decentralised to regional or country offices were less involved in and aware of regional research activity. Responsibility for research varied by agency, ranging from country directors, to HQ nutritionists, health advisors and HQ-based technical/emergency units.

Links between agencies and academics varied from informal, ad hoc consultation with university departments or individual academics, to formal partnerships related to a particular project, student supervision or an established collaboration. Two of the agencies with formal research links reported that whilst valuable, this support had more to do with developing policy and overall direction within the agency, than with managing the more day to day practicalities of field research.

A number of agencies spoke of initiatives to improve information use and sharing, including:
- Emergency Food Security Network based in India, and recently established by DMI to increase the link between emergency response and food security.
- Emergency Nutrition Coordination Unit (ENCU) in Ethiopia, responsible for consolidating the nutritional assessment conducted by different organisations and monthly meetings to share new experiences and findings. A guideline has been prepared by ENCU in collaboration with different agencies, to serve as a national standard for conducting assessments in Ethiopia.
- One agency (CRS) was in the process of trying to establish a more formalised mechanism of regional emergency nutrition training, research and technical assistance using experienced country-based programme staff.
**Reasons for limited analysis and poor dissemination of agency findings**

Time and financial constraints were the main limiting factors to research analysis and sharing agency findings. Other limitations included lack of specialised/motivated human resources, dilemmas concerning the ethics of data collection and use in emergencies, and political and cultural sensitivities relating to findings. Poor communication with academic institutions, lack of confidence in operating in the academic world, and journal subscription costs were also considered as barriers.

The range of existing unanalysed data was diverse. Some existed as metric tonnes of hard data, e.g. TFC and SFP record cards and registers, repatriated from programmes for analysis purposes, stored in warehouses and “awaiting” analysis. Various electronic databases also existed, e.g. survey data, which too was pending analysis but with no specific schedule. Other data were collected and maintained at a country/regional levels but were not centrally collated - three agencies (Care, Christian Aid and WFP) reported difficulties giving complete feedback on their agencies research activity since much of the data and information were generated and held at a regional level.

A number of limitations of existing data, which in part impeded their analysis, were identified by agencies and included:

- In some cases, the primary purpose of data collected was to inform agency programming. A wider role was often not appreciated within agencies and as a result, data was underused.
- Some felt that informal studies within their agency were not sufficiently academic or broad enough to contribute to evidence-based practice. Others felt that since data was limited to their operational areas, they may be of limited value or interest to others.
- Finding time, at least to establish the worth of the accumulated data, was a major limiting factor to data analysis.

**Obstacles to research activities**

In general, lack of time, limited know-how in research design amongst personnel and finances were cited as the main obstacles to research within agencies. Agencies were not research orientated and capacity for research not developed amongst staff. With much of the programme-derived data, a research question had not been established before the data was collected. Two agencies felt that retrospective analysis may be difficult, was likely to be fraught with errors and results might not be comparable. Also, since research activity was not a donor demand or requirement, then this often was not an agency priority. One agency often depended on private, rather than donor-sourced, funding for research– it was more difficult and time-consuming to prove the case for such activities to donors.

Some of the respondents felt it may be difficult to convince field workers of the benefits of research since there may not be an immediate output or programme impact. One agency commented that lessons might be learned from those agencies who were observed to have a strong ethos of investigation and research in the field. Lack of cheap and convenient access to key journals was considered to discourage learning and write-up. Some practical obstacles particular to individual agencies or countries were identified– for example, employment laws which prevented volunteer staff being funded for agency activity, e.g. write-up of results, once they had returned to headquarters.

One agency felt that although technical assistance for research activity would be useful and welcome, it was not the main reason for their relatively low capacity for evaluation and write-up. Rather, confidence to embark on the publication processes, and maintaining the impetus and
securing the time to do so when coupled with daily programming commitments, were the main stumbling blocks to research completion. Another respondent felt that with “minimal tweaking” their agency could be conducting operational research in many of the programmes but were not since it is was not a priority for the agency, was not rewarded by donors and they lacked relevant experience.

Uncertainties around the ethics of research in emergencies were considered to impede research activity, particularly if data has been collected without ethical approval. Many agencies may not have ready and rapid access to ethical guidance and even if approved, politically sensitive information may make it difficult to share research findings. Recognising these constraints and how they may impinge on agency research activity, one agency (ACF), in collaboration with an academic institution (Harvard School of Public Health) was in the latter stages of developing an online/ telephone based ethical review service for NGOs. Entitled the Global Humanitarian Aid-Independent Ethical Review Board (HA-IERB), the initiative hopes to offer NGOs access to rapid ethical advice regarding research in emergency and post-emergency contexts.23

**Obstacles to participation in ENN project**
The main obstacle to agencies participating in an ENN research project was perceived sensitivity of information, both politically and in terms of securing funding - particularly if agencies were seen not to be meeting standards. Some felt that if such a project were to develop, there was a need to establish a “level playing field” for sharing information, with perhaps a code of conduct/ethics/honesty as used in academic circles. Control over use of data and findings were also an issue. One agency felt that in any academic/NGO partnership, humanitarian agencies were the most directly involved and therefore responsible to the beneficiaries and should have ultimate control over findings. It was suggested that roles and responsibilities in any NGO学术ic partnership would need to be clearly defined form the outset.

The vast majority of agencies (87%, 7/8) would attach conditions to research use, which included agency headquarters veto, veto to ensure information was not politically sensitive, recognition of an agencies input and acceptance of potential limited circulation request. It was also suggested that any research should have a clear benefit for the beneficiaries. No problems were identified in terms of the mechanics of the publication process or sharing information at an ENN-led workshop.

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3.2 Academic perspective

Fourteen of the academic respondents (93%) had specialist research areas in the emergency food and nutrition sector (see table 7), and were linked to an institution. All were involved with humanitarian agencies to some degree, varying from formal arrangements for research (e.g. Merlin/LSHTM, WFP/CICH), input on an ad hoc basis (e.g. Uppsala University/MSF Sweden, Concern/TCD), and training links (e.g. Merlin/IHE/Liverpool STMH).

