Mid Term Evaluation of the project: "General Food Distribution and Blanket Supplementary Feeding in Rubkona County, Unity State, South Sudan"
SSD 1051

On behalf of
Welthungerhilfe Monitoring Evaluation Accountability & Learning Unit

Main report

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I. Summary

i. Introduction

The **primary objective** of the evaluation of the project "General Food Distribution and Blanket Supplementary Feeding in Rubkona County, Unity State, South Sudan" is learning and in particular to provide insights and answers to selected policy and operational questions for the on going and the near future food assistance interventions of the World Food Programme (WFP) and Welthungerhilfe (WHH) in Rubkona County. The protracted crisis context calls for changes in the approach.

The users of the evaluation are primarily the WHH team in South Sudan, WFP South Sudan and the Welthungerhilfe Regional Directorate and the Donor Relations Team.

The evaluation used the standard OECD/DAC **evaluation criteria** but did not address the full range of criteria. The focus was on priority questions that fall under the criteria relevance and appropriateness of the intervention, coherence, coverage and connectedness to longer-term and interconnected problems.

The evaluation applied a mixed **method** approach with bi-lateral and group interviews as the main method of data collection. Desk research and direct observations complemented the interviews. The country visit took place in June 2019 and covered the distribution sites inside the Protection of Civilians (PoC) camp as well as the distribution sites in Bentiu, Rubkona and in Ding Ding. Key findings have been triangulated regarding methods and sources as much as possible.

ii. Context

In 2015 Welthungerhilfe became a Cooperation Partner of WFP in South Sudan and in charge of the General Food Distribution (GFD) and Blanket Supplementary Feeding Programme (BSFP) programme for Rubkona County. The programme covers 219,000 individuals with emergency food assistance (GFD) and enriched Corn-Soy-Blend for 41,610 children under 5 years of age and 797 pregnant and lactating women for supplementary feeding (BSFP). The monthly distributions of a 21-day ration take place at three distribution points inside the PoC and at four distribution points outside the PoC.[1]

iii. Relevance and appropriateness

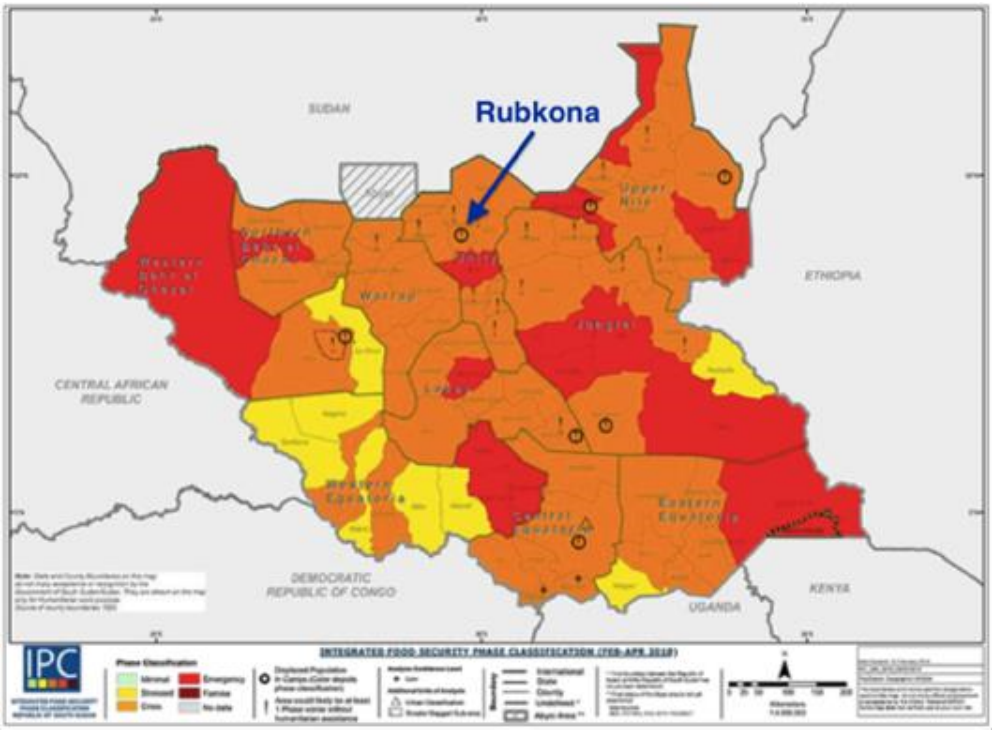
[1] Due to the security situation, the distributions in Nhialdiu are currently suspended. The population from Nhialdiu is expected to collect assistance in Bentiu.

