

South Sudan – Food Assistance for Assets project, 2016-2019

SUBJECT OF THE EVALUATION

WFP has been running FFA activities in South Sudan since 2014, and aims to expand FFA programming in the future.

This project ran from early 2016 to the end of 2019 with up to 588,192 annual beneficiaries. Using transfers of food (36,659 mt) and cash (US\$22 million), the project aimed to strengthen resilience to shocks and stressors through the restoration of productive capacity of arable land, improvements to community infrastructure, natural resource management and climate change adaptation activities, and capacity building and skills development.

OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION

The evaluation is to inform the implementation of the FFA programme in the next Country Strategic Plan cycle, 2023-2027; it serves the dual and mutually reinforcing objectives of accountability and learning. Users of the results are expected to be interested in the operational performance and learning from the project. The evaluation covered the whole of the FFA project period, and was undertaken in late 2020 through an extensive household survey (465 households) plus a further 262 interviews with beneficiaries and stakeholders, across six States and in a variety of livelihood zones, meeting with communities who had received food in-kind, cash or both for their engagement in the activities, supplemented by remote qualitative interviews with key stakeholders.

KEY FINDINGS

Relevance

The provision of food assistance to food insecure and vulnerable people is highly relevant and produces immediate advantages to food security and nutrition by filling food gaps. Asset creation activities included the restoration of productive arable land, construction and improvement to communal infrastructure such as feeder roads and water points, inputs towards

climate change adaptation such as tree planting, and capacity building and skills development.

Among the major outputs, more than 100,000 hectares of land were cleared for planting with crops and vegetable gardens, 1,700 km of roads and dykes were restored or improved, almost 10 million tree seedlings were raised and over 260,000 beneficiaries participated in training courses.

Effectiveness

The programme reached 86 percent of the project target and helped to reduce the prevalence of poor and borderline food consumption between 2016 and 2019, although data from the household survey showed a deterioration in 2020; probably in part due to COVID-19. Some 66 percent of beneficiaries reported completely or significantly improved their livelihoods as a result of the assets. Livelihood-based coping strategies increased from 2018 to 2019 indicating worsening food security but the project improved household income through increased crop production (81 percent of households).

Efficiency

The large scale of the programme, efficient targeting, more flexible donor funding, multi-year partner agreements and the use of cash all encouraged efficiency, but delays in food delivery due to poor roads and pipeline breaks, late seed and tool deliveries together with flooding in 2019, all reduced the efficiency of the programme.

Impact

Food production from farms, gardens and fish ponds increased the quantity and diversity of food at household level and generated income from sales of produce, although this was more marked in areas with a potential for more productive farming, lower initial vulnerability status and greater support from government organisations. Despite some assets being in poor condition, beneficiaries reported 88 percent were still functioning as intended.

Women participated extensively across the project both as direct beneficiaries, as well as through activity identification and project management. Many have been able to stop having to go the bush to collect wild food and firewood, but can work on their farms to sell produce in the market to support their families. They have also become economically stronger in small scale business and gained leadership skills that will continue beyond the project's duration

Sustainability

A strong sense of asset ownership by beneficiaries and communities has been achieved. Asset Management Committees at community level vary in their degrees of capacity, and the level of local government engagement varied widely as a result of the chronic lack of resources. Improved roads brought many benefits to the wider community, including easier access to markets to sell excess production and diversify income generating activities, although there were problems with maintenance of the larger infrastructure assets. Nearly all graduates from the project reported that they could sustain themselves from their crop farms without further assistance. Intangible benefits included an increased culture of work, the sharing of food, knowledge and equipment between participants. On the negative side, large-scale land clearance activities for new crop production risks environmental degradation.

Coherence

Since 2018 the project has been a key element of WFP's Interim Country Strategic Plan and wider United Nations Interim Cooperation Framework agreed with the Government. WFP joined with multiple agencies and donors in the Joint Recovery and Stabilization Programme in Aweil (2018-2019) to improve resilience, including a partnership with FAO to add value to agricultural interventions, but complementary support still needs to be enhanced.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall Assessment

The project reached almost all of its programme targets, and improved agricultural productivity and therefore consumption. Household food security and income also improved with a reduction in inter-communal conflicts, and increased cohesion. A strong sense of ownership in the project's aims and activities was achieved with a commitment to maintain assets beyond the project period. The sustainability of some assets is questionable because of the quality of the initial construction and lack of on-going maintenance.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: The Country Office (CO) should identify the reasons why some Asset Management Committees are unable to ensure that infrastructure is properly maintained and follow up with appropriate remedial action.

Recommendation 2: The CO should consult with the Government over support for the purchase of equipment necessary to undertake proper maintenance work on roads and dykes. The ET recognizes this carries significant initial purchase costs and would require a long-term operation and maintenance plan.

Recommendation 3: The CO should continue to look for improvements to support gender transformative changes. Gender analysis has identified many elements of the project that supported female community members. Female change agents should be identified and empowered, and the recommendations of a recent rapid gender assessment should be implemented.

Recommendation 4: The CO should consider piloting the introduction of small-scale irrigation systems, adapted to local hydrological conditions at selected FFA project locations, to help improve yields and reduce the labour needed for watering, especially for women.

Recommendation 5: The CO should promote the production of tools together with FAO's activities promoting seed production within South Sudan. The quality and availability of tools and seeds provided by the project was too often sub-standard.

Recommendation 6: The CO should promote fish farming more widely, in conjunction with partners and the Government. Fish farming has been a considerable success where implemented, but has not been replicated to non-FFA areas.

Recommendation 7: The CO should explore the use of mobile money, seek more competitive operators/agents for cash distribution, and increase SCOPE enrolment as widely as possible as it improves people's access to credit.

Recommendation 8: The CO should consider introducing an 'exit package' of training, equipment or materials when beneficiaries leave the project, to support their future livelihoods.

Recommendation 9: The CO should consider introducing flexibility (between two to four years) into the period of enrolment in the project to allow for regional differences in vulnerabilities and opportunities for beneficiaries to become more self-supporting.