In terms of technical assistance, the majority of the respondents could provide technical assistance in all of the areas requested (see table 8).

Costs and availability
The anticipated cost of involvement in a research project with agencies depended on a number of factors. These included the nature and amount of work, the degree of travel, whether a peer review publication would result and whether a student was involved in the project. Costs for technical assistance was on average £300 per day but ranged widely (£150-500 per day). Availability depended greatly on the nature of the project, and varied from 5 days to 4 months over a six month period. Thirteen of the respondents were available to travel (six specified limited travel), the extent of which would again depend on how involved their department was in the research work. Five of the academics envisaged a role for using students to conduct research. In such cases, costs, excluding travel, would likely be met by the academic institution.

For a number of respondents, a defined academic output, e.g. peer review/ISBN-listed publication, was essential - both in terms of securing academic funding and the quality of research activity which should be aimed for. For substantial research projects, there may be potential to identify university funding. Other academics were willing to become involved in research that may not be of interest to peer review editors but may be of value and interest to aid practitioners. However this was likely to incur greater costs since university-sourced funding would be unlikely for such initiatives.

All who responded would be willing to share research findings in an ENN forum. The majority felt that this should not interfere with publication, and the process could be strategically managed to avoid problems. One possible problem raised was if results were controversial and a journal editor wanted to deny or limit publication. Two respondents emphasised that irrespective of a workshop forum to disseminate findings, a commitment to peer-review publication should remain. One academic supported an “open source” copyright free arrangement, such as under the GPL free document license, but would depend upon donor and collaborator views.

Many of those who responded, both formally and informally, felt it was critical that academics were involved in the early stages of research planning, rather than being called upon when the data had already been collected.

Detailed academic activities
A number of academics gave details of collaborative projects, sectoral initiatives to improve information sharing, and data they were aware of in the emergency sector.

Specific details of collaborative projects were given by CICH, which included:
- Multivitamin supplementation and pregnant women
- Cooking pots study in refugee camps in Tanzania aimed at anaemia control (WFP/UNHCR/CDC)
- Qualitative assessment of cooking pots initiative, looking at the local impact of the initiative (e.g., market sales, commodity influences)
- Field friendly lab tests for micro-nutrient deficiencies, and development of field friendly training modules.
- NutVal software for food basket monitoring, excel spreadsheet and should be distributed by UNHCR.

Four rapid surveys (Kenya, Uganda, two in Ethiopia) looking at malaria, intestinal helminths, iron status, vitamin A. Carried out in a stabilised population.
- Community based therapeutic feeding (Valid International and CICH) 

Initiatives that academics were aware of or involved in to improve emergency information use or sharing included:
- IMPACT Project between FANTA and Johns Hopkins University to transfer onto CD about 20,000 pages of reports from the early nineties of Child Survival evaluations in many countries.
- FANTA collaborative work with Title II development and emergency PVO community.
- Initiatives taken by Save the Children (US) in analyzing growth monitoring data (source: FANTA).
- Efforts into improving systematic reporting of Crude Mortality Rate and Wasting by PVOs in emergency situations (source: FANTA).
- International Nutrition Task Force at the National Institute for Research on Food and Nutrition in Rome, aimed at designing and implementing nutrition surveys and nutrition surveillance systems, training local staff, advising on nutrition programme development.

A number of academics referred to specific data that they were aware of or suspected existed within agencies:
- MUAC datasets held by Concern WW (Steve Collins)
- Unanalysed data at Concern WW (Jean Long, TCD)
- Livelihood studies at the Bureau of Applied Research in Anthropology (BARA) which incorporated stunting wasting, mortality and morbidity and household data-sets from Haiti and Niger, (Tim Finan, BARA, University of Arizona)
- Evaluation reports existing mostly as hard copies with little collation of these survey data (FANTA).

Many of the academics voiced suspicions that underutilised or poorly disseminated data existed with the emergency sector, contributed to by poor information flows in a fragmented/semi-privatised environment, inadequate in-house data skills, no time for research and poor quality data. Others saw considerable potential for such a research initiative, but achieving this required some means of generating both the organisational capacity and will within the sector to make it work.
### Table 1: Formal and informal research activities and plans by agencies

#### Evaluations/reviews (informal research)
- Nutrition needs assessment/food security tools in Sierra Leone and in Angola (CRS)
- Evaluation of nutritional food supplementation of malnourished children in Zimbabwe (CRS)
- Evaluation of nutritional surveillance and internal lessons learned (ACF)
- CCF’s Annual Impact Monitoring and Evaluation System (AIMES) (CCF)
- Evaluation of WFP Earthquake Response (DMI)
- Longterm Earthquake Recovery Study (DMI)
- Riot Relief Study (DMI)
- Evaluation of the impact of emergency interventions (Care E)
- Analysis of the link between water and environmental sanitation and diarrhoea rates, and between diarrhoea and acute malnutrition rates in urban Afghanistan (Kabul) (ACF/AAH)
- Developing local use of Sphere nutrition standards in India (DMI)
- Various benchmark and feedback studies on the links between food, water, and livelihood securities (DMI)
- Informal review of the treatment of severe malnutrition in dry SFP (MSF-H)
- Review current products, techniques and theories for management of severe malnutrition (Merlin)
- Review current direction and climate of humanitarian response to nutrition emergencies (literature review, practice and policies) (Merlin)
- Review and analyse practical experiences with nutritional projects (Merlin)
- Explore alternative strategies/responses to nutritional needs in modern crises (Merlin)

#### Qualitative research (informal research)
- Integration of TFC units into local health structures (ACF)
- Livelihood security using a rights based approach in a particular geographic area (Care B)
- Effect of refugee return on the livelihood and environmental situation in a particular geographic area (Care B)
- Land tenure rights in Burundi and the effect on livelihood security (Care B)
- Social aspects of the treatment of severe malnutrition (ACF/AAH)
- Designing fodder security in arid areas (DMI)
- Training needs in food security and disasters (DMI)
- Community demand survey on the research agenda for food security (DMI)

