

Evaluation Brief



Synthesis Report of the Evaluation Series on the Impact of Food for Assets (2002-2011) And Lessons for Building Livelihoods Resilience

Context

The report synthesizes the main findings from evaluations in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Nepal, Senegal and Uganda that assessed the impact of WFP's food for assets (FFA) activities and identified lessons on how to improve the orientation of food for assets towards achieving livelihoods resilience objectives.

The evaluations covered a period of organizational change. In 2011, WFP introduced new policies and guidance documents related to FFA, including a new disaster risk reduction and management policy and the Food for Assets Guidance Manual. The evaluations assessed activities carried out in 2002–2011, which were designed and implemented under different guidance and objectives. While focusing on assessing the medium- and longer-term effects and sustainability of these past efforts, the evaluations also provided lessons on how FFA activities could be better aligned with new policy and guidance.

Objectives and Scope of the Evaluation

The evaluations addressed the following key questions:

1. What positive or negative impacts have FFA activities had on individuals within participating households and communities and on the natural resource base?
2. How could FFA activities be improved to increase or sustain impact?

They also analyzed critical factors affecting outcomes and impact.

Overall impacts from FFA are expected to occur over different timeframes. **Short term** benefits could include increased cash/food availability and food access, and the immediate effects of the asset – such as flood protection- which could result in an immediate reduction in vulnerability. **Medium term** benefits may include increased land productivity and agricultural production, greater income-generating opportunities, better physical access to markets and social services, etc.; **Long term benefits** could include reduced vulnerability, improved livelihoods, and increased resilience, although on-going operations and maintenance are needed to ensure that the asset remains functional and useful.

Evaluation methodology included:

- quantitative household surveys
- secondary data analysis;
- focus group discussions,
- interviews

- technical asset appraisal,
- social and institutional analysis.

Change/impact assessed through household surveys taken in both participant and comparison populations (from the same communities, different communities or both).

Key Findings and Conclusions

The evaluations found that in the short term, WFP was effective in providing food and employment to people in underserved communities during periods of civil unrest and natural disaster, and built useful assets in the process. Different types of crises were reported by communities including slow and rapid onset, human and natural caused, cyclical and non-cyclical. Household surveys confirmed that participants in all countries faced multiple shocks during the reference period. WFP was often one of the few organizations to have operated at scale in remote or dangerous areas.

Some respondents reported that food was not always delivered in a timely manner relative to shortages, or that the amount of food provided was inadequate to address the needs. FFA activities were often underfunded by up to 65%, and funding was variable and unpredictable.

Asset survival is a pre-condition for medium-term impact. The evaluations found that for all but one asset type, more than 50% of assets were fully functional. Strong evidence from household survey reported increased land productivity, agricultural production and income generating opportunities. The evaluations confirmed modest changes in incomes, assets and employment. There was plausible quantitative and qualitative evidence of positive income effects associated with asset creation in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Nepal and Senegal. In Uganda, positive but small effects were reported over time on savings, income and standard of living as a result of asset creation. In Guatemala the differences in land asset and associated incomes between participants and comparison households were not statistically significant.

Some assets delivered multiple benefits to livelihoods or resilience, for instance flood protection dykes in Bangladesh protected land from siltation, thus increasing productive land, though the primary purpose was to create a physical barrier to protect against the immediate flood risk. In Guatemala the size of the agricultural productivity effect was positively correlated with the number of asset types in place, suggesting a compounding effect. In Guatemala, Nepal and Senegal, survey respondents and focus group participants linked gardens and agroforestry to diversification of production which was in turn linked to improved dietary diversity and income-generation.

Ethiopia's was the only programme planned specifically to address longer-term livelihoods resilience and all programmes predated WFP's 2011 resilience-oriented policies and guidelines. Nevertheless, a striking positive finding is that FFA activities contributed to significant improvements in livelihoods in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Nepal and Senegal, and limited improvement in Uganda. Improvements in social cohesion were reported by focus groups and survey respondents in Bangladesh, Guatemala, Nepal and Uganda.

However, overall improvements in longer term food security and dietary diversity were limited.

Women benefited significantly from FFA activities through employment and access to resources; and the creation of assets targeted to women that subsequently remained under their control. Improvements were seen in women's position in the community and households, including in budget management, with the increased social connectivity and freedom of movement that resulted from food-for-assets activities affecting women's roles more broadly in the household and society.

The evaluations found substantial confusion about responsibilities for asset maintenance and there were few asset maintenance plans found although user committees were often in place.

Except in Ethiopia, the evaluations found limited evidence of a comprehensive, community-led approach to asset planning and the delivery of a comprehensive package of assets that balanced short-, medium- and long-term risk reduction, or of complementary programming with other agencies. Communities did not always fully understand programme modalities, including payment norms and selection criteria. The evaluations noted that planning for a more comprehensive approach was recently started in Bangladesh, Nepal and Guatemala.

Interventions were based on geographical targeting of communities most at risk of food insecurity, but did not always identify communities at most risk of disasters and who could gain most in terms of resilience-building. In many cases, WFP aimed to reach the largest number of people across all areas facing food insecurity, which when combined with budget shortfalls and capacity gaps led in some cases to short duration, small and scattered interventions.

All of the evaluations reported weak monitoring systems.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Overall Assessment

The theory of change that guided the evaluations in the series predicted impacts to address short term, medium term and long term objectives. The evaluations found that in the short term, WFP was effective in providing food and employment to people in under-served communities in periods of both civil unrest and natural disaster, and in the process useful assets were built. There was evidence of some of the expected medium and longer term positive impacts; however, improvements in longer term food security were limited.

These findings are significant considering that, with the exception of Ethiopia, none of the programmes evaluated were operationally oriented towards achieving resilience objectives, although stated goals were broadly aligned.

The findings confirm the appropriacy of FFA as a mechanism to contribute to delivery of WFP's 2011 corporate policy on

disaster risk reduction and management and the Strategic Plan (2014-2017) with its focus on resilience. The directions set in the 2011 FFA Guidance manual, updated in January 2014, are in line with the evaluations' findings concerning factors important for achievement of impacts, but more needs to be done to ensure that this guidance is consistently applied. To address these issues the synthesis made five recommendations, summarized below.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: WFP country offices, supported by regional bureaux and Headquarters, should commit to bringing FFA programmes into line with current policy and guidance, to maximize the opportunities for FFA to contribute to protecting and strengthening livelihoods and resilience. Dedicated funding will be needed to ensure adequate support to country offices.

Specific areas for action and funding are discussed in the following recommendations.

Recommendation 2: More attention should be paid to the strategic positioning of FFA in country offices where FFA can appropriately be used as an approach to improve livelihoods and resilience; building on WFP comparative advantages complemented by those of partners; ensuring sustainability of efforts; and building partners' commitments for financial and other resources.

Recommendation 3: WFP should strengthen its efforts to support and provide guidance to regional bureaux and country offices by ensuring that the FFA guidance manual is updated to address issues raised in the evaluations and then rolling it out more completely. This should include providing training and technical assistance to country offices.

Recommendation 4: WFP should carry out two special studies to further explore issues raised by the evaluation: impacts of FFA activities on women, particularly their nutrition and health and on opportunities for additional linkages with nutrition generated by a focus on gender issues; and in-depth analyses of the food security of FFA participants to increase understanding of how FFA activities could make a greater contribution.

Recommendation 5: WFP should review the lessons that arose from the evaluations related to FFA baselines and monitoring; update corporate monitoring and reporting systems as needed; and ensure funding and staffing are available to meet M&E requirements.



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