

Central evaluation of the project 'Food and winter support for vulnerable war affected population in Northern Syria and Turkey' (SYR 1022) with particular focus on cross-cutting issues of cash based interventions at Welthungerhilfe

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EVALUATION ON BEHALF OF WELTHUNGERHILFE BONN
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Summary

1. Brief description of the project and framework conditions

The Syria Crises has now entered its 6th year. Turkey is hosting some 3.1 million registered Syrian refugees out of which 90%¹ or some 2.790.000 live in host communities. From these only 2.8%² is receiving support for Non-Food Items (NFI) and basic food as per August 2016.

The Gaziantep/Kilis project is part of a wider programme. It is covered under component 1 and aims to provide approximately 66.000 refugees in Turkish cities³ improved access to food and items of daily need through an e-voucher system. This project is to be compared with another cash based intervention where relevant, which is similar and implemented in Mardin/Kiziltepe.

As the focus of this evaluation is on the Gaziantep/Kilis Cash Based Intervention (CBI) project, this project will be called “the project” in the following. This is to facilitate the readability of the text. The project in Mardin/Kiziltepe will be specifically mentioned where relevant.

2. Relevance

71% of Syrian refugee households earn less than 700 TRY per month based on a UNHCR survey of 2014⁴. This is well below the Minimum Expenditure Basket (MEB) of 1,715 TRY/household/month and the Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket (SMEB) of 942 TRY/household/month established for 2016⁵. The income gap leads to depletion of assets and negative coping strategies including child labour.

The relevance of the project is aligned to the strategic papers of Welthungerhilfe and the international community as laid down in the “2015 Syria Response Plan and 2015-2016 Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan”.

3. Effectiveness

The project’s level of achievement is excellent. Most indicators have already been achieved before the end of the project.

The project categorical vulnerability targeting criteria of the project are similar criteria to those of World Food Programme. These criteria have a negative bias toward small vulnerable households.

Originally it was foreseen to use the lists of the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency of Turkey (AFAD). However, they did not contain the required information for

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/turkey_syrian_crisis_en.pdf

² Calculation of author, based on EU figures and data provided by WFP to August 2016

³³ According to the third donor report component 1 was also used to provide direct food aid for 1.600 refugee Yazidis in Diarbakir, p.3 of the report, date: 30.06.2016

⁴ UNHCR (31 January 2014) Situation Report - Syrian Refugees in Turkey - An Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Şanlıurfa Province, p. 4

⁵ Christina Hobbs - on behalf of, and with the support of, the Turkey CBI Technical Working Group (September 2016) MEB/SMEB Calculation for Syrians living in Turkey, p. 24

targeting⁶. Therefore, the project did its own targeting with the help of Turkish officials, the *mukhtars*. This approach bore the potential of pre-selection of beneficiaries, particularly as some *mukhtars* requested a registration fee of 5 TYP. Sensitisation of the project was weak, therefore some households were not at home during the targeting period. The cash transfer value of the e-vouches is based on the number of household members. Under the prevailing circumstances, it was at times very difficult to establish what constitutes a household, as flat sharing is prevalent. Changes to the household composition could not systematically be registered, as the project did not do regular household visits apart from surveys.

The Mardin/Kiziltepe project worked with an application procedure, which was accompanied by a number of sensitisation measures.

The targeting criteria were not communicated to the beneficiaries. It was foreseen that exclusion error would be reduced through the project helpline. This measure was insufficient, considering that per cycle only 6% of the beneficiaries called the helpline and only 0.3% in the first cycle and none in the second of all beneficiaries requested reassessment. The project had very little leeway to react to changes in the household or to include new vulnerable households, because the planning document foresees that an e-voucher cycle takes 6 months and that after that new beneficiaries are targeted.

The high level of beneficiaries' movements was dealt with through the project design, as e-vouchers could only be used in designated shops.

