

6 Looking forward and outward: links to other approaches and issues

HEA differs from other approaches to vulnerability or livelihood analysis in both the structure of its framework and in the methods typically used for collecting information. Acknowledging these differences helps to highlight areas of complementarity, which allow different tools to add value to each other when used together. The contrasting perspectives offered by different approaches can contribute to a more rounded analysis of livelihoods and vulnerability, and a fuller understanding of the constraints people face in accessing basic services and getting their basic needs met. In addition, the constant evolution of vulnerability assessment methods, including HEA, means that different methods can benefit from the experience of others. The links between HEA and different approaches that can facilitate this are described in section 6.1 below.

In the same way, there are obvious points of connection and areas of overlap between HEA and other subject areas such as nutrition, market analysis and political economy analysis. It is worth pointing out here that HEA is not an analytical tool that is relevant for all

Acknowledging the differences between methodologies helps to identify ways they can add value to each other.

purposes and for all areas of inquiry. It was designed for a certain purpose and its central livelihood focus means that it has been put to a range of uses and has relevance to a number of other fields. But there are limits to what HEA can do and what its analysis can cover. In describing how HEA links with other areas of analysis (see section 6.2), we hope that these limits will be clarified and that ways in which different areas of inquiry can complement and add value to each other can be developed.

Finally, this section outlines how HEA can contribute to certain issues that are a challenge for all frameworks designed for the analysis of poverty, vulnerability

and livelihoods. These include distinguishing between chronic and transitory food insecurity, comparing levels of poverty across geographical areas, and looking at the needs of specific groups, such as HIV-affected households and children (section 6.3).

6.1 How HEA links to other approaches and systems

HEA and other approaches to vulnerability analysis

‘Vulnerability’ is a term used in different ways. Some approaches define vulnerability in terms of an outcome, such as food insecurity, hunger or poverty, with ‘the vulnerable’ taken to be the most food insecure, or the poorest, or those with the fewest assets. In other approaches, including HEA, vulnerability means something quite different; it refers to how susceptible a household or population group is to a particular hazard that might result in an outcome such as food insecurity or hunger. In these terms, there is no general or absolute state of vulnerability; people can only be vulnerable *to something*. For example, households that depend on remittances from South Africa may not be vulnerable to drought, but may be vulnerable to inflation, since they rely on the market for access to food. How a household obtains access to food and cash thus determines which shocks or hazards will affect it, and to what degree – that is, how vulnerable it is to specific hazards. Understanding what different methods mean by ‘vulnerability’ is important because it underlies the approach taken in each case.

In considering different approaches to vulnerability analysis, it is worth emphasising that the usefulness of any survey or piece of research relates to its content and quality. Does the inquiry answer the questions of concern to the user? And can the user trust that the data has been collected in a way that ensures it is representative of the population it claims to describe, and that the method used will produce robust and accurate information? Quality is not inherent in the method chosen for research, but rather is determined by how the

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research is carried out in practice and what it is used for. In practice, of course, the choice of framework or method does not hinge wholly on issues of content and quality; practical considerations of time, geographical coverage, money and staff availability tend to be at least as important.

‘Snapshots’ vs annual accounting of food security and vulnerability

Most approaches to vulnerability analysis are based on the collection of some combination of information on food consumption, income and spending, gathered either for a particular point in time, such as the previous seven days (to create a ‘snapshot’), or over a longer period, usually a full year (described as ‘annual accounting’), as is typically done in HEA. Just as HEA assessments commonly use rapid appraisal methods, so snapshot or annual accounting assessments are typically carried out using household questionnaire surveys.

Snapshots potentially provide more accurate information than annual accounting assessments because of the shorter recall period. But they are limited in that often they do not take account of seasonal factors and inter-annual differences and, thus, the information for that point in time is hard to contextualise: are things improving or declining, and is the situation normal or unusual for that time of year? Thus, unless they are repeated frequently to enable comparison over time, this makes them less useful for early warning and making predictions of how things will change. Examples of surveys that are predominantly ‘snapshot’ in their nature include the World Food Programme’s (WFP’s) Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Assessments (CFSVAs) and many national household budget surveys or income and expenditure surveys.

Annual accounting of food, income and expenditure in a household survey is more demanding than getting snapshot information. It can be difficult to recall accurately things that happened many months previously. However, a well-designed method would facilitate recall by including opportunities for cross-checking information, and by asking questions in ways that are easier for respondents to answer. Some Vulnerability Assessment Committee (VAC) assessments have used this approach (such as in Zimbabwe in 2003/04), while others use a combination of ‘snapshot’ indicators and more or less comprehensive accounting of the household economy within a single survey, such as that carried out by the Mozambique VAC in 2005/06, and the Malawi Integrated Household Survey 2 of 2004.

HEA and other approaches can add value to each other in that different methods of information collection, and different types of information, can be highly complementary. For example, an HEA assessment carried out prior to a household survey can be useful for designing the survey questionnaire and indicating key questions to include. Similarly, HEA assessments can complement 'snapshot' surveys by providing the contextual, seasonal or narrative background against which the survey data can be interpreted. It is less efficient to use HEA assessments and other annual accounting surveys together, as the added benefits are mainly related to cross-checking results and possibly better coverage in HEA of informal income sources. Where an annual accounting survey has national coverage, an HEA assessment may usefully complement it by providing a more detailed description of a smaller geographical area.

It may also be useful to carry out an HEA assessment or qualitative livelihoods research after either a 'snapshot' or annual accounting household survey to investigate and explain anomalous or unexpected findings.

Qualitative livelihoods research

The two most common types of qualitative livelihoods assessments are those based on the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF), often carried out by NGOs such as Oxfam and CARE, and Participatory Poverty Appraisals (PPAs), carried out by the World Bank. Such research typically covers a broad range of issues relating to livelihoods and vulnerability, and the information collected can be very rich and useful in understanding livelihoods patterns and the root causes of poverty. Results are not quantified, however, which can be a constraint in determining the relative importance of different issues and the scale of responses required.

In practice, HEAs typically cover a large subset of the issues investigated in qualitative livelihoods assessments, but add a quantitative aspect. Rather than carry out two separate surveys, it may be more useful to budget additional time in an HEA assessment to provide better coverage of the full range of issues, if the research question requires this.

HEA and the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework

The SLF is an analytical framework that helps us to understand how assets, institutions and processes combine to enable households to make a living. The framework has five broad components:

- **Assets or capitals:** different assets can contribute to making a living – human, financial, physical, natural, social and – in some variants of the SLF – political.
- **Policies, institutions and processes:** these influence and mediate the ways that households can use the assets that are available to them.
- **The vulnerability context:** this describes the external environment in which people exist but which they cannot control, and refers to how long-term trends, seasonality and natural and man-made shocks can affect livelihoods.
- **Livelihood strategies:** on the basis of the interaction of the above three sets of factors, households are able to carry out different livelihood strategies, such as farming, employment or trading.
- **Livelihood outcomes:** these refer to how successful the livelihood strategies have been in ensuring access to food or income or other measures of welfare.

Although HEA was developed before and independently of the SLF, the two share many common elements. HEA explicitly describes livelihood strategies and outcomes through an analysis of sources of food and income and of expenditure patterns. The wealth breakdown in HEA looks at the assets available to the households, and this can be expressed in terms of the five types of assets or capitals in the SLF. In practice, however, most HEA assessments have not looked in detail at the ‘quality’ of human capital (that is, the education or skills and health status of different wealth groups), but have focused more on the quantity of labour typically available in different wealth groups.

