

How WFP Supported Dietary Diversification of Vulnerable Ecuadorians and Colombian Refugees

A Case Study on Nutrition-Sensitive Programming in a Middle Income Country



World Food Programme

SUMMARY

In 2014, the WFP Policy, Programme, and Innovation Division initiated a project to support Regional Bureaux and Country Offices in knowledge sharing through the documentation of a series of technical case studies in nutrition programming. The project was in response to numerous requests from programme and nutrition officers for examples of how WFP has implemented nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions. The first phase of the project highlighted flour fortification in Egypt, local production of specialized nutritious food in Pakistan, nutrition-sensitive interventions in Ecuador and the Dominican Republic, and scaling-up nutrition interventions in Niger and Malawi. WFP headquarters sent officers to each of the countries to interview stakeholders, review programming documents, and visit implementation sites. The nutrition programmes were then summarized into these case studies, which focus on key success factors and lessons learned to date from each of the experiences. The project also developed a template and guidance for writing technical case studies in order to facilitate further documentation of other experiences. The goal in sharing these case studies is to commend the hard work and successes of WFP Country Offices, and to leverage the experiences to support nutrition programming globally.

This initiative was made possible through the generous financial contribution of the Children's Investment Fund Foundation (CIFF).



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A case study on
Nutrition-Sensitive Programming
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How WFP Supported Dietary Diversification of Vulnerable Ecuadorians and Colombian Refugees

Overview:

WFP, the Government of Ecuador, and partners are implementing nutrition-sensitive programmes to increase the dietary diversity of vulnerable Ecuadorians and Colombian refugees. The programmes link local production of diverse, nutritious foods to beneficiaries. WFP repositioned itself in Ecuador as an important nutrition partner and, in close collaboration with national and local governments, and other partners, initiated two integrated programmes to increase dietary diversity, improve food and nutrition security, support stable markets for small-holder farmers, and increase capacity in food security and nutrition for beneficiaries, partners, and small-holder farmers. WFP's continued strategic leadership and technical assistance is guiding and expanding these complex programmes. This case study presents lessons on how WFP redefined its role in a Middle Income Country to address persistent problems of nutritional deficiencies and food insecurity.

Key WFP Success Factors

- Leadership with innovative vision for repositioning WFP in a Middle Income Country
- Flexibility and commitment of WFP staff and partner staff
- Capacity to capitalize on opportunity
- Ability to generate and utilize data
- Presence of WFP staff at local level
- Ability to be programmatically flexible
- Capacity and expertise to sensitize, train, and advise
- Innovation in technology to improve program efficiency

WFP and the Government of Ecuador have worked together for many years to address food and nutrition insecurity facing vulnerable Ecuadorians and Colombian refugees. Since 2011, the focus of the collaborative work has been to improve access to and promotion of consumption of healthy foods especially locally produced fresh fruits and vegetables.



WFP/Leonardo Hinojosa

Quick Facts:

- Ecuador is a Middle Income Country of 16 million people.
- Anaemia is a public health problem with a prevalence of 26% in under-5s, 38% in under-3s, and 62% in children under one year of age (2012).
- 25% of children under five suffer from chronic malnutrition.
- Ecuador has the largest influx of refugees in all of South America.

