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TRIGGER INDICATORS AND EARLY WARNING AND RESPONSE SYSTEMS IN MULTI-YEAR TITLE II ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

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ACRONYMS

APG	Assistance proposal guideline (annual guidance for SYAPs and MYAPs)
CEWS	Community early warning system
CS	Cooperating Sponsor
CSI	Coping Strategies Index
EW	Early warning
EWR	Early warning and response
EWS	Early warning system
FEWS NET	USAID's Famine Early Warning Systems Project
FH	Food for the Hungry
FFP	USAID Office of Food for Peace
FSCCI	Food Security Community Capacity Indicator
IPTT	Indicator Performance Tracking Table
IR	Intermediate Result
LQAS	Lot Quality Assurance Sampling
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MAHFP	Months of Adequate Household Food Provisioning
MYAP	Multi-Year Assistance Program
PMP	Performance Management Plan
RR	Results Report
SAPQ	Standardized Annual Performance Questionnaire
SO	Strategic Objective
SYAP	Single-Year Assistance Program
TI	Trigger indicator
USAID/W	United States Agency for International Development/Washington
WV	World Vision

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Office of Food for Peace (FFP) 2006-2010 Strategic Plan has a single Strategic Objective: “Food Insecurity in Vulnerable Populations Reduced.”¹ The FY 2008 Title II assistance proposal guidelines (APGs) include several recently introduced elements in line with that objective, such as the incorporation of “early warning and response mechanisms (including trigger indicators)” into Title II-supported multi-year assistance programs (MYAPs).² Prior to 2006, in order to respond to an increase in food needs due to a shock, resources were often diverted from the development program to the emergency response. While this approach did facilitate a rapid response to acute food needs, it ran the risk of potentially undermining advances being achieved by the development interventions. The FY 2008 Title II APGs aim to improve this approach by allowing the continuation of development interventions, with appropriate modifications to respond to changing circumstances, while adding emergency resources to the program to respond to food needs over and above those that are being addressed by the adjusted development interventions. This paper aims to review briefly Cooperating Sponsor (CS) experiences with operationalizing trigger indicators (TIs) and early warning and response (EWR) systems to date; outline the key characteristics of EWR systems and TIs within the MYAP context; and provide suggestions on how CSs can operationalize the FFP guidance on TIs.

TIs differ from other monitoring and evaluation (M&E) requirements for Title II MYAPs in several important ways. First, TIs are strongly encouraged, but not mandatory for CSs to include in MYAP proposals. Second, TIs aim to enhance program flexibility rather than monitor or evaluate program impact, unlike most other reporting requirements. Third, TIs are not standardized by FFP – the CSs have a great deal of flexibility to define TIs. Finally, TI information is to be reported to FFP principally via ongoing dialogue with Missions, rather than via existing annual reporting requirements.

CSs that aim to operationalize the FFP guidance on TIs should consider the following:

- TIs should be selected to provide advance notice (typically one to six months) of a potentially serious deterioration in food security conditions. To identify TIs, it is necessary to first identify the shocks of greatest local concern – including slow-onset sub-national/local shocks. A brief justification for the TIs in a proposal should draw from the national vulnerability analysis that the CS conducted as a basis for the proposal.
- Given the function of TIs, the thresholds of TIs should be set conservatively.
- TI monitoring plans can encompass data collection from primary and secondary sources, and should identify triangulation/validation strategies when data indicate that TI thresholds have been reached. TI levels at the start of the program should be documented, and triangulation/validation strategies for TI data identified.
- TIs should be linked to a series of actions, with an emphasis on partnering with national and community food security, early warning and/or disaster preparedness institutions wherever possible.
- TI monitoring and analysis should be integrated into ongoing M&E of the CS, rather than carried out as a discrete and parallel activity.

INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Office of Food for Peace (FFP) 2006-2010 Strategic Plan has a single, integrated single Strategic Objective (SO): “Food Insecurity in Vulnerable Populations Reduced.”¹ With this single SO, FFP has sharpened its focus on addressing underlying causes of vulnerability to food insecurity in all FFP programs, with a goal of enhancing longer-term impact. The FY 2008 Title II APGs include several new elements that align with that change in vision: single-year and multi-year assistance programs (SYAPs and MYAPs, respectively) are both included in the joint guidelines; CSs are encouraged to address underlying causes of vulnerability and program using the ‘development relief’ approach in both types of programs; and CSs are encouraged to build EWR mechanisms (including TIs) into their proposals.²

This change represents more than a theoretical shift. It is also a concrete step by FFP to streamline management processes and allow CSs a greater degree of flexibility to respond to emerging crises and shocks in their areas of operation. This is particularly so in slow-onset and sub-national crises, where a national disaster declaration may not be issued and where, in fact, the CS may be in the best place to detect early indications of a food security problem. Prior to 2006, in order to respond to an increase in food needs due to a shock in a multi-year program area, resources were often diverted from the development program to the emergency response. While this approach did facilitate a rapid response to acute food needs, it ran the risk of potentially undermining advances being achieved by the development interventions. The new Title II APGs aim to improve this approach by allowing the continuation of development interventions, with appropriate modifications to respond to changing circumstances, while adding emergency resources to the program to respond to food needs over and above those that are being addressed by the adjusted development interventions.

The FY 2008 Title II APGs encourage CSs to do the following:

BOX I. KEY TERMS

Trigger indicator	Indicator used to determine the threshold at which MYAPs need to shift activities and/or require additional resources for new activities in response to a slow-onset shock. Such an indicator helps direct program priorities in dynamic and often unpredictable operating environments. For example, in order to be aware of when a population’s vulnerability has increased, a MYAP needs to monitor early warning indicators such as prices or coping measures, clearly understanding which coping measures indicate “normal times” and which indicate that the situation and environment are becoming stressful and hazardous and may warrant additional Title II resources. The trigger indicator(s) advises that the community is being subjected to unusual stress.
Trigger threshold	The level of a trigger indicator that, when seen, signals the need for certain actions to be taken (such as needs assessment, contingency and response planning, request for emergency resources for MYAP).
Vulnerability	In a food security context, people are vulnerable or at risk of food insecurity because of their physiological status, socioeconomic status or physical security; this also refers to people whose ability to cope has been temporarily overcome by a shock. “Vulnerability to food insecurity is a forward-looking concept related to people’s proneness to future acute loss in their capacity to acquire food. The degree of vulnerability depends on the characteristics of the risks and a household’s ability to respond to risk.” (TANGO International 2004).

Source: FFP FY 2008 Title II Assistance Proposal Guidelines

Where specific types of shocks and emergencies are predictable in a country, FFP prefers that these be identified and planned for in MYAP proposals as trigger indicators. In these cases, when predicted emergency indicators are triggered, the CS will respond in the manner indicated in the proposal. In some cases, however, when unforeseen emergencies occur, SYAPs may be approved apart from an existing MYAP to respond. (FY 2008 Title II APG)

In addition to encouraging the inclusion of 'trigger indicators' (Box 1), the emphasis on anticipating and preparing for shocks is also reflected in FFP's Performance Management Plan (PMP), which includes as one of the standardized indicators for measuring FFP's impact in the field "Percentage of Title II-assisted communities with disaster early warning and response systems in place."³

The objectives of this paper are to:

1. Conduct a brief review of experiences of CSs with operationalizing TIs and EWR systems to date, with an emphasis on the EWR activities controlled by the CS, rather than by national multi-agency systems (Section 2);
2. Outline the key characteristics of EWR systems and TIs within the MYAP context, summarizing how TIs fit into current M&E requirements for Title II programs (Section 3); and
3. Provide suggestions on how CSs can operationalize the FFP guidance on TIs, particularly where a national EWR system exists with variable coverage and quality, and the CS is not implementing a formal food security early warning program (Section 4).

REVIEW OF CS EXPERIENCES WITH EWR SYSTEMS AND TRIGGER INDICATORS ⁴

Because FFP only introduced the guidance on TIs in the 2006 Title II APGs, there is not a long history of operationalization of this guidance to review. The author reviewed sixteen MYAP proposals submitted for FY 2007-2011. These proposals were submitted by eight US-based CSs, one local CS and two consortia. Of those sixteen proposals, eleven included specific TIs. The proposals varied considerably in terms of the types of indicators selected, as well as the extent to which they provided the following: justification for the TIs selected; definition and justification of TI thresholds; and monitoring, analysis, reporting, action and partnership strategies.