#### Formal research
- Home treatment of severe malnutrition (ACF/AAH)
- Micro-nutrient fortification (ACF)
- Completion of BP100 clinical trials (ACF/AAH)
- Zoological study in Ethiopia (collaboration with CIRAD) (ACF/AAH)
- Adult malnutrition – PhD thesis (ACF/AAH)
- Completion of BP-100 clinical trials (ACF/AAH)
- On site milling and fortification of food rations in Bangladesh and Zambia (WFP/UNHCR/ICH)
- Iron pots intervention to reduce anaemia levels (WFP/UNHCR/ICH)
- Nutritional trends in Bhutanese refugee camps (WFP & partners)
- Nutritional indicators in Nepal (WFP & partners)
- Community therapeutic feeding in Ethiopia (Concern WW)
- Community therapeutic feeding in Malawi (Concern WW)
Table 2  Key research needs in nutrition sector identified by agencies

**Assessment**
- Rapid assessment techniques to determine emergency nutritional needs
- Determining type of interventions (food and non-food aid) needed in an emergency
- Adaptation of tools for nutrition surveys to enable more to be done without compromising quality, allow identification of more vulnerable areas within the survey zones and allow food security analysis to be integrated fully into the methodology
- Nutritional assessment of all members of a population

**Anthropometry**
- Revision and standardisation of anthropometric indicators, in particular for adults but also specific groups, e.g. MUAC cut-offs in pregnant and lactating women
- Establishing MUAC criteria when high rates of chronic malnutrition are prevalent

**Food security**
- Content of SFP rations
- How to determine appropriate food commodities and amounts for general distributions
- How to target food to the most vulnerable
- Use of local food and diversifying the diet in a culturally sensitive way
- Dispelling cultural myths about consumption of certain prohibited foods
- Access to land and production and strategies for marketing of production
- Fodder security
- Cultural impact of food aid and resulting changes in lifestyle

**Management of malnutrition**
- Home treatment of severe malnutrition
- Adult malnutrition
- HIV/Aids and interaction with nutrition/ malnutrition
- Evaluation of current practices for treatment of moderate malnutrition
- Integration and of new findings in the treatment protocols for severe malnutrition into international guidelines
- Impact of sensory and psychological stimulation on the outcome of treatment of severe malnutrition
- Impact evaluation tools for health education activities
- Assessment of nutritional status of children <5 years
- Spatial distribution of malnutrition
- Alternative approaches in treating severe malnutrition
- Treatment of adult malnutrition and specific concurrent diseases

**Longer-term issues**
- How to address the multiple causes of malnutrition in emergency situations, i.e. beyond food relief
- Weaning the community off emergency aid
- Identifying services that have the greatest impact, e.g. specific nutritional supplementation, EPI integration
- Identifying which key interventions are essential in an acute emergency.
Table 3 Nutrition information held by agencies

- Therapeutic feeding in adults (use of Plumpy Nut) (ACF/AAH)
- Therapeutic feeding in children (first phase use of bp-100, use of Plumpy nut) (ACF/AAH)
- Programme studies looking at livelihood issues (Care B).
- Process of transition from relief to rehab, provision of food to vulnerable families and household participation in decision making process (DMI)
- Evaluations demonstrating an improvement in wasting in children <5y due to interventions of emergency food distribution (Care E)
- Antibiotic treatment of children in TFC’s and associated mortality rates (Ind*)
- Supplementary suckling in infants (Ind*)
- Cash for work interventions (Ind*)
- All the work of the last ten years within ACF (ACF/AAH)

*Individual rather than agency source

Table 4 Nutrition data held by agencies

- Comparative analysis of programme interventions, e.g. traditional centre-based versus community/mobile programmes (CRS)
- Data and experiences in Angola with mobile kitchens, static community kitchens, institutional SFPs and TFPs, investigating what is most effective and what method is most acceptable to the community (CRS)
- Anthropometric data on infants under six months (ACF/AAH)
- Anthropometric data on children and their principal carer (ACF/AAH)
- MUAC and weight-for-height data collected in different contexts (ACF/AAH)
- Therapeutic feeding data on infants under six months, adults, and the elderly (ACF/AAH)
- Nutrition and socio-economic indicators (already used to guide agency programming)
- Water and sanitation and health indicators in different contexts (ACF/AAH)
- Repatriated TFC/SFP patient cards (12 MT of stored files) (ACF/AAH)
- Survey databases containing MUAC and W/H indicators (MSF-H)
- Adult malnutrition data (Concern WW)
- Experiences in agency/MOH handovers (ACF/AAH)
- Nutritional trends from health centre surveillance and attendance in nutrition centres (AAH/ACF)
- Nutrition data from Eritrea, southern Afghanistan and from refugee camps in Pakistan (Mercy Corps)
- Process indicators to determine programme impact on infant and child malnutrition rates and mortality, collected in 1,000 projects in 21 countries (AIMES/CCF)
Table 5  
Agency/ academic links identified by agencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency/academic links</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MSF-Epicentre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merlin-LSHTM</td>
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<tr>
<td>Merlin-University of Aberdeen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACF-Scientific Advisory Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRS-John Hopkins University School of Public Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRS-Centre for International Emergencies, Disasters and Refugee Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRS-Linkages (AED)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCF-American Evaluation Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCF-Interaction Evaluation Forum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCF-NGO Evaluation Round Table</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ad hoc and informal use of academics and institutions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6  
Technical assistance required by agencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technical assistance</th>
<th>Proportion who required assistance</th>
<th>n=7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Design</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice planning the study</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire design</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample selection</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determining appropriate methods</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyses</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice on statistical analysis</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someone to carryout statistical analysis</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistance placing results in the existing literature</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write up</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistance for write up for publication</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialist areas</td>
<td>Source by institution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment of nutrition and health status</td>
<td>CICH, Aberdeen, Tufts, Emory, Uppsala</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey methodologies for anthropometry and mortality, e.g. LQAS</td>
<td>Institute of Ophthalmology/LSHTM/Nordic School Public Health</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validation of mortality estimation methods</td>
<td>Institute of Ophthalmology/LSHTM/Nordic School Public Health</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment of micronutrient status</td>
<td>CICH, CDC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation of micronutrient interventions</td>
<td>Institute of Ophthalmology/LSHTM/Nordic School Public Health</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of MUAC in anthropometric assessments</td>
<td>Institution of Ophthalmology/LSHTM/Nordic School Public Health</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIV and nutrition</td>
<td>CICH</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult malnutrition</td>
<td>Valid International</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infectious disease, Infection/Malnutrition</td>
<td>TCD, Liverpool</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Malaria and Schistomiasis</td>
<td>CICH</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinical nutrition/clinical management protocols</td>
<td>TCD, Liverpool</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community based therapeutic feeding (CBTF)</td>
<td>Valid International</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infant and child feeding</td>
<td>TCD, CICH, Linkages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food security, nutrition and livelihoods</td>
<td>Tufts, Uppsala</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food safety and composition</td>
<td>Aberdeen, SEPASAL</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of child foods</td>
<td>Emory University</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Aid standards, professionalism</td>
<td>Valid International</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation programme impact</td>
<td>Valid International</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration of existing structures into emergency operations</td>
<td>Valid International</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application of new technologies to assessment and management diet related conditions</td>
<td>Emory University</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Provided</td>
<td>Proportion who could offer assistance</td>
<td>n=14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying research question</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice planning the study</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire design</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample selection</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determining appropriate methods</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyses</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice on statistical analysis</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someone to carry out statistical analysis</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistance locating findings in existing literature</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write up</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistance writing up results for internal/pub</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.3 Complementary initiatives