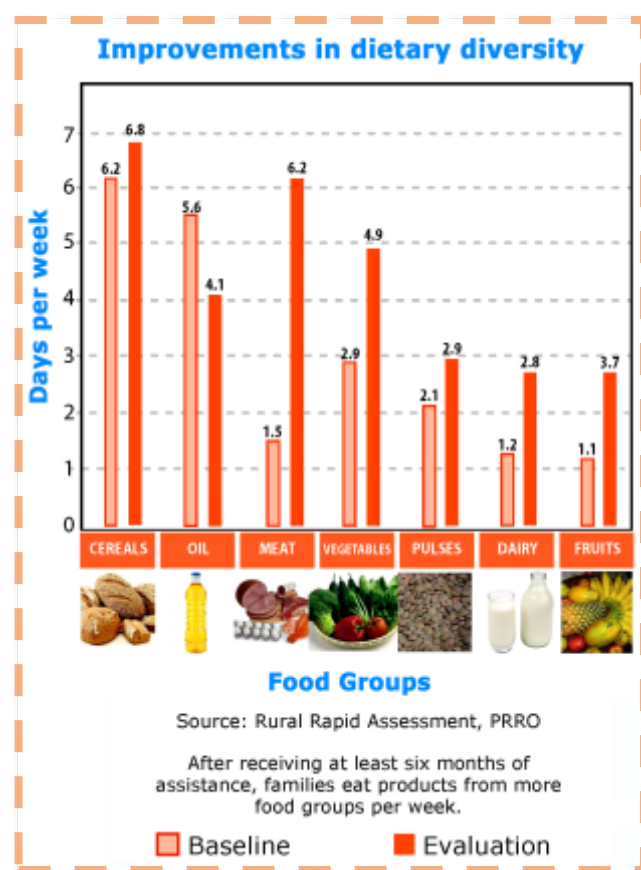
Country Context

Ecuador, in Northwest South America, receives more refugees than any other country in South America. Each month roughly 1300 Colombian refugees cross the border into Ecuador. Many are fleeing ongoing conflict and violence in Colombia and arrive needing basic necessities such as food, clothing, and housing. The border region receiving these refugees is topographically very diverse, from the coastal province of Esmeraldas, to the highland area of Carchi and Imbabura, to the Amazon basin of Sucumbíos. However, all have food and financial insecurities. Therefore, tension between incoming Colombians and Ecuadorians is common because of 1) persistent food and job insecurities in resource-limited areas; 2) the perception that Colombian refugees receive more aid and assistance than vulnerable Ecuadorians; and, 3) the perception that Colombians are a source of violence and delinquency. Although climate and geography enable Ecuadorians to cultivate a variety of foods, the typical diet of many rural Ecuadorians and Colombians consists of yucca, potatoes, rice and noodles. Malnutrition in all forms is highly prevalent with both chronic undernutrition and overweight/obesity reaching levels of public health importance. Increasing concerns about undernutrition and hunger, as well as obesity, led the Government of Ecuador to develop new nutrition-related goals as part of the second national social development plan, National Plan for Good Living 2013-2017 (Plan Nacional del Buen Vivir). One component of this plan is a conditional cash transfer programme that provides financial assistance to Ecuadorians in the poorest two quintiles of the population, the elderly, and the disabled. However, Colombian refugees are not eligible for this programme and, for various reasons, some eligible Ecuadorians are not enrolled in this programme leaving these populations vulnerable to food and nutrition insecurity.

Programme overview (2010-2014)

Prior to 2009, the WFP Country Office in Ecuador played an important role in commodity procurement and logistics. WFP also collaborated with the Government of Ecuador to strengthen food-based social programmes. In 2009, however, the Programme for the Provision of Foods, a governmental entity, assumed WFP's procurement and logistics role. From 2011-2013, the WFP Country Office in Ecuador redefined its role in this Middle Income Country. Under the leadership of a new country director, the WFP Country Office began reviewing national nutrition statistics and exploring innovative ways to continue to contribute to food and nutrition security in the changing economic, social, and political environment. With a focus on sustainable solutions, WFP Country Office

leadership established a primary programmatic objective of improving dietary diversity in the population. Informed by results from a joint quasi-experimental study with the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), and recognizing WFPs comparative advantage for linking local food production and supply to vulnerable groups, WFP developed two programmes, PRRO¹ and CLOSAN² (acronym in Spanish), that rely heavily on nutrition-sensitive programming to increase access to and promote consumption of fruits and vegetables³. Both programmes include a component of WFP provision of conditioned vouchers. Vouchers are also restricted and can only be used to purchase pre-specified, locally produced fruits, vegetables, proteins, dairy products, and other nutritious foods. Furthermore, to strengthen the linkages between nutrition objectives and development, and to achieve food systems that are nutrition sensitive, the programmes conduct strong sensitization and capacity building for beneficiaries, vendors, small-holder farmers and Government and programme staff. The linking of small-holder farmers and family farmers to WFP beneficiaries not only improves the dietary diversity of beneficiaries, but also stabilizes the market for the producers, many of whom are women, to increase their economic livelihoods.



¹In Ecuador, the "Assistance to refugees and persons affected by Colombian conflict" - Protracted Relief and Recovery Operations (PRRO) that was written to address dietary diversity and includes the conditional food voucher programme is referred to simply as "the PRRO" (200275).