These inconsistencies among the MYAP proposals derive in part from the CSs' different experiences with early warning (EW), because the CSs usually drew upon their own country-specific approaches and experiences to identify their TIs and thresholds and propose monitoring and partnership strategies. Below, highlights of CS experiences with food security EW in the field are presented, drawing from both a review of the literature and interviews conducted with CS staff.⁵ It is important to note that this review focuses on EWR work conducted by, and centered in, the CSs themselves. In many countries, CSs also participate in national, typically government-led, EWR networks that serve to collect and disseminate EW data for the country. Those national multi-agency EWR information systems, though extremely important, are not the focus of this paper.

Interviews conducted with CS headquarters staff revealed a diversity of approaches to food security EW systems (EWS) in the MYAP context. Agencies frequently tailor EW work to national, and increasingly local, settings in which they work, with the result that the global range of experience of an agency may not be accessible at the headquarters level. Approaches of several CSs are highlighted below.

Africare has adopted four key strategies to strengthen food insecurity monitoring and risk management capacity in their Title II program areas. First, Africare is working with field staff to increase the ability of their Food Security Community Capacity Indicator (FSCCI) to track community capacity to anticipate and manage risk and shocks and target vulnerable groups. Africare developed the MAHFP tool under its USAID-funded Institutional Support Assistance (ISA) Grant. Africare has sponsored applied research in Guinea and Uganda and sponsored a full Title II program review during its recent Title II workshop in Niger.⁶ Second, Africare is currently experimenting with ways to use its standard Participatory Rural Assessment methodology for community-based assessment of “Months of Adequate Household Food Provisioning” (MAHFP) to identify and track project impact on vulnerable groups. Africare has introduced a MAHFP-based indicator—percentage of households in the most food-insecure category—into all of its Title II Program tracking tables. Africare has supported applied research in which field staff conducted a retroactive analysis of routine project data in Guinea and Uganda to investigate the extent to which the FSCCI and MAHFP measured exposure to, and capacity to mitigate, risks in the community.⁷ The third strategy is a community-level EW approach that is best exemplified in Niger. Africare initially developed this approach in collaboration with CARE as part of the consortium that implemented a food security initiative in Niger; Africare’s current program continues to collaborate with other NGOs. The current program has evolved from the initial approach to take into account the unique features of this highly arid pastoral zone, including the villagers’ creation of an innovative system of community development funds that can also be used for short-term relief purposes. The community-level EW approach uses a range of early- and late-stage indicators that community-level committees assist in identifying. The data are then linked to a four-level alert system and a framework of actions that includes: alerting government and international humanitarian partners, targeted needs assessment to verify the problem and identify target groups, and mobilization of an emergency response at multiple levels (community, local Africare program, government counterparts and NGOs) to protect livelihoods and prevent additional food stress in the area.⁸ This approach has not been without challenges—with weak local capacity probably being the most critical constraint—but Africare plans to replicate the approach elsewhere in the region. Finally, the fourth strategy, which Africare is currently revising, involves a Food Security Program Capacity Index that Africare has used to track staff capacity to design and execute food security programming since 2000.

CARE has implemented community-level food security monitoring and EW in many countries. Globally, CARE is rolling out a new Strategic Plan that places a heightened emphasis on understanding, monitoring and addressing the underlying causes of vulnerability to risk of acute food insecurity and negative health outcomes as well as emergency preparedness.⁹ Implementation of the Strategic Plan will build on Country Office community-level food security monitoring and EW approaches. Africare modeled its work in Niger after CARE’s work in the same country.

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) is developing guidelines for identifying TIs and trigger thresholds relevant for a community-based food insecurity EWS with a strong community preparedness component.¹⁰ The approach, which is at a development stage and has recently been reviewed in Haiti, reflects the broad analytical components outlined in this paper: identification of key shocks; analysis and monitoring of vulnerabilities and coping strategies of community groups; developing TIs based upon these analyses; and linking the information to a clear action framework linked with disaster preparedness strategies.