In HEA, the vulnerability context is expressed in terms of a problem specification for a current year and more broadly as a description in the baseline report of the different shocks to which households are vulnerable. HEA assessments do not usually include an explicit analysis of policies, institutions and processes, and this is an area that could be strengthened. Currently, it is common within HEA to describe aspects of key policies, institutions and processes where they help explain the wealth breakdown or different aspects of access to food and income or expenditure patterns.

Given their respective roots as tools for emergency assessments and for more development-oriented planning, HEA assessments have tended to focus on livelihood strategies and outcomes, while SLF assessments have focused more

on understanding the factors underlying those strategies and outcomes. However, while there may be time and resource issues to consider, there is no methodological reason why greater emphasis could not be placed on understanding all types of capitals and policies, institutions and processes in HEA interviews, if that is what is required from the research question. Alternatively, additional specialised tools could be combined with HEA to ensure adequate coverage of all aspects of livelihoods, such as the ‘social relations framework’, for understanding power and social dynamics. Meanwhile, adding an element of quantification to descriptions of livelihood strategies and outcomes means that decision-makers can understand the relative importance to different groups of different ways of getting food and income, and can see and compare absolute levels of food insecurity and poverty. This makes HEA a very useful tool for operationalising the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework.

As an approach that provides a quantified view of livelihoods and a practical method for information collection, HEA is a useful tool for operationalising the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework.

HEA and the Integrated Phase Classification

The Integrated Food Security and Humanitarian Phase Classification (IPC) is a system for defining the severity of a situation, based on a wide range of indicators of the impact of a hazard event on human health and welfare (such as mortality rate and nutritional status). The IPC is intended as a tool to build consensus about the severity of a humanitarian problem. The classification places a country along a scale from ‘generally food secure’ to ‘famine/humanitarian catastrophe’. While the system was developed originally by FAO in Somalia, the classification is intended to be internationally comparable, and, as such, is particularly attractive to donors as an aid to prioritising resource allocation between and within countries.

The IPC is a classification scheme. It is not a method of assessment and does not generate estimates of beneficiary numbers or amounts of assistance. It gives broad guidance on the type of assistance that is appropriate in each phase, but cannot on its own give detailed information on locally appropriate responses. The IPC relies on existing information sources to provide the data needed to

classify the situation – a process described as ‘meta-analysis’. Within these potentially disparate sources of information, analysts look for a convergence of evidence pointing towards a particular phase, rather than relying on strict thresholds. IPC does not prescribe methods of collecting information. However, the ability of IPC to go beyond simply classifying the situation and to predict how the situation will develop, and what precise responses will be appropriate, depends on the methods used for collecting the reference information.

The IPC relies on existing information sources to provide the data needed to classify a situation. Its ability to predict how a situation will develop, therefore, depends on the methods used to collect and analyse the reference information.

HEA complements the IPC well, and, indeed, was a major component of the food security information system in Somalia that underpinned the IPC’s development there. HEA normally collects information on a number of the key reference outcomes used in the IPC, such as food access, livelihood assets, coping strategies and hazards. But in addition to supplying information to determine the phase that a particular area is currently in, HEA can further complement the IPC by (1) estimating numbers of people in need, types and amounts of assistance required, and the time frame for delivering the assistance; and (2) predicting future phases. The ability to predict how the situation will develop is a particular advantage of HEA over other systems for vulnerability assessment (see ‘HEA and other approaches to vulnerability analysis’ earlier in this section for more on this), and would further enhance the usefulness of the IPC to decision-makers at national and international level.

6.2 How HEA links to other areas of inquiry

HEA and nutrition

Food security assessments and nutrition surveys and analyses are frequently carried out independently of one another, but the information provided by one can be very useful to the other. Most obviously, a HEA assessment tells us about the access of different wealth groups to their minimum energy needs. However, energy is only one component of an adequate diet, and, indeed, food

insecurity is only one of three possible underlying causes of malnutrition – the others being poor childcare and a poor public health environment and access to healthcare. Therefore, decision-makers wanting to use both HEA and nutrition data may want to ask the following questions:

- What can HEA tell us about dietary quality?
- What can HEA tell us about the causes of malnutrition?
- What can HEA tell us about the risk of malnutrition in the future?

Dietary quality

HEA is best suited to assessing whether access to macronutrients is sufficient. When discussing access to food, HEA typically focuses on energy (kcal), but it is relatively easy to add further analysis of access to protein and fat, as information on the sources of those macronutrients is collected as a matter of course. While an analysis of types of food accessed in HEA gives some broad indication of differences in dietary diversity between wealth groups, access to micronutrients is more difficult to assess using HEA. Sufficient quantities of many vitamins and minerals are provided in relatively small quantities of certain foodstuffs, and HEA's quantification is usually not precise enough to capture this reliably. HEA can, however, indicate whether certain types of food are present in the diet or not, which can prompt further investigation into the risks of specific micronutrient deficiencies.

Causes of malnutrition

HEA assessments can tell us whether or not elevated levels of malnutrition in a population are caused by food insecurity. Where food access falls significantly below 100% of minimum calorie requirements, malnutrition will occur. Linking HEA and nutrition survey data more closely requires ensuring (1) that indicators of wealth are somehow included in a nutrition survey, so that the wealth group into which households fall can be determined, and (2) that the geographical coverage of both the HEA and nutrition survey is the same, or that the sampling for the nutrition survey has been designed in a way that enables analysis by livelihood zone to be done. While HEA cannot tell us if malnutrition is caused by poor health or caring practices, it can very usefully tell us whether poverty is hindering access to healthcare or to soap and other items for good hygiene, and it can tell us if a balanced diet is unaffordable or if infant care is being disrupted by the need for mothers to take on heavy workloads.

Future risks of malnutrition

Because HEA is a predictive tool, we can indicate whether there is likely to be food insecurity in the future that could lead to malnutrition. While the diversity of factors that goes into determining nutritional outcomes makes precise prediction of malnutrition rates impossible, statements about future risks can be made on the basis of HEA outcomes by considering three issues:

- the time it may take for coping strategies – including harmful ones that may be used before food consumption is significantly reduced – to be exhausted
- the likely size of the deficit – while a 10% deficit at a point in time may not cause malnutrition, a 50% deficit is certainly going to cause problems
- the seasonality and timing of the deficit – a 17% deficit spread evenly throughout the year sounds bad, but not awful; but if that annual deficit is concentrated in just two months of the year, it translates into a very serious deficit of 100% for those two months.

Monitoring HEA predictions using nutritional status data is made more difficult, however, because nutritional status is generally considered a relatively late indicator, since unless there is displacement of a population or other sudden cutting-off of access to food, it usually takes some weeks or even months for the effect of a shock to show itself in changes in nutritional status. With slow-onset disasters such as drought, the main diminution of access to food may come quite late in the process, and the nutritional effects some weeks after that, so that changes in nutritional status would be a particularly late indicator for monitoring.

In addition, it can be difficult to interpret malnutrition rates in a ‘bad year’ in the absence of ‘normal situation’ survey evidence referring to the same geographical area in the same season. Nutritional surveillance over any wide area – meaning the measurement of a sample within the population at regular intervals – is expensive and extremely rare, but it is the data from such a system that provides the most credible baseline for interpreting rates of malnutrition in a bad year. Nutrition surveys are more typically undertaken in response to crisis, and interpreting data in relation to such one-off, geographically and seasonally specific surveys can be very difficult.

