

Evaluation Brief



Food Assistance in Protracted Refugee Situations in Chad (2003-2011): a Joint Mixed Method Impact Evaluation

Context

Since 2002, Chad has hosted up to 70,000 refugees from Central African Republic (CAR) who arrived in the country in successive waves until 2008. Chad has ratified the 1951 and 1969 (African) conventions on refugee status. It recognizes *prima facie* all the CAR refugees and supports their integration and self-reliance, which translates into allocation of land to refugees, freedom of movement, as well as freedom to engage in economic activities.

The seven CAR refugee camps are located in southern and south-western Chad, which are advantaged regions in agro-climatic terms. The local population is ethnically similar to the refugees and the main activity practiced by both refugees and host population is agriculture.

WFP food assistance

Assistance and protection for the refugees are ensured by government entities notably the Commission nationale pour l'accueil et la réinsertion des réfugiés et des rapatriés (CNARR), UNHCR and WFP, as well as national and international NGOs. The European Commission also funds two Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development (LRRD) programmes aiming to support the refugees' transition towards self-reliance and integration.

Since 2003, WFP food assistance has been implemented through six operations, which aimed to meet refugee food needs. Despite objectives gradually shifting towards the promotion of self-reliance from 2005 for the earlier refugees, general food distribution (GFD) remained the main food assistance modality with some nutrition programmes, while food-for-work interventions stayed marginal and mainly benefited the host population.

In most cases, camps received GFD in the form of full ration (2,100 kcal/day) for the first three to five years after their creation. The rations were then reduced to 1,200 kcal/day, or curtailed and replaced by targeted distributions to persons with special needs (PSN) and *ad hoc* GFD during lean seasons.

Objectives of the Evaluation

Serving both accountability and learning purposes, the evaluation intended to:

- Assess and explain the outcomes and impact of food assistance interventions for CAR refugees within the protracted refugee camps of Southern Chad from 2003 to 2011; and
- Identify changes needed to improve the contribution of food assistance to self-reliance.

Key Findings and Conclusions

Food security

The camps benefiting from full rations have always had a vast majority of households with acceptable levels of food consumption (even when refugees had recently arrived and had still only limited livelihoods options). In those camps, higher food consumption scores were noted than in the camps receiving

half rations and in the camp where GFD had been discontinued. The reduction of rations has systematically led to a deterioration of household food consumption (quantity and type).

In camps benefiting from full ration, the proportion of households with acceptable food consumption score was also higher than that measured by the evaluation in neighbouring villages in 2012. Comparison with the villages also revealed that food assistance has had a positive differential effect on the food consumption of female-headed refugee households (with an average of 21 % of them having a poor food intake against 32% for the local female-headed households). Those households, however, resort more often to the most severe coping strategies (31 %, versus 18.5 % for households headed by refugee men).

Nutrition

The rates of global acute malnutrition (GAM) have varied over time and between the camps, but have most often been below the regional averages for the local population and stayed at 'internationally acceptable' levels (<5 percent), except for the camp of Dosseye, a fact that the evaluation did not attribute to food assistance (similar to that provided in other camps) but likely due to other factors.

Chronic malnutrition rates have remained high (above the 30 percent threshold) in all the camps but are comparable to the national rates (39 percent). The incidence of anaemia is largely above the 40 percent threshold in all camps, and two out of three refugee children suffer from it, indicating a major public health problem. The evaluation was not able to establish a correlation between the evolution of the GFD ration level and that of the chronic malnutrition or anaemia rates.

Livelihoods

Agriculture is the main activity of most households but after seven years in the country, the refugees' agriculture is still notably less developed than that of the local population both in terms of area cultivated and yields. The same can be said of wealth profiles. Also, a comparison between the older and newer camps in terms of agriculture, income sources and wealth levels reveals that the longer presence of refugees in the older camps has not allowed them to accumulate more capital.

Food assistance has played both a positive and a negative role on the development of household livelihoods. When combined with medium-term activities such as agriculture, it allows for more of the households' needs to be met and reduces the extent to which refugees resort to unsustainable short-term activities. When rations are reduced, short-term activities increased.

Protection and gender

The protection situation is mostly satisfactory notably owing to the Integrated Security Detachment (DIS) - a police unit in charge of security in the refugee camps - set up by UNHCR and CNARR late 2010 and which works well. However, funding constraints for the DIS since early 2012 are an issue.

While CNARR issues free and timely safe-conducts, cases of non-respect of this document by the police have been reported

and these documents do not cover cross-border movements, which are frequent.

Instances of gender-based violence linked to the food assistance were nonetheless noted, including: i) conjugal violence following distributions when husbands seek to constrain their wives to sell part of the ration to purchase alcohol or “luxury” food items; and ii) violence against women who venture outside the camps to grow food or collect firewood or sometimes are forced to prostitute themselves to meet basic needs, including food.