Food for the Hungry (FH) has developed and piloted an approach to community-based food security monitoring and EW called the “Community Early Warning System” (CEWS).¹¹ FH developed both the CEWS and its community vulnerability assessment approach as tools to operational-

ize the new FFP strategy, particularly the heightened emphasis on reducing vulnerability and adjustments to programming in response to increasing risk. Based primarily on the coping strategies index (CSI), the CEWS has been piloted in Kenya, Ethiopia and Mozambique. These preliminary experiences, combined with ongoing research with regard to the CSI, will inform further refinement of the approach before rolling it out in other country programs.

World Vision (WV) has piloted community-based EWS in Guatemala, Honduras and Mozambique.¹² Implementation of the approach differs between Mozambique and the Central American countries. In Guatemala and Honduras, combined ethnographic and socio-economic survey research was used to develop and validate a model predicting the probability of acute child malnutrition. Quarterly household surveys (conducted using Lot Quality Assurance Sampling, or LQAS) collect simple monitoring data using a field-friendly data collection tool to predict the risk of acute malnutrition. Simple data tabulation and analysis are conducted at the municipal government level. In Mozambique, communities use a participatory approach to hazard, vulnerability and capacity analyses, spearheaded by community focal points and ending with the development of a community risk map. The main differences between the systems are the techniques of data collection and analysis approach used, the role of the community and the emphasis on tools versus process. In Mozambique, for example, while the tools may be perceived as being less ‘sophisticated,’ the linkages of TI data to action are further developed.

It is notable that CSs frequently identified a tension between maintaining sufficient control over food security information to ensure a technical rigor to the system and working with (and through) partners to promote local ownership and sustainability. It is not surprising, then, that “community based” EWR systems are frequently not truly ‘community based’ in the sense of communities (and their local leaders or representatives) playing a leadership role in the development of the system and indicators, ongoing data collection, analysis and interpretation, and use for response. Rather, community EW activities may collect data at community level, using agency, local government or community-level enumerators, and community members may even conduct simple data tabulation—but CSs control the analysis and linkages to response. Community-level EWR systems range from being largely extractive to being genuinely ‘community-managed.’ One CS commented that its system would become more community-managed over a five-year period, as local capacity to sustain the food security information system grows.

Based on the above, it can be concluded that the adoption of the current FFP strategy has coincided with new thinking in the CSs about how to strengthen the vulnerability analysis and risk reduction components of Title II programs. As they gain more experience with the ‘development relief’ approach to Title II programming, they will be better equipped to develop an EWR system and to identify TIs for their MYAPs.

What this brief review suggests is that CSs will also be in a better position to operationalize the FFP Title II guidelines on TIs if they have a clear understanding of the essential elements of TIs and a straightforward approach for incorporating TIs into their MYAP proposals.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF EWR SYSTEMS AND TIs IN THE MYAP CONTEXT

This section provides a brief overview of EWR systems, and particularly TIs, in the MYAP context. It starts by clarifying how TIs fit in the current overall M&E requirements for Title II programs, and then discusses the role and key characteristics of an EWR system, including TIs and thresholds, for

TABLE I.
M&E REQUIREMENTS FOR CSS IMPLEMENTING TITLE II PROGRAMS (FROM 2007)¹⁷

LEVEL	TYPE	MAIN OBJECTIVE	REPORTING	INDICATOR SELECTION
Program performance indicators	Annual monitoring indicators (generally input, process and output indicators)	Assess progress in implementation of activity and inform program management.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Required • Identified in IPTT • Updated annually in RR 	Should be selected from “well established food security indicators commonly used by FFP programs.” ²
	Impact-level indicators (generally outcome and impact indicators)	Measure—and assess progress in changing—practices and well-being.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Required • Identified in IPTT • Reported in proposal and at baseline, mid-term and final evaluation 	
	TIs (generally population level, not program or beneficiary level)	Alert CS and FFP to increasing food stress and trigger specific pre-determined actions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TIs are optional per the Title II guidelines • Identified and reported when possible in proposal (can be refined after baseline) • Should typically be included in baseline assessment to enable monitoring of trends over time • Reporting as needed to the Mission and FFP 	Defined by individual CS appropriate to local context
FFP PMP indicators	PMP indicators include output, outcome and impact indicators	Assess progress of FFP’s 2006-2010 Strategic Plan across all Title II programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Required • Identified in IPTT • Reported annually in RR and SAPQ 	Defined by FFP for its SO and IR2, but CS should identify which of these apply to its program
USAID Mission indicators	Various types	Objectives vary by country and program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsibility of Missions • Reported by Mission to USAID/W • CS should work with Missions to see where it can contribute by integrating indicators into the IPTT 	Vary by Missions and programs

MYAPs in shock-prone areas. This discussion will provide the foundation for Recommendations for Operationalizing Guidelines on TIs, which follows this section.