However, the Malawi Integrated Nutrition and Food Security Surveillance System (run by the Ministry of Health/Action Against Hunger) is a good

example of a system that relates nutritional outcomes to initial HEA predictions, in this case made by the Malawi VAC, thus (indirectly) monitoring the effectiveness of response programmes.³¹

HEA and market analysis

All populations to a greater or lesser extent rely on markets, either to purchase goods and services, or to earn an income. Access to markets and the ways that those markets function have a substantial effect on the household economy. Figure 24 summarises how an understanding of markets is relevant at different stages of HEA analysis.

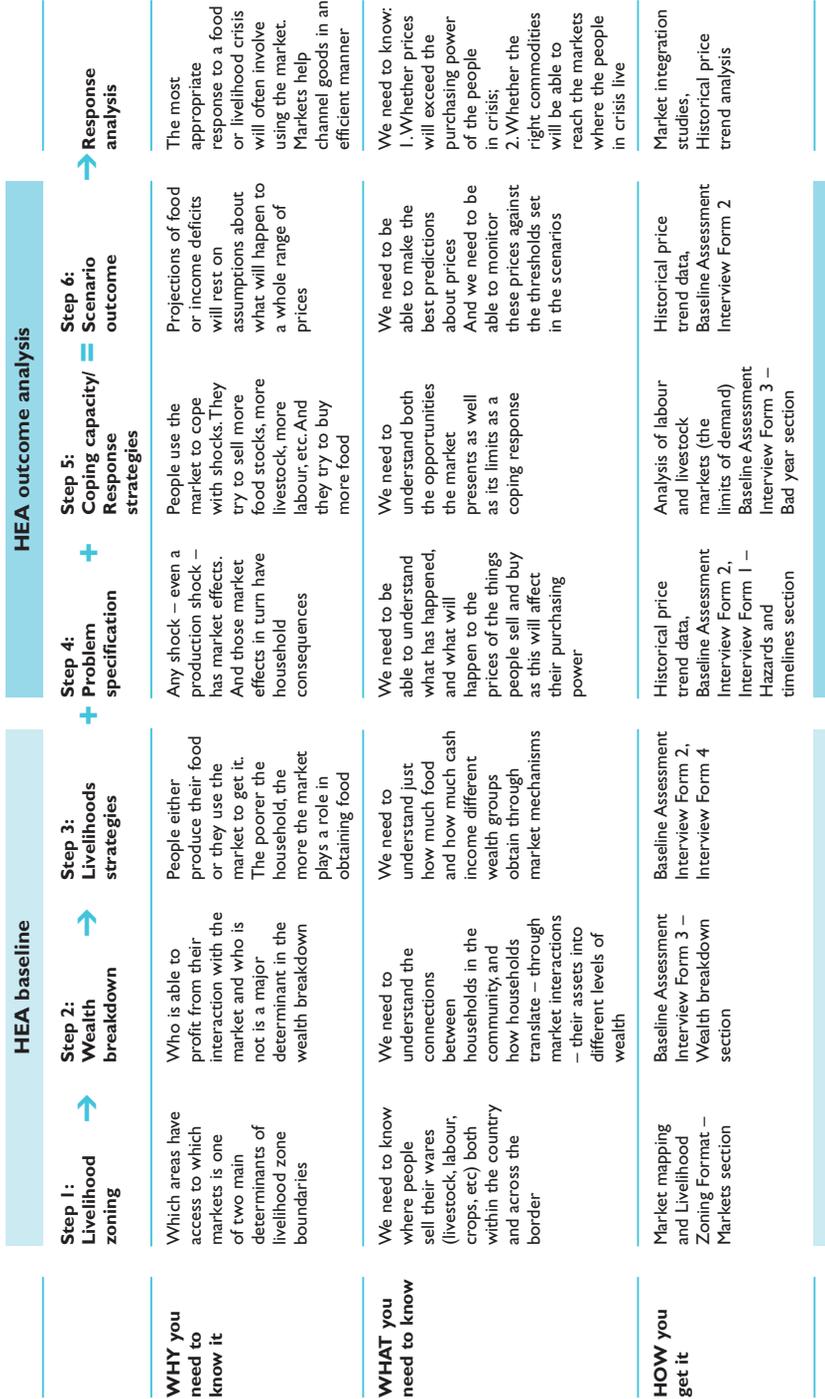
Market analysis in HEA is based on information on patterns of trade and market functioning from key informants such as traders, district officials and village representatives, combined with secondary information such as historical price data. The most important markets in HEA tend to be those for staple foods, livestock and, to a lesser extent, casual labour. Other markets such as those for cash crops or minerals may also need to be considered.

Analysis of this information focuses on understanding:

- the extent to which different wealth groups depend on particular markets and are exposed to changes within them, such as an increase in grain prices, a fall in cash crop prices or wage rates, or a decline in the quantity of grain available for purchase
- the factors that need to be monitored in relation to possible market shocks, such as the availability of grain in markets within the livelihood zone; the supply of grain or the demand for labour in linked markets outside the livelihood zone; governmental regulation of markets; or the functioning of transport infrastructure
- how markets are affected by or react to different hazards – for example, what impact does a drought have on grain prices and the quantities available for sale? – and how this translates into impacts on the household economy.

Many HEA assessments have shown how changes in market conditions can translate into effects on livelihoods at the household level. In Binga, Zimbabwe, an HEA analysis in 2001 indicated how a relatively small drop in crop production would translate into a serious impact on the ability of poor casual labourers to get by, because an increase in competition for a limited amount of work would drive down wage rates. HEA analysis can also highlight

Figure 24: How market analysis fits into the HEA framework



questions on particular markets on which further research could be beneficial, or areas where, for example, the pattern of demand evident in an HEA inquiry seems not to accord with the pattern of supply. For example, the overwhelming reliance of poor households on local casual employment, or *ganyu*, in Malawi, in both ‘normal’ and bad years has seemed out of all proportion to the possible demand for such labour among better-off households. A better understanding of this particular labour market and of its underlying dynamics would contribute a great deal to an understanding of poor people’s vulnerability to drought.

The use of more specialised market analysis in conjunction with HEA assessments can provide additional insight into the range of interventions that might be appropriate in tackling longer-term problems. For example, an HEA study carried out in north-east Turkana in Kenya in 2006 was undertaken in tandem with a market analysis³² which looked in greater depth at the markets (in grain and livestock particularly) on which households depend. This analysis was particularly important, as the poor functioning of the markets was a key constraint to any attempts at strengthening livelihoods in the area. Volumes traded were low and transaction costs were high, and improving conditions for traders was identified as a vital component of any package to revitalise the area’s economy. Possible measures included facilitating better coordination among individual traders to reduce transaction costs, support to the infrastructure, including the improvement of roads and communications such as mobile phone networks, and giving traders more options on where to buy and sell.

The use of more specialised market analysis alongside HEA assessments can be useful in filling information gaps and in identifying appropriate interventions.

Similarly, an HEA assessment of informal mining communities in Zimbabwe indicated that miners were earning only Z\$7,000 per ton of chrome mined, while the international mining company that was at the end of the market chain was buying that chrome at Z\$70,000 per ton. The use of supply chain analysis to explain the difference in the two figures could usefully have fed into further inquiry into appropriate interventions for supporting the miners’ livelihoods in the long term.