Access to information

There are considerable online resources and sources of information available to NGOs and aid workers, for example:

- Reliefweb, ALNAP, FANTA/AED, the ODI/HPN, IDS, NutritionNET, and ENN are just a few of the useful points of reference for up to date information, guidelines and links to research and academic institutions.
- Aid agencies with particular areas of expertise have also developed sites to share information and guidance, for example SC UK\(^ {24} \) and Care\(^ {25} \).
- The WHO-based Advisory Group on Research in Emergencies (AGRE) aims to combine operational research with active learning and capacity building in emergencies, and is a considerable source of information, including work in progress on ethical research in emergencies.
- INASP-Health\(^ {26} \) is a co-operative network for organisations and individuals to improve information access, which services include the ‘Health Information Forum (HIF)-net at WHO’ email discussion list.
- Forced migration online (www.forcedmigration.org) is a comprehensive electronic information system for practitioners and researchers, run by The Refugee Centre in Oxford, UK. It includes a digital library of full text documents and journal articles, search facility allowing simultaneous searches of sources or by theme, and thematic (including nutrition) and country/population-specific guides to conducting research on forced migration issues, with pointers to further information available on the web.
- University sites have useful research-orientated links and may also offer resources that do not require university affiliation, for example SOURCE\(^ {27} \) resources (not completely available online) and TALC\(^ {28} \) publications at the ICH, London.
- The Nutrition Society (UK and Ireland) maintains a register of public health nutritionists, and offers a useful source of research contacts, funding contacts and resources.
- Literature searches of Medline (www.pubmed.org), and Cochrane library abstracts are available online without cost. Full access to the Cochrane Library is available on a subscription basis, while several countries have arranged national provisions\(^ {29} \) and several programmes provide free access to low income countries.

Whilst the majority of journals require subscription for full text access, the entire contents of the British Medical Journal, developing country-related material published in the Lancet, and Disasters papers (via forced migration online) are available free online.

There have been a number of initiatives to improve access to information and encourage research in the context of developing countries, such as the WHO-led HINARI (Health InterNetwork

\(^ {24} \) SC-UK’s Household Economy Approach (HEA) \((\text{http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/foodsecurity/})\)
\(^ {25} \) Care design, monitoring and evaluation centre \((\text{www.kcenter.com/care/dme/})\).
\(^ {26} \) International Network for Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP)
\(^ {27} \) Based at the Institute of Child Health, London, SOURCE is a collaborative project between CICH, Handicap International, and Healthlink Worldwide. It comprises of an international information support centre designed to strengthen the management, use and impact of information on health and disability. www.asksource.org
\(^ {28} \) TALC (Teaching-aids At Low Cost) is a registered charity which supplies teaching aids and books at low cost, catalogued online at www.talcuk.org
\(^ {29} \) For example, all residents of England with access to the Internet can access The Cochrane Library for free, at www.nelh.nhs.uk/cochrane.asp, funded by the National Electronic Library for Health.
Access to Research Initiative) and the INASP-based PERI (Programme for the Enhancement of Research Information). Both offer considerable access at reduced rates to key publications (HINARI and PERI) and databases (PERI only). However since user eligibility for both is based on GNP criteria and individual or institutional presence in a qualifying country, NGOs and aid workers based in higher income countries do not qualify for access. In terms of research-oriented information, the extensive library facilities typically available at research institutions tend to be restricted to members or research affiliates. However, in some sectors, initiatives to allow full access to university facilities by a specific community of end-users have been successfully implemented, e.g. Ptolemy project.\(^30\)

Research and ethics

The ethics of conducting research in emergencies is a considerable agenda item in humanitarian and academic circles with ongoing efforts to come up with practical guidance. Activities have included a multi-sectoral workshop,\(^31\) discourse on the political and human rights issues,\(^32\) and recommendations for conducting research in refugee populations.\(^33\)

Learning

The value of any research, whether formal or informal, is only as good as the quality of the data that is collected, which in a large part is dependent on those working in the field. In the humanitarian sector, aid workers often lack individual support, work continuity and security, and are typically undervalued within organisations.\(^34\) A number of schemes do exist to promote individual research learning within the humanitarian sector. One initiative based at CENDP\(^35\) at Brookes University in Oxford, UK, offers practice-for-credit or research-for-credit learning schemes based on activities undertaken by individuals in the course of their aid work. During the course of this study, a number of other institutions were amenable to the idea of offering individuals space and support to undertake or complete field-related research activities.