TIs AND THE CURRENT M&E REQUIREMENTS FOR TITLE II PROGRAMS

The M&E obligations of CSs implementing Title II programs include at least four levels: CS program performance indicators, FFP PMP indicators, USAID Mission indicators and “F” indicators.¹³ As Table I indicates, TIs differ from other M&E requirements in several respects:

- **TIs are not mandatory.** Unlike PMP indicators, which are required, TIs are optional. As explained in the FY 2008 Title II APGs, CSs have the option to exclude them by providing an explanation in the proposal of why they are not necessary, such as where the CS judges that a national EWR system is sufficient to provide EW or where a chronically food insecure population is not subject to the kinds of recurrent shocks for which EW indicators are useful.

FFP strongly urges all proposal submissions to include a discussion on the process used to identify potential shocks. If the proposal does not include mechanisms to monitor early warning and trigger indicators and plans for how to respond to shocks, the proposal should indicate why these mechanisms are not necessary based on the nature of the targeted population’s food insecurity and the sources of vulnerability and risk. (FFP FY 2008 Title II APG)

- **TIs aim to enhance program flexibility rather than monitor or evaluate program impact.** The principal aim of TIs is to facilitate the modification of a Title II program, through adjustments in the use of existing resources and/or through a request for additional resources, to respond to indications of current or impending heightening of acute food insecurity. This is in contrast to the principal aim of PMP indicators, for example, which is to measure program impact.
- **TIs are not defined or standardized by FFP.** Unlike some of the PMP indicators, FFP does not prescriptively define TIs. CSs have a relatively high degree of flexibility to define these indicators and thresholds. The literature about food security monitoring and EW does point to a framework or approach for defining them, which is discussed in this paper.
- **TI information is to be reported to FFP principally via ongoing dialogue with Missions.** Routine reporting requirements for other indicators, submitted via the Summary Request and Beneficiary Tracking Table and Indicator Performance Tracking Table (IPTT) in the annual Results Report (RR) and the Standardized Annual Performance Questionnaire (SAPQ), for example, are clearly dictated to CSs. Even the PMP indicator for IR2, “Percentage of Title II-assisted communities with disaster early warning and response systems in place,” is standardized and prescribed for inclusion in the SAPQ. While FFP expects CSs to monitor their approved TIs, it is not required that CSs routinely report this information to FFP, and there currently is no distinct reporting mechanism or format for reporting it. Rather, FFP expects CSs to keep Missions, FFP and CS headquarters, continually updated on whether these indicators are suggesting a ‘normal’ (non-crisis) situation or whether an impending intensification of acute food insecurity is suspected.¹⁴

KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF EWR SYSTEMS, ESPECIALLY TIs, IN THE MYAP CONTEXT

First, a critical distinction must be made between TIs and EWR systems. Indicators such as TIs are, in fact, only a part of an EWR system, which broadly encompasses vulnerability analysis, monitoring, food security scenario development, assessment, action (e.g., contingency and response planning, humanitarian interventions) and continual institutional and network strengthening. When CSs develop TIs for the purpose of enabling timely adjustments to programming of Title II resources (per the Title II guidelines), this will clearly benefit if a full food security monitoring and EW system has been established in a CS program area (e.g., for CARE in northwest Haiti). In reality, however, many CS country programs will be developing TIs in the absence of a full food security EW system in their program area. This paper provides suggestions on how these CSs can operationalize the FFP guidance on TIs under typical circumstances (i.e., where a national EWS exists with uneven coverage and quality, and the CS does not run a formal food security early warning program). CSs should remember that the purpose of TIs is to identify when a shock (or series of shocks) may undermine food security sufficiently to warrant either adjustments in programming of Title II resources or additional emergency food resources.