Detailed, formal market studies and analyses such as those carried out by WFP for its Strengthening Emergency Needs Assessment Capacity (SENAC) project, and work by FEWS-NET on informal cross-border trade in southern Africa, can also provide useful information for HEA analysis.

HEA and political economy analysis

Political economy analysis is based on the idea that patterns of asset ownership and of access to food and income among different wealth groups are very much related to who has power and how it is exercised. In these terms, an analysis of power at different levels is necessary to explain the causes of food insecurity. Political economy analysis has been described as “focusing on the distribution of power and wealth between different groups and individuals, and on the processes that create, sustain and transform these relationships over time”.³³

Power can affect food security at different levels. Within the household, for example, gender roles determine who does what work, whether women have control over the use of assets and income, and whether women can inherit land and other assets. At a higher level, power relations can also be the cause of competition for access to land or grazing rights, which can lead to conflict, or of competition for political power, which can lead to marginalisation and discrimination. All of these influence the livelihood strategies that different people can pursue.

An understanding of political economy can, therefore, contribute to food security analysis and programming in three ways. First, it can provide a deeper understanding of the social and political causes of poverty and food insecurity which can sometimes – if rarely – be addressed by humanitarian agencies. Second, it can help predict the problems that may arise as a result of conflict between different groups. Third, it can help ensure sensitivity to power relationships and potential for conflict in the programming of interventions.

Although a limited investigation into power relations can be incorporated within an HEA assessment, it can be more useful for a complementary political economy analysis to be carried out using checklists and tools specifically developed for that purpose. These tend to use the same field methods (key informants and semi-structured interviews) as those used within HEA and they include the ‘Social Relations Framework’, the ‘Local Capacities for Peace

Framework’, and conflict analysis tools such as the UK Department for International Development’s (DFID’s) ‘Conducting Conflict Assessments: Guidance Notes’. This sort of analysis will complement standard HEA results well. HEA assessments indicate who is food insecure, when, and to what extent, and can indicate aspects of livelihoods that are weakest, while a greater understanding of power will provide insight into the causes of food insecurity. It can also help determine which livelihood support options are most likely to be successful and what social and political issues may need to be addressed to tackle the root causes of poverty.

Political economy analysis can provide a deeper understanding of the social and political causes of poverty and can therefore complement HEA inquiries well.

6.3 How HEA can contribute to particular issues

Using HEA to distinguish between chronic and transitory food insecurity

Food security questions go beyond drought and ‘bad years’ to more permanent circumstances for considerable numbers of people in southern Africa. The chronically food insecure are those who either consistently fail, year on year, to meet their full energy requirements, or those who live so ‘close to the edge’ that any small shock can tip them into crisis. It is important for policy-makers to differentiate between the chronically food insecure and those with a temporary inability to access sufficient food as a result of a shock, since the distinction has implications for response: a short-term relief intervention that will help fill the deficit of the transitorily food insecure will not be an appropriate measure for addressing the fundamentally different problems of the chronically food insecure.

The chronically food insecure are commonly those existing on the edge of a given economic mode of life, and in this sense ‘marginal’. They tend to lack productive assets, whether in land, livestock or labour. Many elderly-headed households, for example, lack the strength to work, and those who lack kinship links or other means of community support can find themselves unable to earn

a living. Others may be able-bodied but, as in the case of youths in some communities, lack access to other assets such as land or skills. Others again – such as those widowed women whose inheritance rights are not respected – may have had their assets taken away or be otherwise unable to use them. All these groups may be chronically food insecure, but the appropriate response to each situation varies. The first group may be best supported through old age pensions or some other form of social protection; the second needs support that will enable them to become productive and ‘graduate’ from poverty; while the third group may need policy measures or legal support to maintain their entitlements.

Identifying how the chronically food insecure can be supported involves looking at the particular constraints of different groups within this category.

HEA can be used as a tool both to distinguish the chronically food insecure from those who are facing transitory food insecurity, and as a means of understanding the characteristics of the chronically poor and possible means of supporting them. HEA tries to understand typical livelihoods patterns, vulnerabilities and hazards, and differences between good, bad and average years. With this information we can see which groups are struggling even in the absence of external shocks. Those groups who are unable to meet their minimum food energy needs even in an average year can be considered chronically food insecure. Those who can normally manage but as a result of a hazard are unable to meet their food needs at a particular point in time can be considered transitorily food insecure.

Another question for policy-makers is the extent to which the transitorily food insecure will be able to recover: have they been pushed over the edge? By reviewing their assets and the sustainability of their livelihood strategies (are they drawing down on a limited supply of assets? Or are they actually accumulating capital holdings of some kind?), we can model further in advance and see whether people risk getting caught in a poverty trap that will eventually lead to chronic food insecurity.

Because the chronically food insecure can be a relatively heterogeneous group, an investigation into their circumstances using HEA may need to

disaggregate the poorer wealth groups further to be of practical use. Ways in which this can be done are outlined in ‘Disaggregated variants of HEA’ in section 4.3.

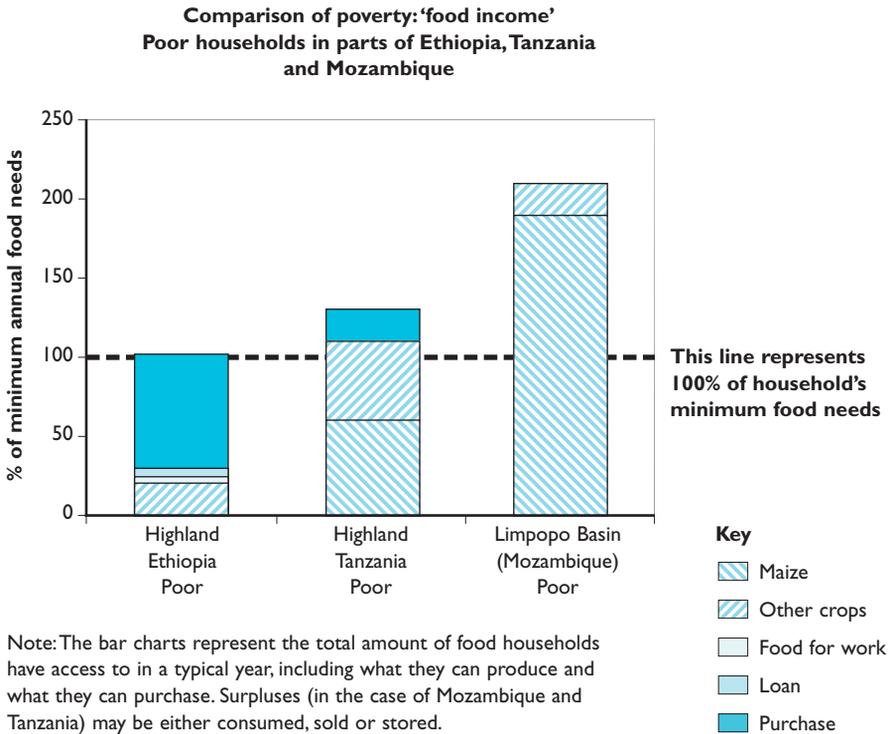
Using HEA to measure levels of poverty

HEA can be used to measure and compare levels of poverty within and across geographic areas. Ultimately, wealth is a measure of how much people can obtain with what they have available. HEA helps get at this through converting all sources of food and income to a common currency – the ratio between calories required for the household, in annual terms, and those provided by the source of food or income. So, for instance, it is possible to express different ways of obtaining food (production vs purchase) and different types of crops (cassava vs maize) in the same terms (% of annual food needs met), which allows you to compare the relative importance (in food terms) of these different sources.