²CLOSAN's name means "Strengthening local capacities for food and nutrition security".

³PRRO (200275) funded by USA, Multilateral, European Commission, Canada and Brazil. CLOSAN (TF 200436) funded by WFP USA, McKnight Foundation

- In 2012 and 2013, WFP conducted a self-evaluation of the impact of the PRRO by analysing monitoring data; specifically, Household Dietary Diversity Score and Food Consumption Score.
- In 2012, families who received WFP assistance for at least 6 months consumed foods from 7 out of 10 food groups compared to only 4 food groups before programme implementation;
- In 2013, families who received WFP assistance for at least 6 months consumed foods from 8 out of 10 food groups.
- In 2013, the percentage of targeted families with a Food Consumption Score of “poor” dropped from 40% to 4% after 6 months of WFP assistance.
- Additionally, families reported consuming meat more than 4 times as often per week after WFP intervention than before (see graphic), and also reported greater consumption of fruits and vegetables and dairy products.

In successfully implementing these programmes, the WFP Country Office in Ecuador has positioned itself as a strong partner in nutrition in a Middle Income Country.

Getting to Success: How WFP Supported Dietary Diversification of Vulnerable Ecuadorians and Colombian Refugees

Key success factors for WFPs support to diversify the diets of vulnerable Ecuadorians and Colombian refugees:

- Leadership with innovative vision for repositioning WFP’s role in a Middle Income Country
- Flexibility and commitment of WFP and partner staff
- Capacity to capitalize on opportunity
- Ability to generate and utilize data
- Presence of WFP staff at local level
- Ability to be programmatically flexible
- Capacity and expertise to sensitize, train, and advise
- Innovation in technology to improve program efficiency

WFP Leadership with an Innovative Vision

Though Ecuador is a Middle Income Country, inequality persists within both the Ecuadorian population and the population of Colombians seeking refuge from the armed conflict of their home country. Additionally, even though the Gross Domestic Product and incomes are rising, malnutrition, especially anaemia, is still very

prevalent. Ecuador continues to receive support for food and nutrition security, as well as other humanitarian and developmental needs. The Government of Ecuador manages such financial support through trust funds. Starting in 2009, governmental changes dramatically altered the way in which WFP works in the country. In 2009, Government assumed WFP’s procurement and logistics role with the establishment of the Programme for the Provision of Foods, a governmental entity. Furthermore, in 2010, Government passed a law that prohibited government-financed trust funds to be administered by international organizations and, therefore, obligated the closure of a number of the trust funds through which WFP programming was financed.

Ecuador, a Middle Income Country

Middle Income Countries (MICs), defined by the World Bank using 2015 data, are those with a Gross National Income (GNI) per capita of more than US\$1,045 but less than US\$12,746 per year. WFP recognizes that in many MICs, higher incomes have not resulted in a commensurate reduction in hunger and malnutrition. WFP, therefore, continues to work in many MICs to strengthen social safety nets, increase capacity, and support stronger, more effective institutions to address persistent challenges in food security and malnutrition.

Ecuador as a MIC:

- In 2013, the GDP per capita of Ecuador was US\$5720, a value that puts Ecuador in the category of High-Middle Income according to the World Bank parameters.
- In the last decade, Ecuador’s economy has grown by an average of 4.8 percentage points per year.
- In the last 8 years, it is estimated that there was a reduction of 1.5 percentage points per year in poverty as measured by income and as measured by the index of Unsatisfied Basic Needs (known as NBI for its Spanish acronym).
- The Gini index went from 0.54 in 2006 to 0.49 in 2013.

Although the identified indicators all show improvements, important gaps in income, investment, productivity, innovation, education, health, and gender still persist.

That same year a new country director arrived in the WFP Country Office and began exploring innovative ways to continue to contribute to food and nutrition security in the changing economic, social, and political environment.

The Government of Ecuador has prioritized addressing chronic malnutrition in children. National statistics document a persistent, stubbornly high prevalence of anaemia and malnutrition in children, and also an increasing prevalence of overweight and obesity. The WFP Country Office had the technical nutrition expertise to recognize that improving dietary diversity could positively impact all of these poor nutrition indicators. Therefore, WFP Country Office leadership selected one objective for country programming: to improve dietary diversity. WFP then maintained focus on that one objective during programme development. Having one clear objective that all stakeholders understood helped orient all actors from the decision-makers to the producers, distributors, and retailers in their role to reach the larger objective. Understanding of the significance of each actor provided meaning and credibility to everyone's role and improved morale, teamwork, and ultimately effectiveness and efficacy of the programmes.