- **TIs should provide some measure of the food security situation of the population in the CS program area.**

Unlike other monitoring indicators included in the IPTT, a TI should not focus at the level of program (as it does not aim to measure program performance), and it should not focus solely on beneficiary individuals or households (as it does not aim to measure impact on participants). It should not exclude non-beneficiaries in the same target community.

- **To identify TIs, it is necessary to first identify the shocks of greatest local concern, including slow-onset sub-national/local shocks.**

The shocks may be current/ongoing, frequent or potential. The shock should have relevance to food aid. To be relevant to the Title II mechanism discussed in this paper, the shock should conceivably result in food stress for which a food-resource-based response would be appropriate. Different shocks will be identified in different areas. For example, irregular rainfall (inadequate, excessive or sporadic) that threatens the success of the principal agricultural season is frequently a shock of concern. However, in northern Uganda insecurity that restricts land access and cultivation by returnees may be an important shock to consider (as a determinant of production); for Zimbabwe maize production in South Africa may be a shock of paramount concern (as a determinant of availability); and in Central America a collapse of international coffee prices may be identified as a key potential shock (as a shock to income) or a rise in the price of maize due to global demand for biofuels (as a shock to purchasing power). Thus, the term 'shocks' should be defined broadly and identified in the local context. The TIs in a MYAP proposal should not just focus on large-scale shocks like hurricanes, because shocks large and severe enough to lead to a national emergency declaration would not require TIs to enable an emergency response.

- **TIs should be selected to provide advance notice (typically one to six months) of a potentially serious deterioration in food security conditions.**

In practical terms, this can be achieved through three strategies:

1. Participating in a semi-annual or even annual food security scenario development exercise with national and international partners, designed to project food security conditions based on a series of documented and measurable assumptions;
2. Identifying early-stage TIs that would signify at the earliest point possible (e.g., the immediate effects of a shock on crop production or sale) that food security conditions may deteriorate; and
3. Selecting a set of indicators that help track deteriorating conditions at various points in time (e.g., early response strategies such as switching to cheaper dietary staples and later response strategies such as selling of assets).

An implication of this discussion is that dietary and nutritional indicators are not sufficient TIs in and of themselves; CSs must combine them with other indicators that register effects of a shock earlier than these outcome level variables. Additionally, CSs can draw upon the longer-term EW and trend analysis work in the domains of global climate change adaptation and environmental sustainability.¹⁷

- **A brief justification for the TIs in a proposal should draw from the vulnerability analysis that the CS conducted as a basis for the MYAP proposal.**

TIs should reflect the main components of a livelihoods-based food security framework: hazard/shock, vulnerability, risk and temporal variation (seasonality, inter-annual variation). The effort required to establish TIs is clearly front-loaded: it should be an extension of the vulnerability analysis work that CSs do to develop their MYAP proposals. MYAP proposals should reflect an understanding of the differences in livelihood patterns and vulnerabilities between different population groups (e.g., livelihood or wealth groups). MYAP proposals should also reflect an understanding of seasonal and inter-annual variation in livelihood patterns and vul-

nerabilities. MYAP proposals should briefly describe how the shocks of concern would likely affect food security. For example, a MYAP could state that “a 20% drop in rainfall during the main planting and growing season is expected to cause significant reductions in production of the staple crops critical for both consumption and sale by poor households,” or “a 25% change in the terms of trade between goats and millet prices during the hunger season puts poorer agropastoral households in immediate risk of being unable to meet their minimum food needs during those months.”

- **Given the function of TIs, the thresholds of TIs should be set conservatively.**

FFP expects that, in some cases, CSs will identify TIs in their MYAP proposals, but define the trigger thresholds during the baseline. This is particularly the case with indicators for which no secondary data exists, like some coping strategies (e.g., selling of charcoal). CSs can use either historical analogy or primary research to identify thresholds for their proposals. For historical analogy, the CS can review secondary data to look at levels of TIs that seem to be associated with crisis years. For example, one can review market price datasets to determine at what level the price of a staple crop is typically associated with increases in acute malnutrition or other signs of population food stress. The risk of historical analogy is that a threshold may change over time due to underlying trends of vulnerability or the fragility of livelihood systems. CSs can also conduct primary interviews with key informants while preparing a MYAP proposal to identify an informed trigger threshold; it is reasonable in this case to expect that the threshold may be revised during the baseline or in the early life of the activity.