Many formal research or study programmes have developed in the emergency sector at centres throughout the world, varying from post-graduate MSC/PhD studies to shorter diploma courses. A number of emergency nutrition courses have also been developed for aid workers, such as those run by the International Health Exchange (IHE) in collaboration with Merlin or the Diploma in Humanitarian Assistance at the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine. Another initiative, ReliefSim (www.reliefsim.org), is a project currently being developed which will employ CD-rom based training simulation for aid workers in complex emergency situations, and includes public health and nutrition as key areas. However, irrespective of what research activities an individual or organisation undertake, there is no system of accreditation or merit within the emergency nutrition sector. Lack of individual and organisational incentives and rewards for information sharing, means that the research process within agencies ultimately depends on the motivation of individuals. Accreditation schemes have been discussed within The

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\(^{30}\) The Ptolemy Project at the University of Toronto, Canada which supports information sharing with surgeons in East Africa [http://www.utoronto.ca/ois/Export%20Web/index.htm](http://www.utoronto.ca/ois/Export%20Web/index.htm)


\(^{32}\) Human rights, politics and reviews of research ethics. Chris Beyner, Nancy E Kass, Lancet 2002; 360:246-51

\(^{33}\) Ethics of research in refugee populations, Jennifer Leaning, Lancet 2001; 357, 1432-33

\(^{34}\) ALNAP annual review, 2002, Humanitarian Action: Improving Performance through Improved Learning

\(^{35}\) Centre for Development and Emergency Practice (CENDP), Brookes University, Oxford, UK

\(^{36}\) A collaborative project between The Refugee Centre (Oxford), Technology Assisted Lifelong learning (TALL) (Oxford), and Columbia Centre for New Media Teaching and Learning (CCNMTL), New York
Nutrition Society, in the context of classifying public health nutritionists on their register, and considered by IHE, but no formal systems are in place. At the time of this report, an inter-university workshop is scheduled to review current academic programmes related to humanitarian aid, and to consider formally establishing an Association of Humanitarian Scholars37.

**Complementary thinking**

Within the nutrition sector, The Nutrition Society of the UK and Ireland is engaged in prompting and sharing nutrition research, including the international nutrition sector. Although individual members of the society may be involved with NGOs, and some discussions within the society on promoting interaction with aid agencies, as yet there have been no specific initiatives to develop this further. The responses of the UK and Irish sections of the society to the proposed ENN workshop was very positive, and those contacted were amenable to collaborative work with the ENN/humanitarian sector.

In 2002, findings of a workshop investigating the broader research agenda in emergencies mirrored many of the constraints and challenges to emergency research identified in this study38. It concluded that to develop the emergency research agenda, some experimentation was required to identify how academic institutions, researchers, and humanitarian organisations can better interact with one another. Key recommendations of the workshop included consolidation of the research agenda, raising funds to allow for commissioned studies related to the agenda, establishment of a management structure to further promote activities, transparency and accountability of procedures and annual sessions on progress in research conferences, e.g. Global Forum for Health Research.

The ALNAP annual review of humanitarian activities in 2002 highlighted the continued failure to share information and learn from experiences within the humanitarian sector. Recommendations for interventions to improve learning within the sector included improved resource provision for learning, development of mechanisms to increase cross-organisational learning, setting up of an annual sector award mechanism for instances of outstanding learning practice and development of an electronic library for the sector. These complement many aspects of what an ENN research initiative might involve in the emergency nutrition sector.

37 Towards a New Curriculum in Humanitarian Studies, Workshop 5-6 May, 2003. Hosted by Feinstein International Famine Centre and the Tufts University/Harvard School of Public Health/Massachusetts Institute of Technology Inter-University Initiative on Humanitarian Studies and Field Practice.

38 Enhancing health in complex emergencies: the broader research agenda. TDR/SEB research working group: surviving crisis. (Manila, 3-7 April, 2002)
4.0 Discussion

This study confirms that a substantial amount of formal and informal research exists in the emergency food and nutrition sector, at various stages of completion. Such research includes unanalysed or underused data sets from project monitoring, qualitative surveys, programme reviews, evaluation findings, and protocol-led research. Typically used to direct programming, research findings may have been shared internally or with a limited external network of contacts, e.g. donors, but many have not entered a wider public domain. Research opportunities also exist amongst humanitarian agencies which currently are not capitalised upon, with agencies tending to rely on routine data collection and retrospective analysis to furnish answers.

Both academics and agency staff expressed concerns regarding potential limitations of accumulated unanalysed data-sets held by agencies. Routine data collection may be of variable quality, have limited comparability, and may lack contextual information necessary for its interpretation. However there may be considerable value in data that has been systematically collected. On balance, this potential resource warrants further investigation, with a view to either analysis or discarding of accumulated data. Hoarding data with no schedule for analysis is a costly exercise in terms of field time, and repatriation and storage of hard data. It may also deter personnel from embarking on new research initiatives, as they continue to be “haunted” by old tasks not completed.

Gaps in current knowledge which would benefit from operational research were identified by those agencies who responded. While some gaps may result from a true absence of information and evidence, others may exist for subject areas where there are information which has yet to be fully analysed or has been poorly disseminated. It is critical that any initiative to support research activity include promoting the dissemination of research already undertaken or underway, which has not been shared with the wider nutrition community.

Dilemmas over the ethics of research in emergencies were a concern of many agencies. Whilst involvement of academics and institutions may help to guide thinking it is still a relatively uncharted territory for many individual institutions. Any research initiative will need to consider and collaborate with work already underway in addressing these issues, e.g. AGRE.