Factors contributing to the results

Amongst the factors explaining these mixed results, the evaluation underlined contextual factors such as the limited size of plots available to refugees, which constrained production, yield and ultimately the income derived from agriculture. Also, while different levels of access to land, seeds and tools have affected the level of agricultural development in the various camps, the evaluation confirmed that prolonged GFD in the form of full rations acted as a disincentive for refugee to engage in medium-term economic activities such as agriculture.

This could have been mitigated by the prompt implementation of alternatives to GFD. Yet, the only complementary activity to GFD included in the WFP programmes was food for work and its implementation remained marginal. Similarly, UNHCR’s livelihood support activities have been limited and too focused on constrained agricultural systems while suitable alternatives including income generating activities were insufficiently developed.

Other limiting factors to self-reliance progress included the lack of a consensus transition strategy between the two agencies and with their partners, which limited common decision-making beyond the Joint Assessment Mission (JAM) recommendations and had a negative impact on an already precarious funding situation. Shortcomings were also noted in programme management, notably for nutrition, compounded by the lack of technically competent partners.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Overall Assessment

In the first years following displacement, general food distribution in the form of full rations has allowed most refugees to reach acceptable food consumption levels and has a positive effect on global acute malnutrition, which remained acceptable. However, a deterioration of refugees’ food consumption (quantity and quality) and an increase in short-term coping strategies ensued when rations were reduced in the longest-established camps. In addition, chronic malnutrition remained high, and did not improve over the years. Also, refugees’ wealth levels and income sources have not significantly improved overtime.

While most refugees wished to be repatriated eventually, they were not informed of developments in potential return areas. Given the lack of interest in third-country resettlement, the option of integration in Chad appears to be the most likely durable solution in the medium to long term. Yet, the expected evolution towards an increased capacity of refugees to develop their own livelihoods in the medium-term and as a result maintain their food security despite a reduction in food assistance did not occur.

Recommendations on longer-term strategies and durable solutions

Recommendation 1. UNHCR should lead the formulation of a consensual strategy for the transition to self-reliance with the concerned relief and development actors. This strategy should set realistic goals for self-reliance and integration given the local context and acknowledge that in contexts such as Chad, self-reliance will imply a degradation of refugees’ living conditions.

Recommendation 2. WFP should pursue alternative and complementary activities to GFD congruent with the self-reliance objectives and UNHCR should enhance its support to traditional livelihoods (agriculture) and increase alternative and complementary activities that have proven effective locally.

Recommendation 3. UNHCR should formulate camp site selection criteria taking self-reliance objectives into account so that local authorities can select appropriate sites for refugees to settle in, thus preventing the need for subsequent relocations.

Recommendation 4. UNHCR and CNARR should more closely monitor refugee movements and facilitate spontaneous returns of refugees in their country of origin and improve monitoring and understanding of the motives of refugee movements. UNHCR should also encourage CNARR to officially authorise cross-border movements and support “go and see” visits enabling refugees to assess conditions in their country of origin and take informed decisions concerning their return. Finally, WFP and UNHCR should enhance the coordination with their respective programmes in the Central African Republic to prevent double-dipping.

Recommendation 5. WFP and UNHCR policy and programme support offices at global level should take note of recommendations 1 – 4, which are likely to be applicable beyond Chad, in other displacement contexts where self-reliance objectives are formulated.

Recommendations on programme implementation

Recommendation 6. WFP and UNHCR should enhance the management, monitoring and evaluation of assistance. A JAM mission should be conducted shortly and strict monitoring of refugees’ food security situation and access to basic services should be systematized when GFD is reduced or discontinued.

Recommendation 7. WFP and UNHCR should promote better use of food rations by beneficiaries by respecting the MOU clauses concerning the provision of fresh foods and cereal milling. Bi-monthly distributions should also be avoided.

Recommendation 8. Protection. UNHCR should: 1) set up a monitoring system to track the occurrence and evolution of protection issues, notably those related to gender-based violence and seek to reduce post-distribution conjugal violence. It should also advocate for an increased engagement of relevant actors including other UN agencies and the government to address specific protection issues. Finally, donors should also continue funding the DIS as long as there are CAR refugees.

Recommendation 9. Nutrition. UNHCR should enhance the relevance of nutrition strategies and improve their implementation and monitoring and in particular: 1) adopt a context-specific approach and formulate a specific public health strategy for Dosseye; 2) formulate a strategy to combat anaemia; 3) conduct active monthly screening of malnourished children in all camps; 4) ensure that nutrition surveys are conducted at the same period of the year to improve the analysis of the evolution of malnutrition. Finally, WFP and UNHCR should invest in developing the technical competencies in nutrition of theirs and partners’ staff, and establish medium-term partnerships to reduce the high turnover rate of partners.



Reference:
Full and summary reports of the evaluation and the Management Response are available at

www.wfp.org/evaluation

For more information please contact the Office of Evaluation WFP.evaluation@WFP.org