

Evaluation Brief

Decentralized evaluation for evidence-based decision making

Final Evaluation of Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation 200938: 'Rebuilding food and nutrition security and strengthening disaster management capabilities in Sierra Leone' (2016-17)

SUBJECT OF THE EVALUATION

The Ebola Virus Disease epidemic in Sierra Leone (from late March 2014 to November 2015) had severe impacts on the country's economy, food security and health systems. After the outbreak, WFP designed its operation PRRO 200938 to support the Government National Ebola Recovery Strategy to 'build back better' and to limit the serious damage done by the disease outbreak and its economic effects.

The PRRO was implemented from beginning 2016 to the end of 2017 and focused on three main priorities: *i)* restoring and rebuilding livelihoods devastated by Ebola, with a safety nets component targeted towards vulnerable people in food-insecure communities and Ebola orphans; *ii)* enhancing the utilization of health and nutrition services weakened by the Ebola outbreak; *iii)* strengthening national capabilities to prepare for and respond to future emergencies, including Ebola flare-ups and localized emergencies.

The decentralised evaluation was commissioned by WFP Sierra Leone Country Office in 2018 to inform operational and strategic decision-making feeding into the Country Office's Transitional Interim Country Strategic Plan from January 2018, and ultimately its first Country Strategic Plan starting in January 2019.

OBJECTIVES OF THE EVALUATION

The evaluation objectives included: determining the effect of the assistance on food and nutrition security, livelihoods, employment opportunities, the local economies, social cohesion, with a focus on accountability, gender equity and women's empowerment. It also aimed at determining the reasons for the observed effects and at producing evidence-based findings.

METHODOLOGY

The methodological approach was mixed-methods, although largely qualitative, with robust use of triangulation techniques, analysis and cross-referencing of both secondary and primary data. The methodology employed the overview of a 'gender lens' in all aspects of the enquiry, aiming to gather balanced information.

KEY FINDINGS

Relevance

Within the nutrition component, the Food by Prescription Programme (FbP) was relevant to the objectives and context, key stakeholders considered its approach to be critical to the national HIV response. The Targeted Supplementary Feeding Programme (TSFP) for MAM treatment was considered appropriate at the time of PRRO design. However, after a reduction in GAM rates, such approach was no longer justified. Given this change, the Stunting Prevention Programme (SPP) was found to be more relevant in addressing both stunting and MAM.

The livelihoods and FFA activities were very relevant and most appropriate, which, at the time of the evaluation, was not the case for the safety nets support through lean season distributions, given the limited resources and the short-term of the support. Finally, the Disaster Management (DM) component was overall relevant, but more could have been done throughout the intervention.

Effectiveness

Overall, the health and nutrition activities have been effective and contributed to the stabilization of GAM rates, though TSFP effectiveness is constrained by data quality and reporting. The number of patients eligible for FbP exceeded food availability, representing a major constraint to the

effectiveness of FbP. The implementation modality through quarterly distributions is a major constraint to programme efficacy and effectiveness, and the food package by itself is insufficient to achieve the set outcome. The approach of community self-selection of the most vulnerable members was seen as particularly effective in leading to better community cohesion. Overall, food support has been effective in supporting smallholder farmers to rehabilitate their agricultural assets.

Efficiency

Despite some good achievements in all components, considerable limitations were due to funding constraints, resulting in slow start-up and delayed rollout of some activities. The presence of multiple databases, formats and systems is highly inefficient and inevitably leads to errors. Consequently, the questionable quality and accuracy of the programme data overshadows some of the valid and useful implementations.

Sustainability

In the FFA component, good prospects for sustainability were noted in the beneficiary farmers' positivity about their capacity to maintain the plantations in a good state without external support, also thanks to the technical training received. The sustainability of the SPP depends on WFP commitment to support it long term, as well as fine-tuning the work as it progresses. The safety net component cannot be considered an efficient nor sustainable intervention due to the limited quantities of food distributed, the small number of beneficiaries and the limited occurrence.

Impact

Under the nutrition component, the impact was good in the FbP activities and showed encouraging signs in the SPP intervention, but overall it was partially compromised by lack of clarity on admission and discharge criteria and limited food availability. The impact of FFA rehabilitation activities was noted in the already improved livelihood levels of the beneficiaries thanks to improved crop yields and sales. Given the limited scale, food quantities, infrequency of the lean season support it is difficult to consider that it had anything more than a token impact. In the DM component, considered useful by the authorities, some positive skills transfers have been made but the work appears to have been under-planned and as such, any impact has been quite limited.

There was no specific evidence of the WFP operation having enhanced Gender Equality Empowerment of Women factors, but widespread evidence did exist of women in committee leadership roles and being directly engaged in programme planning and oversight.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall Assessment

All activities have been very or partially successful, and given the weak operating context and budget

shortfalls, the CO is commended on some positive outputs. This has been achieved, as ever, through good working relations with the Government of Sierra Leone at central and district levels and with a range of committed agency partners. The PRRO's objectives have broadly been achieved despite some individual targets being missed.

Recommendations

R1 The CO, in conjunction with its programme partners and with support and direction from the Regional Bureau in Dakar, should urgently and significantly improve the quality of monitoring, reporting and programme quality assurance systems, particularly for the nutrition components.

R2 The CO should immediately review the assistance approach to the treatment of moderate acute malnutrition through the targeted supplementary feeding programme and prioritise the programme's focus towards the prevention of stunting.

R3 The CO and its partners should ensure that the challenges, gaps and lessons learned during the pilot phase of the stunting prevention programme are identified and incorporated prior to the programme's proposed expansion.

R4 In support of R2 and R3, the CO should reinforce and build its evidence-base on nutrition programming.

R5 The CO should improve the quality of programming and beneficiary targeting of FbP services, and forge livelihood linkages for graduated clients living with HIV

R6 The CO and its partners, with Regional Bureau support, should explore alternative modalities to in-kind food as part of FbP.

R7 The CO should consider undertaking a broad-based nutrition-sensitive gender analysis, to align the upcoming CPS with updated WFP Policies, and to contribute towards strengthened programming, the infant and young child feeding behaviour change communications strategy and other components of the CSP.

R8 The CO should not actively plan for annual short-term safety nets distributions, as implemented to date, but use available resources for additional food activities for assets activities producing livelihood enhancements to targeted vulnerable communities

R9 The CO should develop a more robust engagement with Sierra Leone's Office of National Security to finalise and roll out the national disaster response plan. Future WFP support should follow a more developed structure with an agreed workplan and targets.

R10: The CO should continue to implement its food assistance for assets activities but consider working on community-owned project sites rather than individually-owned smallholdings. Additional partners should be incorporated into the planning to ideally provide complementary resources.