A number of significant obstacles were identified which may at least partly account for poor information sharing and research processes within aid organisations. These included lack of designated funding, time constraints, lack of expertise, lack of processes within agencies to encourage data analysis or ‘deeper’ reflection on programme implementation and problem solving, and poor capacity and confidence in writing up these findings. Unless addressed, poor information sharing within organisations will impede any inter-agency or sectoral initiatives to improve communication and learning.

Less overt obstacles to information sharing were indicated by a number of agencies. In the competitive environment of aid, sharing information may have a price. Agencies may not wish to share findings that demonstrate poor programme performance, that may be used to undermine competition with other agencies to secure donor funds or that may be sensitive in the context of an ongoing emergency programme. It was notable that whilst academics imposed no restriction on information sharing, nearly all of the agency staff who responded wished to maintain ultimate control over how information was used. Organisational self-preservation and self-interest potentially poses a significant impediment to sectoral learning. Establishing codes for information

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39 WHO-based Advisory Group on Research in Emergencies (AGRE)
use and defining data “ownership” in any research collaboration may be one step towards encouraging equal and open information sharing.

Overall, agencies felt they lacked technical expertise in research activities, particularly in terms of statistical analysis and embarking on the publication process and welcomed input. In some cases, expertise was available within, or to, agencies but in insufficient quantities to cover needs. For others the constraint was more in the realm of, lack of confidence for operating in, and time to enter into, what was considered the “academic” world.

Good quality research involves investment of time, resources and expertise. In this study, the academic response to the proposed research initiative was positive and encouraging. Experienced technical assistance was available and forthcoming in a wide variety of nutrition areas, and which complemented the operational activities and research interests of the agency respondents. While the majority of respondents were already involved in some capacity with NGOs, many of the collaborations were on an informal or ad hoc basis, with considerable scope for greater links and a perceived need for earlier involvement in research planning. However, any initiative to heighten academic involvement in emergency research will require funding to support academic activity. For research projects ultimately leading to peer review publication, university-sourced funding may be secured, and may actually tap into an alternative source of funding for agencies wishing to embark on research activities. However, the initial stages of project planning, and any involvement of academics in non-peer review based research activities, e.g. analysis of accumulated datasets, would require external funding.

The majority of academics and institutions who responded had strong track records in emergency-related nutrition. Some were significantly engaged in partnerships with NGOs, while others had some contact but with scope for much more significant collaboration. A third potential “group” consists of those without considerable expertise or involvement in emergency-related nutrition, but with sufficient interest and academic experience to become involved in NGO research support. Encouraging involvement of a wider circle of technical experts, while boosting the support circle, may also encourage fresh opinions and invest in expertise for the future.

Agency staff who responded, both formally and informally, voiced that they appreciated the value of information sharing and operational research, were aware of many of their current shortcomings and welcomed any initiative that could strengthen practical support.

A catalyst for change

Whilst funding is critical to support emergency research, funds alone are unlikely to be sufficient stimulus for research initiation and information sharing. For agencies to actively engage in an open forum of information exchange, and for academics to gain an early foothold and a more directive role in operational research, some further catalyst is required.

External influences, most typically donors in the aid world, wield considerable power in directing agency activities. One of the reasons given why research is low on agency agendas was that operational research is not a donor requirement, and agencies are not “rewarded” by donors for such initiatives. Crediting agencies who engage in operational research, along with donor initiatives to support emergency research activities, e.g. pre-positioned funding for research into key areas, may encourage and allow agencies to forward plan and avail of opportunities for emergency research that arise. However, tying learning initiatives too closely with donor accountability may potentially bias what enters the public domain, and reinforce the defensiveness that persists within the aid sector.
Less common within the humanitarian sector, peer pressure is another potentially powerful external influence on agency activity. Given the ENN’s “neutral” position in the aid sector and active involvement in emergency nutrition, an ENN research initiative could prove the peer-lead catalyst of change required to stimulate open and equal knowledge sharing amongst agencies in the nutrition sector.

5.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the proposed ENN research workshop is a viable and necessary project. Based on the preliminary proposal, a final proposal will be prepared by the researcher.

To initiate and give impetus to the initiative, it is suggested that, within six months of this report, a consultative meeting is held by ENN inviting both aid practitioners and academics who reported data or offered assistance during the course of the pilot study. The aims of the meeting would be to establish contact between interested agencies and academics and to identify research opportunities, with a view to establishing a scheduled plan of activity.

Specific issues to address at the meeting would include the following:

- Promote the investigation, analysis and sharing of existing data and information held by agencies.

- Identify potential new research projects.

- Identify optimal support strategies for agencies for specific research opportunities.

- Explore avenues for funding technical assistance.

- Consider means of collaborating with and promoting the many complementary activities underway both in the humanitarian sector, e.g. ALNAP, EHA, and in the academic sector, e.g. flexible learning programmes.

- Investigate and if possible, include an appropriate system of awards and learning merits for individuals and organisations involved in the initiative. This should complement or incorporate any similar initiatives, e.g. ALNAP learning awards, The Nutrition Society accreditation system.

- Investigate securing cheap and easy access to key journals for those involved in the initiative. The WHO-HINARI system and individual institutions and universities should be approached with a view to negotiating access for workshop participants.

- Identify means to collaborate with other for a, e.g. The Nutrition Society, Global Forum for Health Research.
6.0 Appendices

Appendix 1 ENN Research Questionnaire (NGO)

The Emergency Nutrition network (ENN) is investigating whether there are research opportunities and findings based on programme data, information and experiences which exists within NGOs working in the emergency food and nutrition sector. We would like to establish the nature of these data/information/experiences and determine whether there are obstacles to analyzing and sharing these. This is with a view to investigating the feasibility and support requirements needed for NGO’s to write up findings for wider dissemination. It may be possible to provide support in the form of a range of technical expertise to help identify research potential and facilitate agencies in the analysis, write-up and dissemination of research findings. This project would culminate in a trade fair/research workshop where key research and evaluation findings would be presented and discussed, and from which further research initiatives could be developed.