- **TI monitoring plans can encompass data collection from primary and secondary sources.**

Most countries where CSs implement Title II programs have some type of national food security and EW system. For example, the USAID-supported Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) works in around 25 countries. Although the minority of FEWS NET country offices issue monthly reports for which CSs are formal co-authors, CSs frequently serve as regular contributors and/or sit on national EW fora with FEWS NET.¹⁸ It is entirely acceptable for CSs to identify as TIs indicators for which the data are available from secondary sources (e.g., national agricultural, climatic or market price monitoring systems). In some cases, community-based EWSs have been established that provide ongoing community or household-level monitoring data that can serve as TIs. Partnership strategies with disaster preparedness, contingency and response planning and food security EW networks should be encouraged.

- **TI levels at the start of the program should be documented and triangulation/validation strategies for TI data identified.**

If a CS wants to ‘wave a red flag’ for a potential food security problem, it should report the current TI data as well as the baseline level to the Mission and FFP. Documenting baseline levels assists in interpreting and reporting trends, an essential element for reporting the TI information. For indicators that vary seasonally, CSs should consider developing a seasonal monitoring calendar to reflect the ‘normal’ and ‘crisis’ thresholds of trigger indicators at different points on the calendar. Additionally, CSs may need to cross-check some TIs if they are more difficult to quantify, such as informal or unregulated activities (e.g., charcoal sale for informal market or labor migration).

- **TIs should be linked to a series of actions, with an emphasis on partnering with national and community food security, EW and/or disaster preparedness institutions wherever possible.**

For TIs to be useful in a MYAP, CSs must link them to a clear framework of actions. It is essential to note that the 'triggered' actions in a MYAP proposal should go beyond just providing emergency food assistance:

1. The CS should notify the Mission and FFP;
2. Adjustments may be made in the ongoing implementation of existing programs;
3. The national EW network may be alerted to the possibility of a problem, where available and appropriate;
4. The CS may conduct a geographically targeted situational and needs assessment to validate the nature and potential severity of the problem;
5. The CS may expand its monitoring and strengthen its partnerships with EW and humanitarian response organizations; and/or
6. The CS may decide to request emergency resources for the program area through the mechanisms defined by FFP.

Several of the FY07 MYAP proposals provided a ranking of alert levels, where each alert level signaled a certain level of concern and linked to different types of actions. The actions outlined in a proposal should emphasize community or local-level strategies and sources of resiliency and local and national preparedness and response policies/protocols.

- **TI monitoring and analysis should be integrated into ongoing M&E of the CS.**

Monitoring of TIs should be integrated into regular data collection, analysis and use for program decision making, rather than stovepiped as a separate program activity. One CS noted that because its community level EW system was conducted as a pilot on top of an existing development activity, the staff involved in the EWR pilot were unaware of the monitoring data that the CS development staff routinely collected. Integration into ongoing monitoring, analysis and program management should be planned from the outset.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OPERATIONALIZING GUIDELINES ON TIs

As discussed in Key Characteristics of EWR Systems, Especially TIs, in the MYAP Context, above, FFP strongly encourages CSs to include TIs in MYAP proposals, and where they are not included, the proposal should explain "why these mechanisms are not necessary based on the nature of the targeted population's food insecurity and the sources of vulnerability and risk." This section provides recommendations in cases where the CS decides to include TIs. MYAP proposals that aim to operationalize this guidance should include the following elements at a minimum:

ELEMENT 1: TIs

The proposal should identify the shocks of greatest concern to food insecurity in the population concerned. These shocks should not be limited to large-scale natural hazards that would result in a national disaster declaration. The TIs should be justified in the proposal.

The TIs should be identified at the level of the most common shocks (e.g., rainfall anomalies), immediate effects of those shocks (e.g., percent reduction in staple crop production, critical price thresholds in market), response strategies seen in times of stress (e.g., increased charcoal sales, migration to different areas for work, pulling children out of school, dietary substitution strategies) and dietary and nutritional effects (e.g., dietary diversity, meal frequency, acute malnutrition). However, nutritional and dietary impact indicators are not in themselves sufficient as TIs in a MYAP proposal.