The project met the targeted households' existing needs only partially. If one considers the entire minimum expenditure basket (MEB), the project covers 8.3% of monthly needs for a single person and 17.5% of the household of 6. When only considering food and non-food items like hygiene products, clothes, and cooking gas this would be 46.1% for a single person and 51.2% for a household of 6⁷. The major expenses for Syrian refugee households are rent, services and utilities in that order. The Government of Turkey expects the international community to remain below the Turkish social security payments and set the limit at 62 TYP. The Mardin/Kiziltepe project had a transfer level of 60 TYP. In addition to the low transfer value, beneficiaries faced transaction costs and some opportunity costs, because the selected shops could be far away from their neighbourhoods.

The planning matrix foresaw the implementation of 2 cycles with different beneficiaries per cycle. It formulates indicators to measure the outcome of the project. It is unclear in the component title what is to be understood under access to food and items of daily need. Would the latter only mean non-food items or the expenditure basket? Also satisfaction indicators are used. These usually result in a positive response, as beneficiaries do not want to endanger their privileges.

⁶ According to the first donor report only for Kilis (p. 1) of 03.11.2015

⁷ Calculation of author based on established MEB and Welthungerhilfe's voucher value. For further details on the MEB please see: Christina Hobbs - on behalf of, and with the support of, the Turkey CBI Technical Working Group (September 2016) MEB/SMEB Calculation for Syrians living in Turkey

The planning matrix would have allowed the creation of synergies between component 1 and component 2, which is formulated as “In Turkey 15,000 refugee households have improved access to information by distributing brochures and a telephone hotline for the legal status of refugees, their obligations and access to services like health and humanitarian assistance”. Creating synergies, however, was not foreseen. One indicator (revised indicator 4) was not measurable.

A general observation is that also other opportunities of creating synergies at the households level between different Welthungerhilfe’s projects did not occur. Even communication between the two very similar projects in Gaziantep/Kilis and Mardin/Kiziltepe only happened at the end of the project and through e-mail exchange.

Mardin/Kiziltepe lies in an area where no other international NGOs are present while the budget does not allow providing assistance to an acceptable percentage of vulnerable Syrian refugees⁸. Because of this Welthungerhilfe staff is exposed to pressures from refugees not participating in the project.

One of the core partners to the project is the financial service provider. It was contracted without a tender procedure, despite the service fee of 5% raised at the vendors. The services had been positively evaluated by the project. The financial service provider also conducted the market survey. This could be considered as a conflict of interest. It is not quite clear why a low cost supermarket chain could not be won for the project.

Other implementing partners were the Golden Crescent in Kilis and the Turkish Red Crescent. While the cooperation with the former was excellent, a number of capacity challenges emerged with the latter.

The project team was sufficiently staffed. It was positive that a psychologist supported the team through supervision sessions. Also other inputs to the project proved to be sufficient.

However the project work plan and financial disbursement plan were overambitious, putting pressure on the project and potentially leading it to take short cuts like the direct contracting of the financial service provider without the required tender procedure and leaving insufficient flexibility in the project design.

Support offered to the project from the country office and headquarters was on an ad hoc basis. The donor relations’ unit at Welthungerhilfe Bonn is mentioned positively. What is missing, however, is the support of the CBI technical expert at headquarters. The CBI stated

⁸ Deutsche Welthungerhilfe (August 2016) Field Manual for E-Voucher Distribution in Turkey, p. 14

that he has no clear job description and very limited time to have an input in cash based interventions.

The monitoring and evaluation system and related post distribution monitoring was used for reporting purposes only. However, the project database supported management decision-making.

The target group was not involved in decision-making. This is also due to the fact that Syrian refugees are not sufficiently organised with a representation, which could be included in project implementation.

Some of the assumptions and risks occurred but were successfully mitigated by the project.

4. Efficiency

From the project holder perspective, cost efficiency of cash transfers is higher than distribution of goods, as activities of procurement and in particular storage, transport and regular distribution of goods do not occur.