Ecuador produces many diverse foods including fruits and vegetables throughout the calendar year. WFP Country Office leadership proposed capitalizing on WFP's comparative advantage to support improved dietary diversity through linking local production and supply of diverse foods to vulnerable populations in need. The programmes, therefore, focused on nutrition-sensitive programming and capacity development, and their success demonstrated to Government how WFP can be an important nutrition partner.

Flexibility and Commitment of Staff

The new focus on dietary diversity, capacity development, and nutrition-sensitive programming required a shift in staff roles within the Country Office. Sensitization of all staff was crucial for knowledge of the new vision and programming objective, and for motivation and full engagement. In some cases WFP staff required additional capacity development, and in others, staff had to take on new roles for project implementation. Though leadership was important in this phase, successfully repositioning the WFP Country Office role required commitment from the staff to make the shift. The efficacy, effectiveness, and speed by which the leadership committed to shifting the focus of the office helped motivate the staff change. However, staff being flexible, committed, and receptive to change made the repositioning of the WFP Country Office successful. Furthermore,

Nutrition Trainings and the Case of Quinoa

In the Sucumbíos Province, WFP staff showcased the nutritious Ecuadorian grain, quinoa, in one of the training classes directed towards recently arrived Colombian refugees. The Colombian women in the training session were unfamiliar with this grain, therefore, WFP prepared a cooking class and taste test. After the training session, the manager of the supermarket partnering with WFP in Sucumbíos, reported that the beneficiaries arrived at the store and purchased every bag of quinoa on the shelves that same day.

partners in Government and other organizations had to be receptive to the new role of WFP as well. WFP invested time and resources in sensitizing partners, building personal relationships at the national and the local level, and increasing credibility for the new role through demonstration of high technical capacity, integrity, and commitment.

Capacity to Capitalize on Opportunity

With staff at all levels receptive to making the changes in attitude and role needed for reaching the programme objective of increased dietary diversity, innovative ideas for WFP's engagement were forthcoming. Observations included:

1. the potential of schools to be excellent entry points for working in communities because improving children's lives is a mission the entire community can support;
2. the inclusion in WFP programmes of vulnerable Ecuadorians excluded from the government social safety net programme could reduce tension between the Colombian refugee population and the host Ecuadorian community;
3. the incorporation of gender and protection as cross-cutting themes in all programme activities could have multiple benefits; and,
4. the use of conditional cash or voucher programming might be successful because similar transfer modalities were already in place in other programmes in Ecuador.

With creative and innovative thinking in the Country Office, WFP programming in Ecuador combined typically separated WFP activities. The PRRO and CLOSAN programmes combined school feeding, gender empowerment, and linking local food (fruit and vegetable) production to beneficiaries to improve dietary diversity and nutrition status of vulnerable Ecuadorians and Colombian refugees.

Ability to Generate and Utilize Data to Inform Programming

Before implementing programmes with the new dietary diversity objective, WFP partnered with the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) to test the cost-effectiveness of various distribution modalities. Innovation Funds provided by WFP headquarters to the Ecuador Country Office allowed the Country Office to undertake this research.

In early 2012, WFP and IFPRI jointly implemented a quasi-experimental evaluation to compare the transfer modalities of in-kind, cash, or voucher to link local production to vulnerable populations. The results confirmed that there was little diversity in the diets of vulnerable Ecuadorians and Colombians. More innovative were the results showing that using vouchers was the most cost-effective strategy for increasing dietary diversity in the target population. In this case, WFP provided vouchers to beneficiaries for the purchase of specified food items. Further results revealed that food and nutrition trainings as part of comprehensive behaviour change communication were important for changing dietary habits and increasing dietary diversity.

Informed by the results of the WFP/IFPRI research, WFP proposed a conditional voucher programme whereby receipt of vouchers valid for the purchase of locally produced fruits, vegetables, and other nutritious foods was conditional on attendance at nutrition and health trainings.

