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Food assistance, development-oriented food assistance and food security Initial evaluation findings

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Twenty-five food assistance projects have been completed since 2008 under Financial Cooperation (FC), and further projects are currently being implemented or in preparation. The projects are carried out via United Nations (UN) humanitarian organizations. The results of the ex-post evaluations reveal success factors and challenges.

Background: evaluated projects

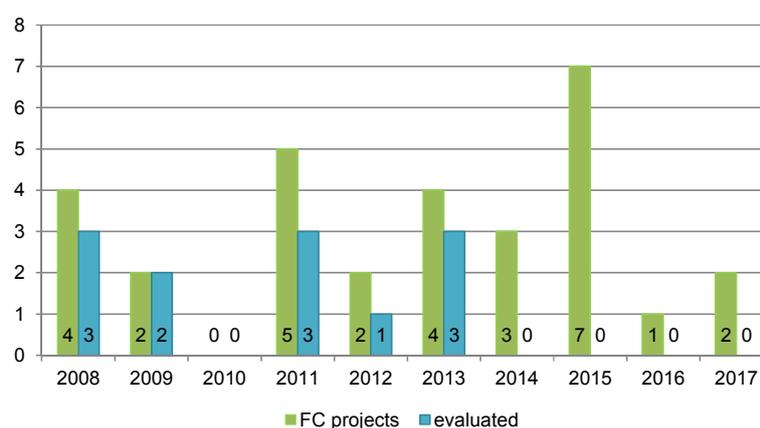
Ex-post evaluations have so far been carried out for twelve projects, which were implemented between 2008 and 2013 via the UN's World Food Programme (WFP) in the countries of Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Yemen. If more than one project promoted the same WFP operation, they were evaluated together.

The projects typically included:

- General or seasonal food distribution to secure basic supplies

Approved and evaluated food assistance projects

Twelve projects were evaluated in the period 2008-2017.



Source: internal project database

- Targeted supply of vulnerable groups with fortified foods
- Emergency rations for (national) refugees
- School meals
- Cash or vouchers for food
- "Food for Work", "Food/Cash for

Assets¹ or "Food for Training".

The distribution of food, cash and vouchers for food was intended to stabilize or improve the nutritional

¹ Building or rehabilitating productive small and micro infrastructure and remunerating workers with food or cash

status of the target group at the **outcome level** in the short term. "Structural" measures such as "Food/Cash for Assets" and "Food for Training" were designed to enhance the resilience of the target group. At the **impact level**, the measures were aimed at lowering the prevalence of under-nutrition and improving household incomes as well as assets of households and municipalities.

The factors **triggering and amplifying** food risks were

- (1) climatic and geographical aspects (induced by climate change), weather phenomena and an unsustainable use of resources (for example the drought in the Horn of Africa in 2011/2012, erratic rainfall in Ethiopia, a lack of rain in Djibouti and using scarce water resources to grow khat in Yemen),
- (2) market risks, caused especially by dependency on food imports (90% in Yemen for instance), and fluctuating global market prices (e.g. food price hikes of 56% at local markets in Djibouti),
- (3) fragility (e.g. waves of refugees from Sudan and Somalia to Ethiopia, civil war in Yemen).

Needs-based and conflict-sensitive selection of the target group

Detailed target group and conflict analyses were not carried out for reasons of urgency, but the *do-no-harm* principle was observed.

Results of the ex-post evaluations

A total of twelve projects have been assessed so far in seven evaluations—nine with a rating of 3 ("satisfactory"), and three with a rating of 2 ("good")

Country	Project year	Overall rating	Relevance	Effectiveness	Efficiency	Impact	Sustainability
Ethiopia	2008-09, 2011-13*	3	2	3	3	3	3
Djibouti	2011	2	2	2	3	2	2
Yemen	2008	3	3	3	3	3	3
Yemen	2011	2	2	3	2	3	2
Yemen	2013, 2013**	3	2	3	3	3	2
Kenya	2008	3	2	3	3	3	---
Kenya	2009	2	2	2	2	2	3

*) The five FC projects largely cofinanced two successive WFP operations supplemented with a parallel WFP operation and were therefore evaluated together. **) The two FC projects largely promoted the same two WFP operations and were therefore evaluated together. Source: evaluation reports.

In the projects evaluated, the quality of the beneficiary selection process depended on data availability and institutional capacities.



Ethiopia:

Estimating needs as well as identifying and prioritizing the target regions took place based on analyses from the Ethiopian government, in consultation with humanitarian organizations, using set guidelines and selection criteria, and with close monitoring.

Yemen 2008 and 2011:

The attempt made—despite the program's underfinancing—to reach as broad a target group as possible meant that not enough food was calculated per household. Moreover, the recipients were chosen based on poverty data and not according to the level of food insecurity.

