

FINAL REPORT

ECHO-funded WFP programme in Afghanistan

August 2-12, 2002

QUEST-Consult

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PROGRAMME EVALUATED

Evaluated action: Assistance to drought victims and IDPs in Afghanistan
Evaluation of part of World Food Programme activities funded by ECHO (Afghanistan, Eritrea, Serbia, and Tanzania)

Country: Afghanistan

Operation Contract: ECHO/AFG/210/2000/04001 (food aid of the EMOP for drought victims and IDPs)
ECHO/TPS/210/2001/27010 (logistic support)
ECHO/TPS/210/2001/21002 (flight operations)

Total amount: EURO 4,225,000

Sector: Food aid, logistic support and flight operations

Consultant/Evaluators: QUEST-Consult, Mr W. Klaassen, Teamleader and Logistics. Mr. A. van der Heide, Nutrition

Period of evaluation: The Afghanistan evaluation was carried out from August 2-12, 2002.

PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

The global objective requested an assessment of the set-up and impact of the WFP programmes in Afghanistan, Eritrea, Tanzania and Serbia and the part played in them by the ECHO contribution.

METHODOLOGY OF THE WFP AFGHANISTAN EVALUATION

The methodology used was: briefings, interviews and file studies in ECHO Brussels, WFP Headquarters in Rome and WFP Regional Office for the Balkans and eastern Europe in Rome; then an 11-days field visit to Afghanistan in order to meet with WFP staff in the Kabul Country Office and three sub-offices in Mazar-i-Sharif, Bamyán and Kandahar and the ECHO field experts in the ECHO Kabul Office. Intensive meetings were organised with Implementing Partners in Kabul and the provinces visited. A final debriefing was held with WFP country office staff in the presence of the ECHO representative. A separate debriefing was organised with ECHO staff and the EU delegation. Information was gathered from interviews and discussions with staff of WFP, ECHO, IPs and the beneficiaries. Information was also gathered, during field visits, visits to distributions, visits to EDP and FDP, from studies of files and documents and through "tacit knowledge" during the whole mission.

The time allocated to the evaluation (11 days) was very limited and this constrained the consultants; there was time to study all aspects of their assignment, but a limit to the extent to which they could evaluate in depth.

MAIN CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Concerning food aid, food security and nutrition

Conclusion 1a: Food needs assessments are carried out but outcomes are not reliable and methods need improving. WFP is in the process of making improvements. Food needs assessments are not sufficiently household-orientated and do not take into consideration the position of mothers and children in the families. This makes the system not particularly gender-friendly.

Conclusion 1b: The 2001 food needs assessment was carried out under difficult political circumstances. Its methodology was in principle based on an extended food balance sheet approach not taking the specific household approach into consideration. The distributions in 2002 were based on the results of this assessment. There were questions as to the reliability of its findings. The 2002 WFP Crop and Food Supply Assessment, the results of which were not yet available during the evaluation, has an improved methodology; results are expected to be more reliable and more household-orientated.

Recommendation: It is strongly recommended that WFP join even more in the efforts of the Food Security and Nutritional Surveillance System for Afghanistan, implementing the methodology worked out by its steering committee.

Conclusion 2: Malnutrition rates among young children are very high for stunting but not so high for wasting. Half of the young children have arrears in growth; micronutrient deficiencies are widespread among children and women. The household food security situation needs more analysis but there are

indications (UNICEF Kandahar and MoH food security consultant) that on the family level, the main problem is not access to food but the lack of diversity in the food basket. The results of the 2002 WFP-FAO crop and food supply assessment will supply more detailed information¹.

Recommendation: It is strongly recommended that VAM adopts a more household approach using the methodology proposed by the Food Security and Nutritional Surveillance System for Afghanistan in which the food security situation is evaluated by proxy indicators. This approach will change the food needs, both the quantities and the types of food.

Conclusion 3: Beneficiaries are targeted according to the criteria developed in the WFP food needs assessments. WFP and IPs do the final targeting of beneficiaries according to an adapted community-based targeting system; in most cases the shura does the selection of the vulnerable and needy families. A change of methodology in food needs assessments means a change of targeting and surely in the number of beneficiaries.

