

Evaluation of Sudan: Food Assistance to Populations Affected by Conflict

Context

The outbreak of conflict in Darfur in 2003 led to deaths, the destruction of productive assets, and large-scale displacement. This displacement led to the loss of livelihoods, not only for the displaced, but also – to a lesser extent – for the nomadic and settled communities that were economically linked with the displaced agricultural communities. WFP has been aiding the conflict-affected population in Darfur since 2003, and its programme is now mature. However, seven years after the conflict started, there has been little return in Darfur, as the causes of the displacement remain unresolved.

EMOP 107600: Food Assistance to Populations Affected by Conflict in Sudan

The overarching goals of the EMOP were to save lives, reduce food insecurity and restore livelihoods of conflict-affected and vulnerable populations in the Sudan. This fits into WFP's Strategic Objective 1, "Save lives and protect livelihoods in emergencies". The operation also aimed to protect livelihoods.

The EMOP had a total budget of US\$868.7 million for the year; US\$675 million had been raised by the end of 2009.

The programme aimed to reach 6.2 million beneficiaries, including 3.8 million general food distribution recipients in Darfur. It included several food distribution methods, the most important of which was GFD. WFP planned to distribute 443,800 mt through GFD in Darfur, accounting for 84 percent of the EMOP's total general food distribution.

The EMOP was complemented by a special operation, to cover the extra costs arising from the expulsions of cooperating partners and to increase the number of locations where WFP staff could work in compliance with United Nations security rules.

Objective and Scope of the Evaluation

The objective of this evaluation was for both accountability and learning. Accountability in this case refers to determining the extent to which the stated project objective has been achieved. Learning refers to the identification of lessons that can assist with the planning of further operations in Sudan and elsewhere.

The evaluation covered the operation's implementation in 2009 and limited to general food distribution in Darfur. It was carried out between January and June 2010 by a team of independent evaluators.

The evaluation report was presented to the Executive Board in November 2010.

Key Findings of the Evaluation

The Strategy of the operation

When the Darfur operation started in 2003, the entire population was in need of food aid. Since then the affected population has developed alternative livelihoods. Many of these are inadequate to support families on their own and are poorly adapted in that they damage other livelihoods or are unsustainable. All of them are contingent on local security. Nonetheless, these livelihoods together with other factors mean that the need for food assistance varies across the affected population.

A needs-based approach targeting households would be more appropriate to this situation, but its introduction will face resistance:

- The leadership of affected communities is strongly opposed to any rationalization of the distribution lists.
- The affected communities are similarly opposed to any targeting that differentiates among community members; they recognize the fragility of many of their livelihoods and are concerned that targeting aid to fewer households would threaten social cohesion. In addition, some communities confuse entitlement to food with conflict-affected status.
- Cooperating partners have capacity constraints that affect the extent to which they can carry out alternative programmes that require more expertise.

Results and Assistance Provided

Beneficiaries reached

At peak times, WFP reached 3.7 million beneficiaries in Darfur – 96 percent of its original plans. This was a significant achievement given the difficulties of operating in Darfur.

Another remarkable achievement was that the loss of cooperating partners in March 2009 had very little impact on the numbers of beneficiaries reached or the tonnages distributed. WFP launched its direct distribution very effectively.

WFP appropriately varied the numbers of beneficiaries and the ration composition throughout the year, based on vulnerability assessments, responding to the seasonal pattern of need with rations for resident populations during the hunger gap.

Objectives attained

The indicators used in the EMOP for saving lives were crude mortality rate and level of global acute malnutrition among under-5s, in line with WFP's corporate indicator compendium. However, the evaluation found these indicators problematic because:

- The targets have been largely met since late 2005 – although some areas continue to have persistent problems with acute malnutrition – so progress or achievements since then cannot be determined.
- Acute malnutrition can be caused by other factors, including poor hygiene in the home, so changes in the indicators may be difficult to attribute to food assistance.
- The indicators are designed for the onset of an emergency situation, such as to measure eligibility for supplementary feeding, rather than for long-term crises such as in Darfur.

WFP's assistance has not reduced crude mortality rates or global acute malnutrition, but has helped prevent them from rising in the face of suboptimal alternative livelihoods.

One of the unintended positive outcomes was the effect of food assistance on local markets. Research on the impact of conflict on trade, carried out by Tufts University in 2008, found that WFP food had a greater than previously estimated effect on urban cereal markets, virtually keeping these markets alive.