This way of measuring poverty has distinct advantages over two other frequently employed methods: that of comparing against a minimum income threshold, and consumption surveys. Income in rural areas is often hidden, with local labour, gifts and petty trade often falling through the gaps. Consumption surveys, on the other hand, are a reflection of choice as much as access, and say little about people’s assets and income sources. HEA captures the full range of reported income and food options, making it possible to see clear differences in real wealth between households.

There are two ways that HEA typically expresses this measurement. It can do so firstly in terms of ‘food income’, and secondly in terms of ‘maximum access’. **Food income** simply means the total amount of food produced, purchased or received by the household in a typical year. Figure 25 provides an example of how this kind of analysis provides an interesting basic comparison of poor household wealth across very different country contexts.

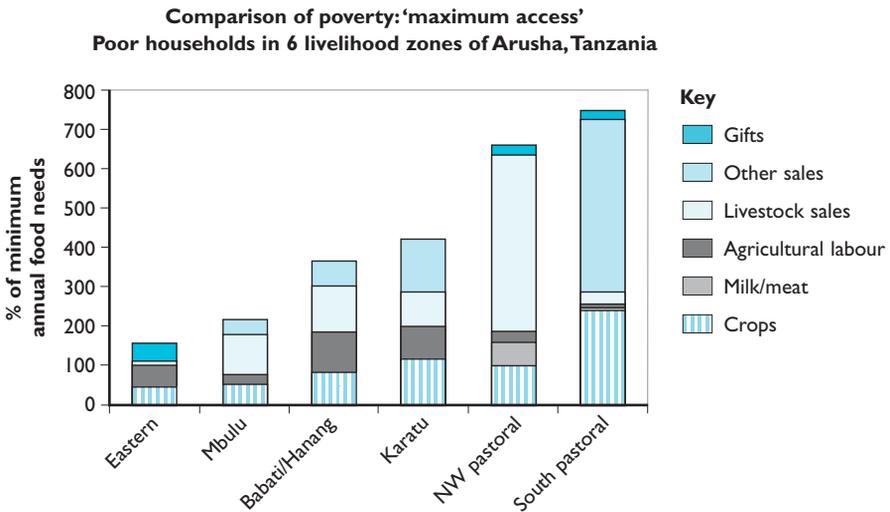
While this is the simplest way to express the measurement, and can be useful in certain contexts, it leaves out most income as well as assets such as livestock, which together usually comprise a substantial proportion of household wealth. **Maximum access** is, therefore, a more inclusive way of measuring poverty, because it takes account of all food produced, all income potentially earned, and all convertible assets. In other words, if all of a household’s potential food

Figure 25: Comparing poverty using 'food income'

production, income earnings and productive assets could be converted into food, maximum access shows how much of a year's food requirements this would cover for a household.

Figure 26 (overleaf), for instance, shows that poor households in the Eastern Livelihood Zone in Tanzania could potentially cover around 150% of their annual food needs if they maximised all of their livelihood strategies. We know that households do not maximise their access to food in most years, choosing instead to put assets in reserve for other purposes. Maximum access is, therefore, not meant to be an illustration of what people *actually* do, but rather a measurement of what they would be able to obtain if they had to. In that sense, it provides a useful tool for comparing household economic potential or wealth.

Figure 26: Comparing poverty using ‘maximum access’



Note: The bar graphs represent ‘maximum access’, or the total amount of food and income (converted into kilo-calorie equivalents) available to households based on reference year production and price data. In other words, the bars show just how much of the household’s annual calorie requirements could be covered if it converted all of its assets (food production, income generation, productive capital, etc) into food.

Source: Based on analysis conducted by Tanya Boudreau using data gathered during an assessment organised by Save the Children, the Government of Tanzania and WFP

Using HEA to understand and address the needs of specific groups: the examples of children and HIV/AIDS-affected families

A ‘classic’ HEA assessment provides household economy information by wealth group within each livelihood zone. However, certain users may need information on specific sub-sections of the population other than wealth groups. These may be demographic groups such as children, the elderly or women,³⁴ or groups defined in social, cultural or economic terms such as those affected by HIV and AIDS, specific ethnic minorities, or people doing a specific livelihoods activity (such as sex workers). When considering such groups, decision-makers are typically interested in:

- What differentiates them from other groups in terms of their livelihood activities and their food security or overall wealth?

- What particular needs do they have and/or what specific interventions would be most suited to their circumstances?

The HEA framework can be used, with minor adaptations, to field methods to look into these questions. To illustrate, we can consider two typical areas of research: the situation of HIV/AIDS-affected households, and the situation of children within families.

Using HEA to understand the needs of HIV/AIDS-affected households

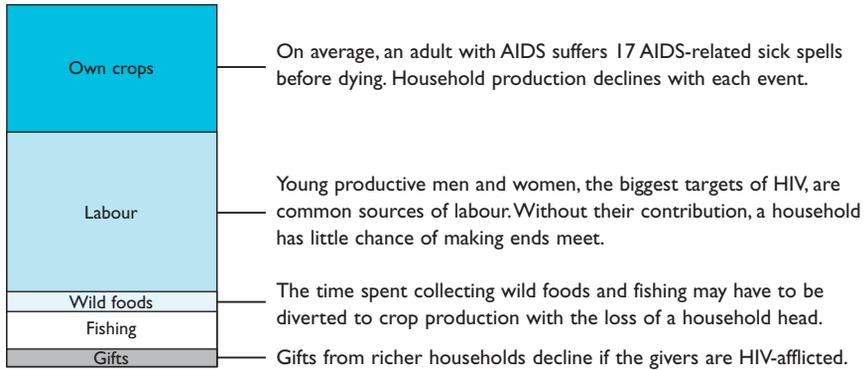
In recent years, the links between HIV and AIDS, food security and livelihoods have been the subject of much research and many direct interventions. The impact of HIV and AIDS on livelihoods are multiple and diverse: it can reduce the ability of sick household members to work; increase the demands on remaining household members' time to care for the ill; increase the burden of healthcare costs; and lead to problems with the inheritance by the bereaved of land and other assets. The ways in which different aspects of the household economy can be affected by HIV and AIDS is illustrated in Figure 27 (overleaf).

The HEA framework can be used to examine the situation of HIV/AIDS-affected households and to illustrate the effects of HIV and AIDS. In this case, we would take our baseline as being the period before the effects of HIV and AIDS were felt, and look at assets, food, income and expenditure as usual. HIV and AIDS would then be treated as a shock, or as a collection of shocks, with those affected providing information both on how they have been affected and how they have responded. For example, the problem specification may show that the loss of labour as a result of illness caused a 100% loss of casual labour income if the ill household member was the only one working, or a 300% increase in the cost of healthcare, etc. The response may be, for example, an increase in the number of livestock sold as a coping mechanism, or in an increase in work by other members of the household to compensate for the loss of labour of the ill member.