As a challenge to Welthungerhilfe it was identified that there is a lack of expertise related to CBI and in particular to vouchers.

5. Outcomes and impacts

For the duration of the project, food related negative coping strategies were reduced.

The e-vouchers also helped to build up some social capital, which had the potential to spill over into the period after the intervention.

A negative output of the project is that the short interventions created psychological stress (anxieties) to the households towards the end of their cycles.

Only limited institutional outcomes can be observed.

The project had no long-term impact on the target group. For this the transfer value of the e-vouchers was too low, synergies with other activities were not created so that the service per household was very limited and the intervention period too brief.

A negative impact of the e-vouchers was that it created jealousies, which affect future support to the households.

6. Sustainability

The project as such is not sustainable and by its very nature could not be expected to be so. The future Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) is a paradigm change and it remains to be seen how international NGOs will be allowed to participate in this national programme.

7. Most important recommendations

For the project no specific recommendations are made, as it will close in December 2016.

8. General conclusions and “lessons learnt”

The general conclusions and recommendation are arranged under a number of headers.

Technical conclusions and recommendations:

8.1 Targeting

- During targeting, pre-selection and transaction costs should be avoided.
- Consider measures such as stipulating that voucher values have to be spent before next loading to allow identification of potential inclusion errors.
- Allow sufficient access for potential beneficiaries to the project to facilitate reduction of exclusion error.

8.2 Cash transfer value

- In an environment such a Turkey, where the host government sets cash transfer levels, the maximum payment level to households should be considered.
- The project should make all efforts to reduce transaction and opportunity costs for beneficiaries.

8.3 Project design

- Short programme cycles should be avoided to allow for qualitative targeting and registration and also to allow for corrective measures to deal with exclusion and inclusion errors.
- Future project documents should be consistent and sufficiently clear in what they intend to cover.
- Potential for synergies at the household level should be explored within a programme and between programmes.
- Potential for referrals should be capitalised.
- Work plan and financial disbursement plan should be realistic. The project would at least require four to five months to set up an e-voucher programme.
- Sensitisation measures should be included in the project design.

8.4 Procurement

- Financial service providers should be contracted on the basis of a transparent tender procedure in line with Welthungerhilfe’s RAC, even if Welthungerhilfe is not paying for the services but the local vendors.
- Welthungerhilfe should consider concluding framework contracts with some financial service providers to avoid lengthy tendering procedures in projects.
- Alternatively, tendering the financial service provider contract before signature of project might be considered.

8.5 Strategic at country office

- It should be avoided to establish projects in areas where no other international NGOs are working while not being able to cover an acceptable percentage of potential beneficiaries. This could expose Welthungerhilfe staff to a security risk.
- Welthungerhilfe should strive to provide quality services to households under their support, rather than spreading itself thin.

8.6 Strategic at head quarters (HQ)

- Building up a pool of CBI experts. Building up a pool of CBI experts would require a significant mass of projects that employ cash transfers. CBI experts would be employed in projects and work as consultants also for proposal writing. The pool of CBI experts would enable Welthungerhilfe to timely contract CBI experts that know the organisation's rules and regulations. Failing this, Welthungerhilfe is always free to advertise through the CaLP Discussion Group (D-Group).
- Learning within Welthungerhilfe and its cash transfer activities should be continuous. Establishing a Welthungerhilfe CBI network, which exchanges views freely and meets once a year or so, could facilitate this. In this way, Welthungerhilfe would be strengthening its CBI expertise.
- The position of the CBI expert for cash transfers has to be strengthened. Clear TOR and a full-time position would be required. SOP delineating Welthungerhilfe's ways of implementing cash transfers should be one of the tasks of the CBI expert at HQ.
- In the long-run Welthungerhilfe could see which area of CBI it wants to specialise and provide support to the wider cash learning community. For example, Mercy Corps developed an expertise in financial inclusion and Oxfam and some others in market analysis.