Contributing to the Humanitarian Situation in Darfur

WFP assistance has allowed the affected population to avoid engaging in livelihood strategies that pose greater risks than those they currently use.

WFP's emergency operation is the largest humanitarian intervention in Darfur, giving WFP a central role in providing a framework within which other humanitarian partners can implement complementary initiatives. However, only a few programmes have been implemented by other actors, especially since the March 2009 expulsions of non-governmental organizations.

Factors Explaining Results

Security. Results were achieved in spite of continuously worsening security conditions for the aid community. Almost the whole of Darfur is subject to travel restrictions. This situation affects the way in which WFP staff can operate, the availability and quality of cooperating partners, and the cost of the operation.

Inclusion and exclusion errors. There are two types of inclusion errors in the distribution lists in Darfur: the inclusion of people who are not members of the affected population and of those with strong alternative livelihoods. Current lists have remained largely unchanged since 2005. WFP conducted one re-registration exercise at a small camp in West Darfur, but only after leaving the camp without food for three months. This was wholly appropriate as the current ration registers are an obstacle to proper targeting.

Partnerships. WFP is constrained by the limited number and capacity of cooperating partners, who in turn face difficulties attracting appropriate staff given the working and living conditions in Darfur. WFP with its aim to work as efficiently as possible negotiates hard on the contract conditions, which not all partners find easy to work with.

The expulsion of non-government organizations in March 2009 made it necessary that WFP implement the programme directly, something that was done admirably well but also with a trade-off of other activities.

Beyond general food distribution. Other modalities than general food distribution were planned, but had to put on halt when WFP had to take over distribution. Equally, other modalities will require a higher level of technical capacity of partners, which might be difficult to attain under given circumstances. Having said this, WFP piloted milling vouchers in north Darfur with excellent results.

Learning from experience. WFP in Darfur has learned lessons from its investments in research, for instance by bringing eminent Sudan experts around a table to discuss achievements. In addition, the experience with direct distribution highlighted consequences of weaknesses in monitoring systems and created a strong incentive to rectify them.

Level and timeliness of fund. WFP attracted 78 percent funding for the Sudan EMOP and received much of that early on the implementation process (as a matter of fact: the year before). This funding approach facilitated the reported achievements.

Cost. The Sudan is an expensive operating environment, especially Darfur given the cost of transport and security. Despite the cost, there is evidence that without WFP assistance there would have been a food crisis in Darfur, which implies that the operation is cost effective.

Overall Assessment

Relevance. WFP's operation in Darfur was relevant to the affected population and largely appropriate to its needs. General food distribution continued to be appropriate in 2009. However, the programme is facing a growing disconnect between needs and assistance owing to the need to update distribution lists and consider the alternative livelihoods that are developed among affected populations.

Efficiency. General food distribution has generally lower implementing costs per metric tons than other modalities, but is untargeted. Darfur is a high cost environment, but WFP Sudan introduced cost-saving measures in 2009.

Effectiveness. When measured against conventional indicators, the objectives were attained since 2005. However, without WFP food assistance, the continuing large food deficit in Darfur would lead to a return of humanitarian crisis.

Sustainability and connectedness. The continuing efforts of WFP and other humanitarian agencies are preventing the political crisis in Darfur from escalating in to excess malnutrition rates.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1 WFP Sudan should continue general food distribution in Darfur in 2010.

Recommendation 2 Given the inability to target general food distribution effectively within communities, WFP Sudan should continue to reduce the ration so that all food modalities combined match each community's overall need for external food assistance.

Recommendation 3 WFP Sudan should extend the Darfur food security monitoring system to provide managers with good information on the impact of ration changes in different locations.

Recommendation 4 WFP Sudan should move away from a single ration level for all the beneficiaries in a category to a range of rations to be allocated to that category at a single location, based on food security information.

Recommendation 5 WFP Sudan should consider introducing a targeted ration for vulnerable cases.

Recommendation 6 WFP Sudan should continue working with IOM to rationalize distribution lists, and should suspend distribution at sites where the community refuses to accept re-registration.

Recommendation 7 WFP should avoid direct distribution when possible. This may involve developing cooperating partners' capacities for sites where no acceptable distribution partners are available.

Recommendation 8 WFP needs to develop its mechanisms for negotiating costs with partners, to make them more appropriate to the concept of partnership.

Reference: Full and summary reports of the Evaluation are available at: <http://www.wfp.org/about/evaluation>
For more information, please contact the WFP Office of Evaluation