CSs that do not have a well-established EW presence in a given country should start by taking stock of what is already being done in the country in EW. Because of the stovepiping of emergency and development work across the international assistance community, national and local CS staff are often not fully aware of what data are being collected and reported up as inputs into the national EW information system and how this information can feed into or inform a local EWR system. In such cases, CS staff should start by doing an inventory of monitoring and EW information collected nationally and in their program area, including consulting with FEWS NET, before deciding what additional data the CS should collect.

ELEMENT 2: TI THRESHOLDS AND BASELINE LEVELS

The proposal should indicate the trigger thresholds or indicate how and when they will be established. The thresholds should be justified briefly, unless they are to be determined via the baseline or other research at the start-up of the MYAP. Baseline levels should be noted (again, unless they are to be determined via the baseline) to enable the monitoring of trends.

ELEMENT 3: MONITORING AND ANALYSIS PLAN

The MYAP proposal should identify the strategies to be used to obtain the primary and/or secondary TI data. Validation or triangulation strategies should be identified for information of uncertain quality or representativeness. Proposals should describe how the TI information will be integrated into the agency's broader M&E, ensure that the early warning information can inform the management of ongoing programs and projects, and to strengthen and support the integration of food security analyses conducted by the country team.

ELEMENT 4: REPORTING PLAN

The proposal should briefly note plans for keeping the Mission and FFP up to date, including where evidence of a problem is seen, information on which populations may be affected and why, the potential severity and assumptions underlying the scenario.

ELEMENT 5: PARTNERSHIP PLAN

The proposal should briefly present a plan for how the CS will engage with national or sub-national EW and disaster preparedness and response institutions and networks, at least at the level of information sharing. CSs should be encouraged to consult and acknowledge existing contingency and response planning protocols.

ELEMENT 6: ACTION FRAMEWORK

Actions to be taken include following-up assessments, expanded monitoring, expanded partnership with EW/disaster preparedness partners, programmatic adjustments and/or request for additional resources from FFP. CSs should include plans for at least one situational and needs assessment to follow up where TI thresholds are reached.

REFERENCES

- ¹ USAID/DCHA/FFP. "Strategic Plan for 2006-2010." Washington DC: USAID, 2005.
- ² USAID/DCHA/FFP. "PL 480 Title II Program Policies and Proposal Guidelines." Washington DC: USAID, 2007.
- ³ USAID/DCHA/FFP. "Food for Peace Information Bulletins 07-01 and 07-02." Washington DC: USAID, 2007.
- ⁴ The author reviewed the versions of the MYAP proposals that FANTA had previously reviewed.
- ⁵ Interviews were conducted in September 2007 with HQ staff of Africare, CARE, Catholic Relief Services, Food for the Hungry, Land O' Lakes International and World Vision. Interviews were also conducted with seven Washington-based staff of FFP and AMEX International, Inc.
- ⁶ McMillan DE and FTushemerirwe. "Community Based Use of the FSCCI to Identify and Manage Risk in Uganda: Lessons Learned." Washington DC: Africare, 2007 (DRAFT).
- ⁷ Africare. "Comparative Research/Analysis: Strengthened Village Level Risk Management and Capacity to Reduce Food Insecurity of Affected Populations within Africare's Title II Food Security Programs (Guinea and Uganda Case Studies)." Washington DC: Africare, 2006.
- ⁸ Africare. Maslowsky SM, Tarver H, Tingbo A. Personal communication, 9/19/07.
- ⁹ CARE. Bell B. Personal communication, 9/7/07.
- ¹⁰ CRS. Levine C. Personal communication, 8/29/07.
- ¹¹ FFH. Sywulka S. Personal communication, 9/6/07.
- ¹² WV. Villela M. Personal communication, 9/6/07.
- ¹³ USAID/DCHA/FFP. "Food for Peace Information Bulletins 07-01 and 07-02." Washington DC: USAID, 2007.
- ¹⁴ FFP/WV. Personal communication, 9/13/07.
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ FFP/WV, Clesceri E. Personal communication, 9/13/07.
- ¹⁸ FEWS NET. Personal communication, 9/11/07.