Recommendation: It is recommended that WFP continue the process of refining the needs assessments and responding to changes in the criteria of targeting and selecting the beneficiaries. It is furthermore recommended to include IPs and their knowledge as much as possible in this process.

Conclusion 4: Monitoring is poorly done, according to a group of implementing partners. There is no post-distribution monitoring. Impact is not well known. WFP is in the process of changing and improving the monitoring system. IPs want to be more involved and better trained.

Recommendation: Making improvements to the monitoring system has to continue; post-monitoring and impact assessment should be carried out. IPs must participate in the process of improving the monitoring system. WFP must train IPs in monitoring.

Concerning Implementing Partners

Conclusion 5: IPs report to WFP mainly on distribution data. No final reports are requested and no information is transmitted about "lessons learnt" or "impact measurement" etc. According to a group of interviewed INGOs, WFP says that it requests final reports from IPs but some IPs do not fulfil this requirement. The WFP system of final reporting to ECHO is also poorly done and does not follow the logic of the project cycle.

Recommendation: Reporting procedures should improve and become more impact-oriented. WFP has to systematically collect information on 'impact' and 'lessons learnt' through IP reports. This information would help to improve the WFP final reports to donors.

Conclusion 6: Evaluations are not carried out systematically and partners are not involved. The experiences and recommendations of partners are seldom used. Impact assessments are not carried out.

Recommendation: Systematic evaluations must be carried out in which impact is measured; IPs must participate actively.

Conclusion 7: IPs and ECHO-field offices have emphasised that in the resource-rich areas of Afghanistan, 'Cash for Work' would be an appropriate approach to support local marketing of crops and provide support to families.

Recommendation: Cash for Work should be discussed from the point of view of, support to food-insecure families, effects on the local market, and the cost-effectiveness of ECHO's operations.

Conclusion 8: Relations with partners in the field could improve. Flat rates for distributions are too low and WFP should better inform IPs of the possibility and criteria of augmenting flat rates.

¹ "The energy content of the food basket in almost 56 percent of households surveyed was below the recommended requirements for populations in emergencies"

Recommendation: Relations with partners should be strengthened through a better joint programming and evaluation system. WFP has to inform IPs in a better way about criteria and flat rates. These recommendations would certainly improve both performance and the quality of interventions.

Conclusion 9: Donors are diverse. Criteria for programmes and reporting quality are not standardised. ECHO's criteria for implementation and reporting are the same as for an NGO. WFP does not want to be treated like the other NGOs.

Recommendation: ECHO should continue to request from WFP the same implementation and reporting criteria as from other funded partners; if this is not practicable, as in cases of un-earmarked funds or contributions for very short periods, both organisations should agree on the procedures of reporting.

Conclusion 10: From the point of view of the cost-effectiveness of ECHO's operations and to stimulate local agricultural markets, Cash for Work would be an option for implementation.

Recommendation: Implementation of Cash for Work projects should be discussed for the northern and mountainous, relatively resource-rich areas where commodities are sometimes in surplus and can be procured. However, further analysis is needed to determine where cash and food for work might be appropriate.

Concerning Logistics and pipeline management

Conclusion 11: The logistics system in Afghanistan is complex, and had to be re-instated to a large extent after the turmoil in the second half of 2001. The system is in functional terms up-to-standard and adequate for reaching the beneficiaries. The different components in the system -communication, transport, storage and controls- are in place but not sufficiently interrelated, each functioning to some degree in isolation.

Recommendation: More attention should be given to a systems approach whereby the components are interactive, depending on and responding to each other, e.g. information about pipeline projections widely available enabling area office management to advise IPs, winterisation planning linked more to local stocks than availability from pipelines.

Conclusion 12: WFP uses good quality management and operational software but several IPs and ECHO say that WFP does not keep them adequately informed.

Recommendation: WFP should link monitoring (controls) and management decisions systematically as suggested in the text of this report. IPs and other stakeholders should be informed on a routine basis about the details of planning and management within WFP.