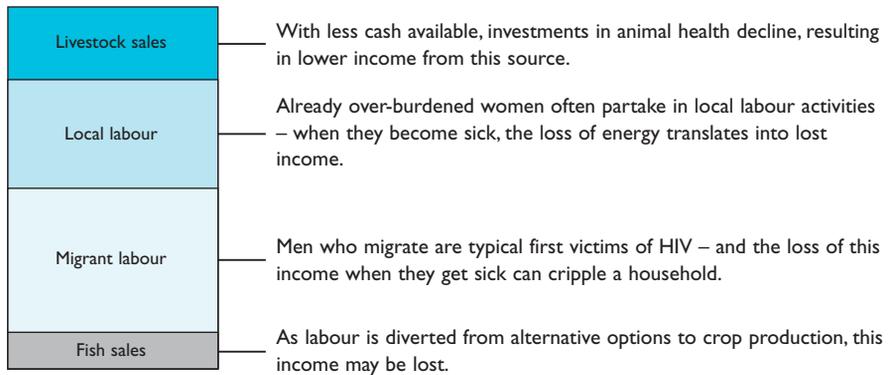
The added value of HEA in this case is that it gives a holistic view of the impacts of HIV and AIDS, rather than focusing on, for example, the impacts on agricultural production alone. It enables us to see how the household adapts to the illness, recognising that while the overall impact will almost invariably be negative, households will try to re-allocate their labour and other assets to minimise those negative impacts.

Figure 27: HIV and AIDS and the household economy

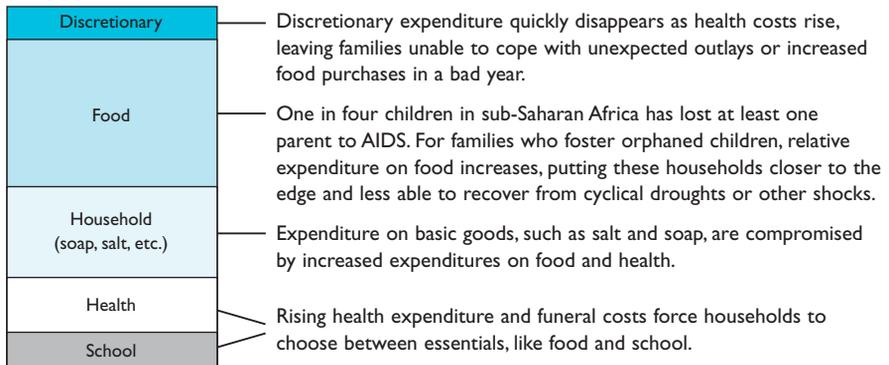
Sources of food



Sources of cash



Expenditure patterns



In terms of the methods needed for collecting this information, some adaptation of the purposive sampling normally used for HEA assessments is required, in that it is necessary to define quite clearly the type of people who will be interviewed in order to get the clearest results. For example, the broad category of ‘HIV/AIDS-affected’ can include families with someone who is chronically ill, families who have recently lost an income-earner, or families who have taken in an orphaned child. The nature of the ‘shock’ resulting from HIV and AIDS may differ significantly in each case, and so care should be taken not to over-aggregate information by placing all HIV/AIDS-affected families in a single category. Similarly, disaggregating by wealth remains necessary, as the impact of HIV and AIDS on a family that was initially better off could vary substantially from the impact on a poor family, especially in the short term. Because of the sensitivity of the issue of HIV and AIDS in some cases, it may be more effective to interview people on an individual basis rather than in focus groups.

Once information on HIV/AIDS-affected families has been collected, then their status can be compared with those unaffected. But to do so effectively, it is again vital to ensure that you are comparing the affected and unaffected within the same wealth group. Comparing, for example an affected family from a better-off background with an unaffected family from a poor background would produce confusing results. This type of comparison is also important as a means of trying to separate out the effects of other shocks from the shock of HIV and AIDS. For example, if there has also been a drought between the baseline period and the current period, then it is useful to compare the change over time between affected and unaffected households to try to determine how much of the change for the affected households is caused by HIV and AIDS and how much by drought.

Using HEA to understand the needs of children

Considering the situation of children within HEA involves incorporating the same kind of sensitivity that can be given to power or conflict or gender issues. It does not require changes to the framework or major changes to field methods.

Within most recent HEA assessments by Save the Children, an effort has been made to consider (1) how children contribute to the livelihood of their family and (2) how their family’s livelihood affects not only children’s access to food,

but other aspects of their welfare, such as access to education and healthcare, or the risk of abuse or exploitation.

In the first case, the work goes beyond classic HEA analysis by looking more systematically at who does what within the household. This, equally, could be applied to considering the roles of women or the elderly. In assessments to date, the information for children has been gathered by talking directly to boys and girls of different ages, in addition to including it in discussions with parents. The direct discussions with children have on occasion been found to reveal activities that children engage in of which parents are largely unaware, such as small-scale hunting and the selling of birds and small animals in Zimbabwe, or activities that parents are reluctant to discuss, such as sending children from poor families to do paid domestic work for better-off families in Ethiopia.

By getting a clearer sense of children's roles, the impact on children of hazards can also be understood more thoroughly and the implications highlighted for decision-makers. For example, is there a risk that increased casual labouring will mean increased child labour? Might there be an increase in dangerous forms of labour undertaken by children, such as mining? Might girls be exposed to greater risk of sexual exploitation if coping strategies include transactional sex or sending girls away for domestic work? This sort of analysis is vital both for strengthening the case for fast and adequate response to emerging livelihoods problems, and for encouraging responses that go beyond traditional food-focused activities.

7 Limits and criticisms of HEA

The application of HEA in the field of early warning and emergency needs assessment has been tested and developed over more than a decade in a range of conditions and different contexts. Over the same period, the approach has been adapted and used for other purposes, such as the identification and design of poverty reduction and social protection strategies. This history and range of experience has entailed methodological adaptations and the development of new tools, and some of the criticisms levelled at HEA in its early days no longer apply. For example, HEA was originally criticised for focusing too much on emergency response and food aid requirements, and for not being applicable in urban contexts or situations of conflict. Its wider application as described in Chapter 2, ‘How has HEA been used?’, has shown that it adapts well to different contexts and purposes.

Learning from experience should include continued attention to criticism. The only caveat is that the criticism should be about things HEA can reasonably be expected to do. There are, of course, many aspects of project planning and implementation for which HEA does not provide information, and these are listed in Table 12 overleaf.

It is also worth bearing in mind that the central subject that HEA does tackle – the assessment of livelihoods under pressure – is by no means simple. The challenge for HEA has been to construct a practical field approach for identifying the threshold between poverty and livelihood failure – or between poverty and livelihood security – and to do so in a quantified way. Such differences are often delicate and difficult to discern, and no one with experience of the rigours of field work wishes to make the task more difficult than it has to be. Adaptations to the approach will continue to be made; however, such adaptations must always consider the

The assessment of poor people’s livelihoods in relation to thresholds that are delicate and difficult to discern will never be easy.

Table 12: What HEA does not provide

- macroeconomic analysis
- direct political and social analysis
- analysis of food 'utilisation' in the sense of the absorption of nutrients by the body; or analysis of dietary quality and micronutrient deficiencies
- an analysis of the operational feasibility of implementing particular projects
- information on the delivery infrastructure and logistics
- an analysis of market infrastructure/viability
- detailed information on targeting such as distribution lists³⁵
- an analysis of the political considerations in deciding on one type of intervention over another
- a wider environmental or anthropological analysis of project impact: can the environment support more livestock? Might the project exacerbate intra- or inter-community relations? How might it affect patterns of reciprocity between the poor and the better off?
- analysis of the political context of an humanitarian crisis.

Note: Should these things be needed by decision-makers and should the necessary skills and resources be available, they could be done in conjunction with an HEA assessment.

trade-offs between the detail and relevance of the information sought and the time and money required for field work and analysis.