In general the need for food assistance continues in the programme location. At the same time the protracted crisis context calls for changes. Time has come to reconsider the approach of the GFD Programme as well as of the BSFP for children under five years old.

It is very difficult to obtain reliable systematically collected and documented data about the food security and livelihood status of the population in Rubkona County due to the inaccessibility of some locations and the sensitivity of any systematic assessment in particular inside the Bentiu PoC.

WHH itself until now has not undertaken any systematic assessment of the food security and livelihood situation in the project location. WFP leads comprehensive central exercises for monitoring, assessment and analysis (Food Security and Nutrition Monitoring Systems-FSNMS, Integrated Food Security Phase Classification-IPC, and Post Distribution Monitoring-PDM). They primarily serve planning purposes at national, at state and at county level.

The results of the FSNMS are of limited value for Welthungerhilfe for decision-making at county-level. The number of households selected is just too small to allow for decision-making about target groups, project locations and intervention strategies.



Key IPC findings: January-July 2018[2]

For the Bentiu PoC the IPC classification is based on the status of the population as displaced persons. Displacement camps in Southern Sudan are generally classified as

[2] http://www.ipcinfo.org/ipcinfo-detail-forms/ipcinfo-map-detail/en/c/1103832/

phase 3 with the supplement exclamation mark: "Area would be at least one phase worse without humanitarian assistance."

The market situations -in particular in the markets of Bentiu and Rubkona town- are better covered by assessments undertaken by WFP and FSL partners.

iv. Alternatives to unconditional food distribution

Given the above-described situation, it is not easily possible to choose alternative approaches to the current unconditional GFD and BSFP based on assessments. The rather multifaceted picture of the context calls for a targeted and differentiated approach. Rubkona County cannot be considered as one uniform humanitarian context.

At the time of the visit WFP favoured the idea of a "light conditionality" that adds value in recovery efforts and that can be organised with high numbers of recipients. Furthermore, the conditionality is meant to reduce the attractiveness of the food assistance for those who do not need the assistance as urgently as others or for those who are not actually residing within the programme locations.

The most obvious option for the PoC is to link the food distribution to already on-going activities, such as the participation in the hygiene promotion campaigns and community work. Another –preferable- option is to offer new activities that directly add value to the population's efforts in organising their life within the PoC and outside:

- Improved farming: E.g. farming in the direct neighbourhood of the PoC, working with lead farmers willing to go back and forth between their places of origin and the PoC, introduction of new vegetables in gardens inside the PoC
- Cooking stoves and safe access to cooking energy sources
- Vocational training for youth

For areas outside the PoC the conditionality can support strategies in shifting from livestock as the main livelihood to other forms of income: Extending and diversifying farming practices, fishing and small livestock such as bees, goats and chicken and farming as a business.

v. Alternative transfer modalities

People are divided about the question of cash versus in kind. In particular women prefer in kind support as they are by now accustomed to manage the food rations. Many do not have experience in managing cash budgets over a one-month period. Traditionally often the men are handling the cash.

Whether the market capacities allow for a switch to the cash option can only be answered location-specific. In general, the markets would not be able to provide for the entirety of the currently distributed food.

Working with vouchers has been tested already. Traders with sufficient capacity are most likely available and would establish markets if the approach proves to work well and is scaled up.