WFP Presence at Local Level

To implement the newly proposed conditional voucher transfer programmes, WFP opened suboffices in the provinces bordering Colombia. Local WFP presence facilitated the creation of key partnerships with local governments and

Key lessons learned for WFP from programme preparation:

- Importance of capitalizing on WFPs comparative advantage to define role especially in a Middle Income Country with changing political, social, and economic landscape
- Importance of strong leadership and staff receptiveness to change
- Importance of innovative thinking to recognize and capitalize on opportunities
- Importance of conducting research and using data to inform implementation strategies

strengthened WFP's existing partnerships with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and international NGOs, specifically the Hebrew Immigration Aid Society (HIAS). A key success factor for this programming was assuring the local government that the WFP nutrition objective was aligned with local government priorities, particularly:

1. To improve the nutritional status of the population, especially in the most vulnerable groups;
2. To create economic opportunities; and
3. To decrease tension between Colombian refugees and local Ecuadorians.

WFP's programme proposal provided the local



- PRRO, Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation. Name used to describe PRRO 200275
- CLOSAN, Spanish acronym for activity called "Strengthening local capacities for food and nutrition security" (TF 200436)

governments with an opportunity to address their own priorities. These priorities also aligned with those of WFP and the national government. The local WFP presence fomented a relationship of trust between WFP and the local authorities, which gave WFP credibility to advocate the goals of the programmes and supported an environment conducive to Government receptiveness to the proposed activities. Using joint planning sessions, WFP and the local governments chose activities linking local production of fruit and vegetables to schools and communities to achieve WFP's goal of dietary diversity and simultaneously address key priorities of the local governments. WFP works extensively and collaboratively on a daily basis with staff from the local governments, and the political, financial, and administrative commitment of the local and municipal governments has been critical in programmatic success.

The Importance of Partnerships: Working with UNHCR and HIAS

UNHCR and HIAS are valuable partners for WFP in addressing the needs of incoming Colombian refugees. In 2013 a joint planning process occurred between WFP and UNHCR to create a coherent protection framework. Part of this framework focuses on nutrition, hygiene, safe water and gender-based violence support. HIAS works with WFP in five provinces. Part of joint WFP/HIAS work is financed by WFP. For example, in Carchi, HIAS helps plan and deliver trainings for the beneficiaries, and in Sucumbíos, they provide monitors to watch the children of beneficiaries so that parents can focus on WFP-led trainings.

Ability to be Programmatically Flexible

Though the activities of WFP programmes across Ecuador remain focused on the one single nutrition objective of increasing dietary diversity, WFP and partners have adapted the programmes to fit different contexts. The unique geographic characteristics of each province along the border with Colombia require unique programmatic adaptations for feasibility while continuing to reach the same objective. For example, WFP's work in Carchi and Sucumbíos, described below, illustrates WFP's programmatic flexibility throughout the country.

Bringing Fruits and Vegetables to Schools.

The Ecuadorian government discontinued government-sponsored school lunch programmes nationally and, therefore, children were attending school without receiving lunch. Having recognized that schools are good entry points for working in communities, WFP included a school-feeding

component into the PRRO. Schools are the focal points of communities, where teachers, administrators and families all have a vested interest in the well-being of the children, and WFP saw an opportunity to improve the diet of children and influence the behaviours of the entire community.

WFP's commitment to empowering women and empowering communities

In Ecuador, according to the National Institute of Statistics and Censuses, six out of ten women have experienced gender-based violence including psychological, physical, cultural or sexual. As in other countries in Latin America, women shoulder a double-burden of work, with rural women working on average of 60 hours a week, versus the 23 hours that rural men work. Based on these data:

- Women refugees account for more than 50% of the beneficiaries of the PRRO and CLOSAN programs.
- Out of the 2,054 small farmers involved in WFP activities in five provinces, 56% are women.
- Women in a Small Farmers' Association that receive extra income through WFP programmes have greater independence and ability to invest more in the lives of their children.
- Using vouchers enhances women's decision-making ability, and participation in the programme decreased gender-based violence between 38 and 43 percent.