Please feel free to add any additional comments, impressions and experiences and also contact me by email or phone if you want to discuss any issues. If there are some sections that you cannot complete at this time (eg key personnel with information not available) send what you can with key contacts and I can follow up missing data.

Key definitions

Formal research refers to data collected specifically to answer a pre-meditated research question/s.

Informal research refers to nutrition data, qualitative information and evaluation findings that exists within agencies and that through analysis, write-up and dissemination, could contribute to organisational and institutional learning in the emergency food and nutrition sector. We want to establish how these data/information are currently collected and used, whether there are any obstacles to analyzing and sharing this information, and to investigate the feasibility and support needed for NGOs to analyse, write up and disseminate such information to a wider audience.

In all of the questions below, research refers to both formal and informal research.

Research activity

1. Has the agency
   Undertaken any formal research over the last 6-12 months Y N
   Undertaken any informal research over the last 6-12 months Y N
   Collected any data that is currently awaiting analysis Y N
   Currently collecting any data with a view to future analysis Y N

   Brief outline of any research schedule:

2. Who initiated the research?

3. Who is responsible for the research within the agency?

4. Did those involved in the research receive any internal support (e.g. policy department) in the research process?

In this context, the term research findings is used broadly and should be taken to mean 'new findings' based upon programme analysis or data collected during the course of an emergency programme/intervention.
5. Do you currently have any partnerships or involvement with external scientific/academic institutions or individuals to aid in conducting activities such as research, evaluation and review? Outline the nature of any involvement.

6. Regarding any past or current research activity, at what stage is the research process in terms of

   data collection
   analysis
   write-up
   publication
   distribution?

   Details:

7. Are there any obstacles to data collection, analysis, write-up and dissemination that you have experienced or anticipate?

8. Where are agency research findings typically published and distributed?

9. Has the agency any plans to undertake any research in the next 12mths?

   Brief outline of research topic/s and schedule for completion:

10. Who has initiated this research?

11. Who will lead the above research?

12. Is an expert / academic /institution advising on the work? Give details

Research Potential

13. What do you think are the key outstanding research questions in the emergency food and nutrition sector?

14. Do you currently have any agency research findings that answer a key question/s or contribute to current knowledge in the emergency food and nutrition sector? Y N

   Details of research findings:

15. How have these research findings been disseminated?

16. Do you currently have any agency data/information that you feel with analysis and write-up could answer a key question/s, or contribute to current knowledge in the emergency food and nutrition sector? Y N

   Details of agency data/information:

17. Has this agency data undergone/are there any plans for analysis, write-up, publication or internal/external distribution?

   Details of plans:
18. What, if any, are the obstacles to application of this data for research purposes?

19. Are there any key research questions that you would like to investigate within your agency? Y N

Details:

20. What are the obstacles to initiating and conducting this research?

21. Would the agency consider undertaking research if an expert was provided to give periodic advice? Y N

22. What kind of technical assistance would the agency require? (tick and fill in details as required)

   Design
   Advise planning the study
   Questionnaire design
   Sample selection
   Other
   Determining appropriate methods

   Analyses
   Advise on statistical analysis
   Someone to actually carry out statistical analysis
   Assistance placing results in the existing literature

   Write up
   Assistance writing results for internal report / wider dissemination / presentation at trade fair / publication in scientific journal

23. What type of non-technical assistance would the agency require?

   Funding
   Personnel to carry out research
   Personnel to supervise research
   Not a priority for this agency
   Other

24. Would your agency allow technical input on programme data collection to facilitate interagency pooling of data, eg creating a megadatabase?

Information sharing

25. Would your agency be willing to share formal or informal research findings with ENN or a trade fair before publication?

26. Would this interfere with the process of publication in a scientific journal?

27. Are there any conditions that would be attached to sharing research findings outside the agency?

Further comments

Other contacts
Appendix 2 ENN Research Questionnaire (Technical)

The Emergency Nutrition network (ENN) is investigating whether there are research opportunities and findings based on programme data, information and experiences which exists within NGOs working in the emergency food and nutrition sector. We would like to establish the nature of these data/information/experiences and determine whether there are obstacles to analyzing and sharing these. This is with a view to investigating the feasibility and support requirements needed for NGO’s to write up findings for wider dissemination. It may be possible to provide support in the form of a range of technical expertise to help identify research potential and facilitate agencies in the analysis, write-up and dissemination of research findings. This project would culminate in a trade fair/research workshop where key research and evaluation findings would be presented and discussed, and from which further research initiatives could be developed. The lead-time to such a forum would be approx 2 years.

An initial email contact with academics and researchers has been met with very positive interest. Whilst in principle many may support the venture, in practice this will depend on time and money. In order to realistically address these factors in any project proposal, I would be grateful if you could complete the following few questions, giving an indication of the sort of availability and cost implications (if any) of involvement of you or your institution.

Please feel free to add any additional comments, impressions and experiences and also contact me by email or phone if you want to discuss any issues. If there are some sections that you cannot complete at this time (e.g. key personnel with information not available) send what you can with key contacts and I can follow up missing information as appropriate.

1. What kind of technical assistance could you offer? (tick and fill in details as required)
   - Identifying research question
   - Design
   - Advise planning the study
   - Questionnaire design
   - Sample selection
   - Other
   - Determining appropriate methods
   - Analyses
   - Advise on statistical analysis
   - Someone to actually carryout statistical analysis
   - Assistance locating findings in the existing literature
   - Write up
   - Assistance writing results for internal report / wider dissemination / presentation at trade fair /
   publication in scientific journal

2. Do you have specialist research areas in the emergency food and nutrition sector? If yes, please specify:

3. Prioritize which research areas would you be interested in supporting the project described?

4. Would you be available to travel?

5. Would you be willing to share research findings with ENN or a trade fair?

In this context, the term research findings is used broadly and should be taken to mean 'new findings' based upon programme analysis or data collected during the course of an emergency programme/intervention.
6. Would this interfere with the process of publication in a scientific journal?