Criticisms made of HEA include the following:

HEA requires high calibre staff and a lot of training

Conducting an HEA investigation in the field *is* a technically demanding task. This is not a questionnaire system, with field assistants or enumerators filling in forms and with the entire data analysis carried out by someone else later. A successful 'household economist' has to be a clear analyst as well as a rigorous field worker. HEA field staff must fully grasp not only the key information requirements but the concepts which have generated them: as far as possible the information has to make sense as it is recorded in the field, and where it does not, that must prompt further questions.

HEA field work does not require people with higher degrees – or any degrees at all. But it does ask a lot from field workers and this means that more time is required for staff training than for a typical sample survey. An apt person will need about one week's 'desk' training on the concepts and procedures, but the rest of the standard training tends to be 'on the job', doing field interviews; and

this should be under the supervision of an experienced team leader. As with most technical skills, practice counts heavily. While these demands are in one sense a drawback, they also have their benefits. These include capacity-building: staff develop a better understanding of the concepts of livelihoods and food security in general, and of the areas and populations under investigation in particular. There is also a much

HEA field work is technically demanding and requires staff to be well trained. But this has benefits in terms of capacity-building and in terms of a greater sense of shared ownership among staff of the analysis.

greater sense among staff of shared ownership of the analysis and, therefore, of the output. In this way, an HEA assessment is not only an exercise in obtaining information, but a process of building the confidence and capacity of staff to construct an account of livelihoods for themselves. For those staff who are also involved in designing and implementing interventions, these skills can enhance their work considerably.

Investigators in any kind of survey have to understand the basics of the subject they are inquiring into, otherwise the questions are likely to be posed badly. They also have to understand how to do the minimum of basic cross-checking and they have to be sufficiently committed to the exercise to not simply sit under a tree and fill in the interview formats themselves. The pertinent point is not that HEA methods themselves require high-quality and trained staff, but that high-calibre staff are needed by any method that seeks to provide valid and convincing data on livelihoods.

HEA is expensive

This criticism often attaches to the foregoing. Yet unlike sample surveys involving large numbers of field enumerators, for coverage of the same population HEA typically involves two to four teams of around four people; the field methods of HEA are, after all, those of rapid appraisal. But the expense referred to is usually that of international consultants – for training, field work planning, and field team leadership or supervision; for helping with the analysis and write-up; and for leading the use of the data for situation-monitoring or other purposes. There is no question that international consultants are expensive compared with local consultants or the time of

government professionals. This, of course, is not a problem exclusive to HEA: many surveys of other types involve the use of international staff. However, it is an issue that needs to be confronted.

One-off HEA exercises are inevitably more expensive if local staff are not capable of running them. The capacity-building referred to in relation to the first criticism above comes strongly into focus here. HEA has become institutionalised in a number of places, including Malawi, Somalia and Ethiopia, and national staff increasingly run the show. HEA is at its best and least expensive when it involves continuity and ‘nationalisation’, so that local staff run the training and the other steps listed above, while international consultants may be called in only for quite specific and short tasks. In that case, HEA can actually be cheaper in terms of personnel/time than many other survey procedures.

Another criticism is that HEA baselines are expensive to develop, in terms of personnel time and logistics. Again, this is true of many surveys. But a baseline is almost by definition something that is referred to for a long time afterwards. For instance, the baseline developed by the Malawi VAC in 2002/03 has been used for national assessments in all the subsequent years; so one has to see the investment in the HEA baseline work in terms of its utility over time. It is usually thought that baseline information will be valid for at least five years unless a major event changes the fundamental livelihoods picture (see ‘Use of baselines’, in section 2.4). Even then, the cost of updating a baseline is likely to be considerably less than that of developing it in the first instance.

The cost of developing an HEA baseline should be seen in terms of its utility over time, since the same baseline data can normally be used over several years.

But in the end there is no getting away from the fact that good-quality information has a cost. HEA allows opportunities for short cuts in information-collection and is remarkably flexible and adaptable. But there is a ‘bottom line’: there is no point in attempting an HEA exercise without the minimum resources to provide a reliable result. And experience has shown time and again that in the long run, the cost of decisions made on the basis of poor information can be very high, in terms of missed opportunities to limit suffering as well as material wastage.

HEA assessments take too long

The time taken to do an HEA assessment is to a great extent determined by the resources available and the purpose for which the baseline information will be used. An indication of the time necessary for different types of assessment is given in section 4.4. Experience has shown that, despite the HEA requirement to cross-check and discuss information as it is being collected in the field, the time taken for both the field work and the analysis is actually short compared with most sample surveys that collect similar information, and for which results are rarely available until at least a month (and often much longer) after the completion of the field work.

HEA lacks statistical rigour

This criticism is usually based on the notion that the only ‘real’ information is that based on statistically based sample surveys. However, statistical approaches are not the only form of ‘rigour’. Statisticians will be the first to point out that random-based or probability statistical sampling may guarantee an equal chance for people to be represented in a given area, but in no way guarantees the accuracy of reported data. Whether data is collected by means of statistically sampled household interviews or through interviews of carefully identified and compared focus groups, what is important is how well it is done – and what means there are to promote accuracy. This is discussed in Chapter 5, ‘Is HEA reliable?’.

Random or other statistical sampling may guarantee an equal chance for people to be represented in a given area, but it does not guarantee the accuracy of their response to questions.

HEA is methodologically rigid

The idea of a methodology does imply a certain integrity of framework and procedures that distinguish it clearly from others. If that is defined as rigidity, then any methodology worth its salt must be ‘rigid’. For HEA, a change away from the household as the primary reference point, or from the analysis of food and cash sources and expenditure as primary procedures, would be a fundamental challenge to the methodology as such. This does not mean that a methodology cannot be adapted for different purposes; nor does it mean that a methodology should be blind to possible improvements that emanate from other methods or approaches. But unless the core of the methodology is

unsound, an ‘improvement’ cannot be something that fundamentally alters the framework and procedures, even in the name of collegiality or ‘harmonisation’. Similarly, this does not mean that HEA as a methodology should not expect – and indeed endeavour – to sit usefully beside other methodologies, such as nutritional survey or social inquiry – usefully in the sense that each tries to inform the other. But again, this does not mean that methodologies can or should be somehow merged, unless a detailed and practical case is made for both the feasibility and the advantage of merging them.

That methodologies can inform and complement each other does not mean that they can or should be somehow merged, unless the advantages and feasibility of merging them are clear.

At another level, the criticism of rigidity has sometimes referred to HEA’s strong association with one approach to collecting field information: rapid appraisal. While this is not so much a rigid adherence to one method as a reflection of its successful application over many years, it is important to recognise that HEA is a framework that can use a broad range of tools for information collection, including household sample surveys, depending on the purpose of the inquiry.

HEA is food-oriented and does not consider non-food issues such as water, health and education

Like any other practical methodology, HEA does not seek to be ‘all things to all men’ or claim coverage of, and skills in, areas attended to by other specialists. But because the analysis of livelihoods is of considerable relevance to a number of such areas, there may sometimes be an expectation that HEA include direct study of them. Clearly, where an assessment seeks to investigate the economic constraints to access to certain services, or, say, the impact of long-term illness on households’ ability to survive, HEA information collection and analysis are constructed around these requirements.³⁶ Such inquiries can also provide a useful entry point for looking at non-economic barriers to healthcare and education. But these are HEA investigations with a focus on a particular sector. Information systems that seek to tackle a question as difficult as determining which groups will fall below a certain livelihood

threshold in the future should not be expected, whatever the methodology, to include a meaningful study of other sectors.