Carchi Province and Small Farmers' Associations

In Carchi Province, WFP and the local government linked production by Small Farmers' Associations to school meals. In 2011, the local government of Carchi conducted a survey of all existing Small Farmers' Associations, and used the results to familiarize WFP with the functioning of Associations in the province. WFP engaged the Small Farmers' Associations, especially those with a majority of women members, since gender empowerment was and continues to be a priority of the WFP Ecuador country programme, to provide fruits and vegetables to schools. The local government identified eligible local schools and the appropriate Small Farmers' Associations to supply those schools with fruits and vegetables. WFP pays the Associations for the products provided to the schools. WFP also provides training and nutrition support at all levels: Associations, schools, parents, and students.

Sucumbíos Province and Family Farmers

In Sucumbíos Province, there are no Small Farmers' Associations; therefore, WFP and the local government have worked together to link production by family farmers to school meals. The Putumayo River, a tributary of the Amazon River, lies on the Colombian-Ecuadorian border and many Colombian refugees and WFP beneficiaries live in communities along the river. WFP and the local governments coordinate families with small plots (family farmers) to provide the small local schools in each community with fruits, vegetables, and animal protein. Additionally, WFP provides in-kind support of dry commodities. Local government staff deliver the fresh products from family farmers and the dry commodities by boat to the schools in these remote, isolated communities. Family farmers receive vouchers equal in value to that of the supplied products, which can be used to buy WFP-approved food items such as cereals, oil, meat, vegetables, pulses, milk, and fruit from a local supermarket.

Linking Local Production to Communities

To increase access to fruits and vegetables at the community-level, WFP and the local governments of both Carchi and Sucumbíos, have developed points-of-sale for healthy products.

In Carchi, the local government operates stores open to WFP beneficiaries and the general public that sell fresh fruits and vegetables grown by the Small Farmers' Association members. The WFP beneficiaries can purchase the produce using vouchers and the general public can purchase the produce using cash. In addition to supporting the points-of-sale, WFP provides logistic support for mobile delivery of fresh foods to reach beneficiaries of CLOSAN, families with children from 6 to 36 months, living in disperse rural communities.

In Sucumbíos, WFP works directly with the main supermarket chain (two stores) in the capital city of Lago Agrio, and engages with fruit and vegetable vendors at the town market. Prior to working with WFP, the supermarkets did not carry fresh fruits and vegetables, and the fruit vendors had no electricity or capacity to track sales or customers. After sensitization of and trainings on the WFP objective and programmes, the supermarkets engaged with WFP and began supplying fresh fruits and vegetables that could be purchased by WFP beneficiaries using vouchers or by the general public using cash. Fruit and vegetable vendors also invested time and resources into their businesses so that they too could participate in the WFP programmes. All retailers continue to receive business-related capacity building and support from WFP, highly valued skills which keep them engaged in the WFP programmes.

Training increases sales

Yolanda Peñafiel is an independent fruit and vegetable merchant in Sucumbíos. WFP beneficiaries can use vouchers to purchase her produce in the local market. Ms. Peñafiel was so satisfied with the training she received from WFP, she invested her own money in electricity, internet and a laptop so that she could participate in the WFP-supported programme. When asked about her investment and working with WFP, Ms. Peñafiel states, "Everything is going well. Just as WFP showed me new ways [of conducting business], I get to show new products to Colombians customers. [Working with WFP] has been very worth it because I have a lot of sales."



WFP/Nancy Aburto

Capacity and Expertise to Sensitize, Train, and Advise

The WFP Country Office leveraged its strong programmatic experience and nutrition expertise to optimize the implementation of programmes in Ecuador. One conclusion of the previously mentioned WFP/IFPRI research was that Behaviour Change Communication would be critical for programmatic success. Behaviour Change Communication is a nutrition-sensitive activity that is based on interpersonal communication with beneficiaries reinforced through communication with influencers of beneficiaries, and supported by fomenting an enabling environment for behaviour change. WFP staff partner with provincial and local government agencies, UNHCR, and an international

NGO partner to implement the communication activities needed to affect change in the behaviour of beneficiaries of the WFP programmes.

Beneficiaries

A primary conditionality for receipt of vouchers for food items is for beneficiaries to attend training sessions. These are group sessions of interpersonal communication organized around eight WFP-developed modules containing practical knowledge on food and nutrition, such as the importance of consuming a diverse diet. WFP also helps prepare menus and healthy recipes for traditional dishes and dishes utilizing diverse foods available at the points-of-sale that are not familiar to beneficiaries, especially the recently arrived Colombian refugees. Trainings are dynamic, participative workshops and often include taste tests, cooking demonstrations, or dramatic theatre. In 2013, WFP trained more than 60,000 beneficiaries and their family members, more than half of whom were women. WFP, provincial and local government agencies, UNHCR, and an international NGO implement these comprehensive trainings, provide child care during trainings, and respond and improve trainings based on participant feedback.