7. Are there any conditions that would be attached to any research publications?

8. Do you currently have any partnerships or involvement with agencies or individuals to aid in conducting activities such as research, evaluation and review?

9. Are you linked to / staff an academic institution?

10. Can you work as an independent or does an institution have to be paid for your services?

11. What would be the daily rate of pay for involvement in this project?

12. Over a six-month (18-month) period, how many days could you offer?

13. During a one-month period, would you be available to offer telephone or email advice to queries relating to any project you were involved in?

14. Have you supervised research projects in the past? *If yes, please give example*

15. Other comments
Appendix 3  List of Contacts

NGO/UN Questionnaires returned
Kari Egge, Nutritionist, CRS US
Linda Doull, Health Director, Merlin
Saskia van der Kan, Nutritionist, MSF Holland
Mija Tesse Ververs (Technical Director), and Caroline Wilkinson, Frances Mason, Laurence Verdenal, (HQ Nutritionists), ACF/ AAH
Circe Trevant, Programme Development Officer (Health and Nutrition), Christian Children’s Fund (CCF) USA
Mihir Bhatt, Director, Disaster Mitigation Institute (DMI)
Holly Solberg, CARE Ethiopia
Chris Necker, CARE Burundi

NGO/UN telephone/email response
Anna Taylor, Nutrition Advisor, Save the Children UK
Sarah King, Christian Aid
Mary Corbett, Concern Worldwide (Ireland)
Judy Canahuati, Care International
Rita Bhatia and Andrew Thorne-Lyman, WFP
Hakan Sandbladh, Guy Zimmerman, Hishan Khogali, IFRC International Federation of the Red Cross
Judian McNulty, Mercy Corps
MSF France
Sophie Baquet, MSF Belgium
Jeanne Downen, Director, PHLS, Care
Dan Maxwell, Regional Programme Co-ordinator East and Central Africa, Care International
Daniel Wordsworth, Director and Naval Dave, Programme Manager (AIMES) CCF USA

NGO Meetings
Mary Atkinson, Oxfam GB

Technical Questionnaires returned
Andrew Tomkins, Director, CICH, Institute of Child Health, London, UK
Andy Seal, Researcher, CICH, Institute of Child Health, London, UK
Tim O’Dempsey, Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, UK
Paul Bath, University of Sheffield, UK
Rory McBurney, SEPSAL, Kew Gardens, UK
Barbara Golden, Honorary Consultant in International Child Health, Department of Child Health, Aberdeen and Jane Knight, FSA and University of Aberdeen, UK
Mark Myatt, LSHTM and Institute of Ophthalmology, UK
Helen Young, School of Nutrition Science and Policy, Tufts University, USA
Dirk Schroeder, Associate Professor of International Health, Rollins School of Public Health, Emory University, USA
Bradley Woodruff, Medical Epidemiologist, International Emergency and Refugee Health Branch, CDC, Atlanta, USA
Jean Long, TCD, Ireland
Nadra Franklin, Linkages, USA
Steve Collins, Valid International, UK
Pat Diskett, Uppsala University, Sweden
Jeya Henry, Brookes University, Oxford, UK

Academic meetings
Andrew Tomkins, Director, and Andy Seal, CICH, Institute of Child Health, London
Jeya Henry, Head of Department of Biological Sciences, Oxford Brookes University, Oxford
Marilyn Deegan, Director, and Sean Loughna, The Refugee Centre, Oxford Also present: Peter Sommer, Columbia Centre for New Media Teaching and Learning, US
Pat Diskett, Director, Centre for Humanitarian Assistance, Uppsala University, Sweden.

Other technical feedback
David Thurnham, University of Ulster, Coleraine, UK
Andrew Prentice, MRC International Nutrition Group, Public Health Nutrition Group, LSHTM, UK
Stefan Peterson, Karolinska Institutet, Sweden
Francesco Branca, Director, National Institute for Research on Food and Nutrition, Rome
Fred Carden, Senior Program Specialist, Evaluation Unit, International Development Research Centre, Canada
Mike Golden, UK
Sean Loughna, The Refugee Centre, Oxford, UK
Andre Briend, Paris, France
Nancy Mock, Tulane University
Mark Duffield, University of Leeds
Tim Finan, Director, Bureau of Applied Research in Anthropology, University of Arizona, US
Paul Currian, Project Manager for the Afghanistan Information Management Service
Aid Workers Exchange
Pat Brookes and Marion Birch, International Health Exchange (IHE), UK
Andre Griekspoor, Department of Emergency and Humanitarian Action (EHA), WHO
Paul Garner, International Health Research Group, Liverpool School Tropical, UK
Catherine Deering, Librarian, Liverpool School Tropical Medicine, UK
Marina Waddington, SOURCE, Institute of Child health, London
Aaron Sundsmo, Worldbase network
Dr Neil Packenham-Walsh, INASP
HINARI/WHO
The Nutrition Society (UK and Ireland) (included on listserv)
John Mason, Department International Health and Development, Tulane School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, US
Bruce Cogill, Project Director, FANTA
Caroline Tanner, FANTA
Trish Schmirler and Mara Russell, Food Aid Management (FAM)
Jeff Crisp, UNHCR
Anne Ralte, USAID
Lucy Carver, ALNAP/ODI
### Appendix 4 Schedule of ACF/AHH research activities (June, 2002)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Description</th>
<th>Bibliography</th>
<th>Data Collection</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
<th>Write up</th>
<th>Publication</th>
<th>Distribution</th>
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- GIS Nutrition: The database for the project has been developed and has yet to be tested and then refined in the field.
- Home treatment of severe malnutrition: the research protocol is currently under ethical review once the protocol has been accepted by the ethical board the data collection will begin (next month).
- For Ethiopia (1) the field work has just been completed and the final report is scheduled for August 2002
- For Ethiopia (2) the work was completed last year and the final thesis was completed in October 2001
- For Ethiopia (3) the field work is scheduled to begin in July 2002 with the bibliography and background to pastoralism in progress