Earmarking of FC funds and risk of misallocation

Earmarking funds for certain components, regions or target groups had a negative impact on the assessment of relevance and allocation efficiency. It bears the risk of misallocation in a setting of rapidly changing needs and requirements, and it is not appropriate in the sense of humanitarian principles. Allowing the WFP to respond flexibly towards acute changes was considered positive.



Yemen 2013:

In phase I, the FC funds were earmarked for a girls' education program and certain

components, target groups, and activities; in phase II, they were earmarked for the seasonal emergency system. Support for internally displaced people and cash transfers was ruled out.

Implementation, coordination, and institutional challenges

There was consensus in the ex post evaluations that the WFP was the best possible cooperation partner under the circumstances due to its extensive expertise and experience as well as the existing structures. Establishing structures would have taken much more time and would have not been as efficient. Existing structures were used wherever possible in the difficult institutional context.



Yemen 2011:

To increase the coverage rate of the food components and to compensate for weaknesses of the health system, the state-run health centers were supplemented with mobile NGO units.

Yemen 2013:

The WFP used national structures such as the *Social Welfare Fund* (SWF) and decentralized health care facilities and schools to implement the program. Synergies were achieved thanks to cooperation with the SWF as well as the use of existing selection mechanisms and distribution structures. Yet, the effectiveness suffered during the implementation period owing to the target group's low use of the health care facilities. Mobile clinics were not established as planned.

Use of alternative transfer mechanisms

Some studies show that cash and voucher systems as an alternative to food distribution have statistically significantly higher impacts when compared to food distribution. However, as the examples show, these impacts are not guaranteed.



Yemen 2011:

The piloting of cash and vouchers for food proved to be beneficial with regard to cost efficiency and food diversity.

Djibouti:

Issuing vouchers incurred additional costs of 24% compared to distributing food. The reason for this was that, due to

the food shortage in the country, only the distribution mechanism changed. Food was still provided through the WFP, meaning there were additional costs for setting up and operating the voucher system without “saving” transport costs.

Supply bottlenecks and avoiding gaps in supply

Short purchasing times were crucial to combating the crises effectively, but the time required was closely linked to food availability as well as to planning and logistic capacities. The FC support of the WFP stood out thanks to its rapid provision of funds.



Djibouti:

Storage capacities enabled the WFP to overcome supply bottlenecks effectively. To avoid transportation delays to outlying distribution points, the WFP contracted private transport companies and supported public-sector partners in building up transport capacities.

Yemen 2008:

In the international procurement of special rations significant delays were caused by financial shortfalls, administrative hurdles and a lack of availability on the international markets. The delays contributed to the limited effectiveness on account of the time-critical management of malnutrition.

Limited effectiveness of nutritional supplement rations

Successful treatment with preventive nutritional supplement rations and curative special rations depended on the knowledge of the users and the capacities of the health system, meaning that the parallel execution of information campaigns and the strengthening of decentralized capacities in the health system were critical success factors.



Yemen 2008 and 2011:

The recovery and drop-out rates in the treatment of acutely malnourished children under the age of 5 came in at 36% (target: >75%) and 38% (target: <15%), well behind expectations.

Ethiopia 2011:

The recovery rates fell markedly short of expectations due to a lack of capacity at the health centers and the sharing of rations.

Kenya 2008:

Rations were set at a higher level to account for the lack of knowledge of the users and the expected redistribution within households.

Urgency and aspiration for sustainability

The projects provided short-term aid in an emergency situation and therefore had limited aspiration for sustainability. Alongside elements of emergency humanitarian aid, eleven of the twelve evaluated projects featured components of developmental and structural transitional aid (e.g. construction of irrigation systems) and, with their short to medium-term focus, they built a bridge from emergency aid to longer-term development cooperation.

While it is entirely reasonable for food aid to be complemented by structural measures to strengthen resilience, an acute crisis is not always the right time to develop these measures. Measures to boost resilience were carried out in the evaluated projects via existing (public-sector) programs or institutions and to a far lower extent than in the realms of typical structural FC measures. The scope of structural activities was partly reduced during project implementation in favor of extending emergency aid measures.



Kenya 2008 and 2009:

The program focused on small infrastructure measures to overcome the recurring food crises. The measures were chosen on a participatory basis and in cooperation with technical experts, which fostered acceptance, use, and sustainability.

Djibouti:

Food for Assets measures resulted in the rehabilitation of 1,715 km of rural roads and the reinforcement of 24,105 settlements against the effects of future shocks (e.g. by building wells, rehabilitating small dams, and implementing erosion protection measures).

From the evaluations we can draw the following **preliminary conclusions**:

1. The choice and design of components came with significant trade-offs (e.g. higher rations in anticipation of redistribution versus coverage rate).
2. While there were successes in

some approaches, it was very difficult to connect emergency aid with prevention efforts.

3. In the different countries, projects, and project phases, the individual context had a strong bearing on success factors and challenges. There were marked differences in the reasons behind the crises, in the bottlenecks, and in the success of the approaches and instruments (for example, the issuance of vouchers brought cost advantages in one country and generated additional costs in another).



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