Small Farmers' Associations

WFP also trains the members of the Small Farmers' Associations on improved production techniques to increase yield without the use of chemicals or pesticides. Small farmers report cultivating foods year round, diversifying the crops they produce, and increasing the yield on their land. WFP and partners also support the Associations' accounting, money management, and business skills. All of these new capacities add value to the programmes as they increase women's empowerment and build sustainable solutions to issues of food and nutrition security, poverty, and hunger.

School Staff and Vendors

WFP trains school staff and partners on the importance of dietary diversity and how to increase the dietary diversity through school meals. By increasing the knowledge and appreciation of dietary diversity in the school staff, as well as, parents and children, sustainable change in the community is more viable.

In Carchi, WFP has trained vendors and all staff at the points-of-sale of the diversified food items on the objective of the programme, the list of WFP-approved food items, and the ways to help beneficiaries navigate through the programmes effectively. By having staff appreciate the challenges the beneficiaries face, the need for the programme, and the benefits to the local small farmers and community, staff are more supportive of the beneficiaries and more engaged and committed to the programme.

In Sucumbíos, a critical factor in securing the participation of vendors was offering benefits relevant to their businesses. WFP provides advice and training on improving customer service and merchandising, two vital facets of business operations that are difficult to find and highly valued. Furthermore, WFP provides training, advice, and expertise on monitoring at the point-of-sale, which also increases staff capacity.

Governmental leaders

Finally, WFP committed substantial time and human resources to sensitize the provincial and local governmental leaders on the programmes. WFP's local presence facilitates continuous dialogue with local authorities who are now completely versed in the objective of the programmes and their relevance to the community. The engagement of these leaders has created an enabling environment for behaviour change to increase dietary diversity in the beneficiary population.

Innovation in Technology to Improve Program Efficiency

In order to register beneficiaries, establish eligibility for benefits, and monitor beneficiary participation and food purchases, WFP contracted a local Ecuadorian information technology company to develop an electronic computer platform for monitoring and evaluation. The platform, the System Monitoring And Reviewing Transfers (SMART), currently hosts the surveillance system for the PRRO and CLOSAN programmes but is flexible enough to rapidly host surveillance of other programmes as needed. The contracted company developed the platform in less than one year for less than US\$15,000. At registration, each beneficiary receives a beneficiary card with a unique barcode that is registered in the database of beneficiaries via SMART. WFP and trained partner staff use barcode readers connected to computers to track beneficiary participation in training sessions, as well as, purchases. WFP staff can charge the beneficiary cards with value, converting the card into an e-voucher, the value of which can be exchanged for purchases at points-of-sale. Food items are also identified with barcodes and at the time of purchase, the exact food items purchased by each beneficiary are included in the SMART database. The interconnectivity of SMART allows WFP and partners to evaluate the coverage and participation in the programmes, and the programme impact on dietary diversity. WFP staff, the local and provincial government, point-of-sale vendors, UNHCR, and international NGO partners are all sensitized to SMART and the beneficiary surveillance system. WFP has also trained each partner on the portion of the system that

corresponds to his programmatic activities.

WFP first implemented the conditional voucher programme using paper vouchers. However, in 2012, in response to difficulties in maintaining control of paper vouchers, beneficiary complaints, and environmental concerns, WFP converted from paper vouchers to e-vouchers. The e-voucher (the beneficiary card) is charged with value based on eligibility, and used to purchase select items at designated points-of-sale. The plastic cards are more practical than paper vouchers because they are durable, long-lasting, and, most importantly, can be charged with varying values depending on the dynamic eligibility of the beneficiary. The use of plastic e-vouchers increases the efficiency of the entire WFP voucher programme.