This criticism can also relate to the practicalities of information collection. Detailed field work organised to represent large rural areas can be sufficiently rare that colleagues in other sectors may want to add some elements of inquiry – for example, into villagers’ use or views of health or education facilities – which may not be relevant to the focal question of the HEA analysis. Often, colleagues may not realise just how much effort is involved in obtaining the basic HEA field data in the time usually available, and how much of a burden additional questions may present. Constructive working together to look at how analyses of different issues complement each other is, needless to say, always welcome.

HEA is not useful in complex emergencies

Experience demonstrates that this is not the case: HEA has been used in several complex emergencies, ranging from Burundi to Somalia to Kosovo. What is true is that HEA is useful for looking at the economic aspects of such emergencies, such as household coping in terms of food and cash. It does not aim to provide an analysis of the wider social and political determinants of the crisis, although these are naturally taken into account when looking at economic coping. The links between HEA and political economy analysis are discussed in section 6.2.

HEA does not adequately analyse non-economic root causes of poverty

That is true: HEA is not designed to do this, and does not claim to. HEA is an economic analysis, and would need to be combined with additional tools to analyse non-economic factors in depth. However, HEA might be considered as one of many approaches or specialisms that have something indirect but important to contribute to such analysis of non-economic factors. The holistic description of livelihoods strategies and assets offers a remarkably acute view of poverty – for instance, of the resource constraints faced by poor people, and how they try to maximise what they

HEA describes in detail wealth divisions that are often all but invisible to outsiders, but which reflect among other things differential political and social power and influence.

can do with what they have. It describes in detail wealth divisions that are often all but invisible to outsiders, but which reflect among other things differential political and social power and influence. This interface between the economic and the non-economic enables HEA to help identify in broad terms the non-economic root causes of poverty, whether these be political marginalisation and insecurity, as in the Turkana region in Kenya (see section 3.5), or inequitable land distribution, as in the Thar Desert in Pakistan (section 3.4). Further analysis of such structural determinants of poverty is the province of other specialists.

HEA does not link community-level and macro-level analysis

HEA connects directly with the wider political economy, from land law to the wider market system, in two respects. First, it is inevitably the context within which an HEA baseline is constructed, since it forms the operating environment that ultimately defines the local constraints and opportunities that people must negotiate to run their livelihoods. Second, as a result of this connection, macro-level changes in the economy, for example, through changes in market access, or the introduction of new pricing policies, or changes in levels of or access to state benefits, can be imposed on baseline HEA information to assess the impact on people's exchange entitlements at the household level.

HEA inevitably connects with the wider political economy, since this is the operating environment that defines people's constraints and opportunities.

To this extent, HEA links to the macro level. However, HEA does not in itself include macro-level analysis either of the wider national economy or of the political and social changes that impinge on it. That is the job of other specialists, just as it is not usually the job or skill of these specialists to analyse the effects of such changes at the household level. But HEA practitioners should make a point of taking account of the analyses available at the wider level, and should seize upon any practical suggestion from other specialists as to how to do this better.

HEA does not offer the disaggregated information necessary for social protection design or targeting

While HEA analysis is usually conducted on wealth groups, for reasons described in section 2.4, the framework does not preclude the study of groups of households defined by demographic characteristics. Different sampling and analytical methods can be used to look at different groups, and this is discussed in section 4.3, while the use of HEA to understand the needs of specific groups, such as children or HIV-affected households, is discussed in section 6.3.

HEA is not a ‘one size fits all’ methodology; the methods by which HEA information is gathered and analysed continue to be adapted and developed for particular purposes. Most recently, this has been to help in the identification and design of social protection interventions, and a combination of different methods have been used in order to look at questions of interest for policy-makers (see section 4.3).

It is worth pointing out, however, that the wealth of detail offered by an HEA analysis that looks at four wealth groups already adds very great value to the design and targeting of social protection transfers (see section 3.5). HEA data can be used to compile cut-offs for livestock and land ownership, which can then be used to identify poor households requiring safety net support.³⁷ The characteristics of the ‘very poor’ or ‘poor’ wealth groups identified (by local communities) in an HEA assessment can be turned into targeting criteria, which can then be ‘passed back’ to community leaders or committees to identify individual households eligible for assistance.

However, it is important to note that targeting is rarely achieved by any kind of survey, except nutritional anthropometry aimed at screening children for special feeding programmes. Otherwise, targeting is either administrative – that is, beneficiaries are officially selected according to a given criterion, such as owning no livestock, female-headed, disabled – or it is community-based, performed by village committees according to given parameters, such as the poorest 25% of households. Whether the application of criteria identified in an HEA-type vulnerability assessment can be more accurate, timely and cost-effective than such community-based targeting – for which approaches to reduce the problems of nepotism and exclusion have been developed – is an open question.

HEA does not consider intra-household issues

This is broadly true. The HEA framework is based on the economic activities of households, not individuals, since the household is the smallest economic unit by which people manage and within which decisions related to acquiring food and cash, allocating labour and accessing basic goods and services are made. It is difficult to analyse individuals' access to food and income outside this context in any meaningful way. In HEA, we can ask about which household members are involved in different activities, but we often cannot precisely quantify the economic contributions of individual household members, nor their personal consumption of goods and services. However, the household is arguably the smallest unit at which it is effective to target support, at least in terms of programmes that aim to provide food or non-food economic support. Issues of intra-household sharing of resources, or childcare behaviour, or decisions about who should be sent to school, are for other programmes and other analyses.

In HEA, while we can ask which household members are involved in different activities, we often cannot precisely quantify the economic contributions of individual members, nor their personal consumption of goods and services.

HEA does not take into account differences in livelihood within a livelihood zone

Sometimes, groups of people living in the same livelihood zone pursue quite different patterns of livelihood, not because of differences in wealth, but for cultural reasons or because of differences in ethnicity. For example, a lakeshore zone might have two different groups living side by side: cattle-keepers who do not fish and fisherfolk who keep a few cattle. If these differences in livelihood are not just reflections of differences in wealth, then two patterns of livelihood need to be defined. The fact that the groups pursuing these patterns of livelihood live in exactly the same geographical area does not really matter; the two groups are simply considered as separate livelihoods.

But should different ethnic groups living in the same livelihood zone be analysed as separate groups? The important point here is that the economic vulnerability of ethnic groups is still defined by their livelihood patterns; how they will respond to a particular shock depends on their ability to access the

food, income and basic services they need. Of course, livelihoods are defined in part according to households' access to social and political networks; but what matters here is how such networks affect access to land, or employment, or gifts of food, rather than the social and political environment itself. This is an analysis that requires them to be grouped according to livelihood, rather than ethnicity.

How an ethnic group will respond to a shock depends on their ability to access the food, income and services they need. Access to social and political networks, defined by their ethnicity, is just one determinant of this.

On a related note, it is true that certain ethnic groups are more likely to be exposed to particular hazards such as looting or cattle-raiding. But the critical task is to group people according to what is effectively their capacity to cope, rather than to the probability of a shock occurring.

HEA is based on a 'normal' year, which in reality does not exist

HEA practice does not seek to define a 'normal' year, but instead identifies a 'reference year' for which baseline information is then gathered. This enables monitoring data in subsequent years to be compared with that in the reference or baseline year. More on the reference year and how it is chosen can be found in section 4.1.

HEA analysis does not correspond with administrative boundaries

This is discussed in 'Livelihood zones and administrative divisions' in section 2.4.