The transition from in-kind to vouchers needs to be done gradually. A good option is to go step by step by taking out only some commodities and to give the corresponding amount in cash or vouchers instead (e.g. starting with oil and salt).

vi. The role of Welthungerhilfe in Rubkona County

WHH has been a highly effective and reliable partner in WFP's food assistance programme in Rubkona County. It has been a major achievement to run this extensive programme in a very challenging context. The team continuously developed the distribution process further, resulting in a smooth and time-efficient operation if the context allowed.

Welthungerhilfe largely depends on its partners for very essential aspects of the programme: WFP is in charge of the timely and accurate delivery of the food to the distribution sites, the assessments and monitoring and for the formal complaint mechanism. IOM is in charge of registering and managing the lists of beneficiaries.

Given the fact that WHH in Rubkona over the past years has not implemented any activities other than the WFP food distribution, the organisation's role is currently exclusively concentrated on the WFP food distributions. With a conditional and thus more diversified WFP programme in the future, WHH will have to diversify its activities if it wants to continue to play a significant role in Rubkona county.

vii. Appropriateness and effectiveness of distribution sites

Overall the distribution sites are appropriate with a few exceptions regarding the sites outside the PoC: Distance for the women, lack of shelter for protection against the sun, lack of appropriate toilets and problems in the areas at the final phase of the distribution.

viii. Effectiveness of Project Management Committees

It is difficult to distinguish PMC members from WHH local staff and casual labourers who also have roles in facilitating the distribution process. The current situation calls for a clarification of the role of the PMC, while at this point in time there is little need for additional community liaison and accountability functions during the distributions. This might change when new location-specific approaches and conditionality are introduced.

ix. Conclusions and recommendations

WFP and Welthungerhilfe successfully implemented this extensive programme in a very challenging context. WHH has been a highly effective and reliable partner to all

stakeholders. After years of providing free food distribution to all, the time now has come to reconsider the approach and the modalities:

1.) Shifting away from general and free food assistance
It is urgent now to move away from free blanket distributions. Working with a two to three year strategy will help in aligning partners and in communicating transparently to the communities about the changes in the programme. Keeping some capacities and some flexibility to switch operations back will be needed in case the situation deteriorates again.

2.) Plan and communicate location- and population-specific
Rubkona County cannot be considered as one uniform humanitarian context, calling for a location- and population-specific approach to food assistance. Integrating this notion into all forms of communication internally and externally will help in aligning all stakeholders.

3.) Use the whole range of programme options and assistance modalities
Having various aid modalities at the disposal (e.g. switching to cash transfers or vouchers) and introducing different ways of conditionality, give options in designing a diversified approach per location and per population group.

The shift away from unconditional blanket distribution needs to be done gradually. Furthermore, the programme needs to preserve some flexibility to switch operations back to unconditional in kind assistance in case the need occurs due to changes in the context. And even if cash transfers appear to be the easier transfer modality, it is recommended to also consider voucher options.

4.) Reduce the caseload as quickly as possible
Inside the PoC a first step should at least be to take persons out of the programme that are employed by the humanitarian agencies. Reducing the caseload and gradually moving into targeted and conditional approaches based on the communities preferences is likely to help increase the relevance and appropriateness of the assistance.

5.) Determine the new role of WHH in Rubkona
With such a shift in the programme approach, WHH's role in Rubkona will need to undergo changes. WHH needs to decide what role the organisation wants to play in Rubkona in the future. Redefining its role has implications for the assessment capacity of Welthungerhilfe in Rubkona, its ability to attract funding other than WFP and its recognition as a partner with substantial FSL expertise.

6.) Find solutions for distribution sites with partners
Even if some of the sites are not ideal, there is no urgency to solve the issues immediately. A few improvements still can be done within the existing parameters, while the bigger questions of the distribution sites can be included in planning for the next year.

7.) Adjust role of Project Management Committees

Currently PMC members predominantly fulfil organisational support functions rather than community liaison and accountability roles. It is worth looking into their roles and to determine it according to their specific location.