Key lessons learned for WFP from programme implementation:

- Establishing strong local presence increases credibility with local authorities
- Schools can be good entry points for working in communities
- Local business engagement in WFP programmes supports beneficiaries and local communities
- WFP expertise can be vital for sensitization, training, and behaviour change communication at multiple levels
- Technology can be used in multiple ways to improve programme efficiency

Summary

Since 2011, WFP, in the role as an important nutrition partner, has worked with the Government of Ecuador at the national, provincial, municipal and local levels to address the food and nutrition security needs of the country's most vulnerable populations. WFP, Government, UNHCR and partners have worked together to diversify the diets of vulnerable Ecuadorians and Colombian

refugees by increasing access to and promoting consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables, linking small-holder farmers to more stable markets, and improving dietary diversity in schools. Furthermore, WFP activities have supported a decrease in tension between Colombian refugees and Ecuadorians by improving food security and fostering community cohesion through support to Small Farmers' Associations, school feeding programmes, and local producers and vendors. Finally, WFP activities have contributed to a reduction in gender-based violence by both promoting women's decision making and providing additional income to women farmers in Small Farmers' Associations.

Though the WFP Country Office has successfully positioned its role in Ecuador as a lead partner with Government in nutrition and, in this role, has launched two impactful programmes in three years, some challenges remain. WFP still strives to reach some of the most vulnerable including those living in remote mountainous areas and isolated indigenous groups. In addition, having crucial local presence of WFP staff in the provinces increases programmatic expense.

The work of WFP in Ecuador exemplifies how WFP can leverage its nutrition and programmatic expertise to successfully implement nutrition-sensitive programmes in Middle Income Countries where inequities exist and nutritional deficiencies remain stubbornly high. The lessons learned from the Ecuador experience demonstrate how WFP can engage in nutrition-sensitive activities in a Middle Income Country and attain broad, positive changes in the lives of the individuals, families and communities it reaches.

Key success factors, lessons learned and recommendations

Table 1 summarizes the key success factors, main lessons learned, and recommendations that were identified in the Ecuador case study that can be applied to other nutrition-sensitive initiatives.



Table 1:
Key success factors used in the WFP Country Office in Ecuador and recommendations for applying them in other programmatic settings

<p>ACTIVITIES</p> <p><i>Used by WFP in Ecuador to address malnutrition and food insecurity by improving access to and promoting consumption of healthy foods.</i></p>	<p>KEY SUCCESS FACTOR</p> <p><i>Or</i></p> <p>LESSON LEARNED</p>	<p>RECOMMENDATIONS</p> <p><i>For applying success factors or lessons learned to other programmes</i></p>
Right Team at the Right Time		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Country Office senior leadership (CD) involved fully in the project to ensure success. Multidisciplinary team created to support various facets of programmes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Senior management support is crucial for success. When capacities are not equivalent to programming needs, capacity development should be prioritized and can be accomplished in numerous ways. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continuous senior management support needs to be provided throughout project timeframe. In addition, having a committed and dedicated team, having staff with specific technical or programmatic expertise in nutrition and gender is important. If expertise in CO is not available request support from RB/HQ and/or look to hire specific expertise in form of consultants to assist team (look for RB/HQ advice on potential candidates).
Effectively Conduct Research and Use Data		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WFP invested in research to determine which type of transfer modality was most cost-effective and feasible to improve dietary diversity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Based on research results, using a voucher was the most cost effective modality for improving dietary diversity in this context. In addition, other research results underscored the importance of nutrition sensitization, via trainings, for improving dietary habits and diversity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commitment to conduct research on the best modality to use given country or programme-specific requirements is important as research can serve to both inform policy and shape government decision making. To garner support, the programme should be evidence informed. Specific context for programme implementation should be considered and programmes tailored to context through research/data/information.
Innovative Thinking and Reception to Change		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WFP used innovative thinking to reposition the Country Office given new political, social, and economic realities of this Middle Income Country. WFP capitalized on nutrition expertise to credibly communicate to Government that its programmatic objective was aligned with national nutrition goals set by Government. With decentralized Government structure, WFP established critical partnerships with local Government. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Importance of aligning WFP goals with governmental priorities and communicating that back to Government. Importance of having credibility through demonstration of expertise and experience. An analysis of governmental structure can open avenues for improved engagement at multiple levels. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using strong leadership and flexibility to select goals, and aligning them with Government, both national and local. Support innovation to foster receptiveness by staff to change. Continuous dialogue with partners to increase credibility so that they will also be receptive to change.