Conclusion 13: Pipeline performance problems in Afghanistan are not caused by the physical properties of the pipeline or the corridor itself but by the sourcing.

Recommendation: The pipeline projections should give more attention to the need to address the pipeline sourcing in time. WFP Rome will have to play an important role, responding promptly and communicating actively with the donor community.

Conclusion 14: WFP procured wheat in Iran, Pakistan and Kazakhstan to an amount of 174,198 mt in support of the regional EMOP 10126 utilised by the three countries to cope with the emergency outside and inside Afghanistan.

Recommendation: WFP to further strengthen its existing policy that donors provide their support in cash for procurement from the region as importation from abroad in-kind could take 3 to 4 months and may cause a lack of balance in the food basket.

Conclusion 15a: WFP has emphasised the importance of increased cost-effectiveness and efficiency. This is reflected in a decision by the WFP Executive Board which has requested the Secretariat to embark on a comparative study of the support budgets of comparable NGOs, focussing on mandates,

case studies of interventions, business processes, cost structures and cost comparisons. This study has started and will be submitted to the EB in February 2003.

Conclusion 15b: A detailed study concerning cost-effectiveness by the evaluators has not been possible due to time constraints. Costs have been assessed by discussing the cost factors with different actors, however this did not allow for conclusions, only indications that the cost of the WFP system is high.

Recommendation: A detailed study on cost-effectiveness be implemented which focuses on operational factors and that research be done into the internal costing factors within WFP operations and the structure itself.

Recommendation: The cost-effectiveness of projects can be improved by using the LTSH spreadsheet as a standard tool to monitor actual prices against budgeted costs. This will have positive effects on the financial planning as well as on the possibility to re-programme ongoing projects.

Conclusion 16: The slow-down mode of operation of the pipeline is detrimental for all the beneficiaries, the IPs and the WFP and their mutual relations.

Recommendation: In order to allow IPs to take adequate measures when the pipeline becomes irregular, pipeline projections should be distributed widely amongst IPs.

Conclusion 17: An example of the positive trend of decentralisation in WFP is the authorisation of the Area offices to decide on local contracts with IPs to a maximum amount of 2,000 mt. However, some area offices are informed late about the shortage of food creating a very difficult relationship with the contracted IPs.

Recommendation: In the case of decentralisation, not only the authority should be decentralised but also the resources. It is therefore important that commodities are assigned to each level in the organisation in relationship to the authority granted. Operational controls and management checks need to be coupled to decentralised initiatives to ensure that at each level the authority and the means are available for action.

Concerning Common Services in Afghanistan

Flight operations

Conclusion 18: After initial problems, UNHAS, under the management of WFP, has operated very well since January 2002, especially within the country.

Recommendation: To continue for the near future with the services of UNHAS, establishing and consolidating a forum for communication between users and service providers about improvements to the quality of flights and arrangements.

ICT

Conclusion 19: A large number of activities have been carried out and the application of telecommunications and hence security for staff have improved considerably.

Recommendation: In the final WFP reports the areas of the spending of ECHO contributions should be identified.

UNJLC

Conclusion 20: The UNJLC has created a fast data bank covering the physical infrastructure in the country with low threshold access for stakeholders.

Recommendation: Increasingly information from UNJLC should be standardised and made available to CIMIC; orientation and planning should be done to see how some of the information can be processed and be made available to GoA departments.

Concerning the organisational sector: improvement of strategy and context of future ECHO-WFP co-operation

Conclusion 21: WFP and ECHO have important mandatory and policy reasons to co-operate. However, the procedures and regulations of both organisations differ and are not mutually understood. The Strategic Dialogue of the leadership of the organisation is crucial to further the objective of improving the co-operation between the organisations.

Recommendation: WFP and ECHO will focus on improving the mutual vision and communication characteristics between the organisations. The following issues need attention:

- i) Comparing decentralisation and centralisation tendencies in the organisations and its consequences and effects;
- ii) Clarifying the different roles of the organisations in view of their mandate and objectives;
- iii) Agreeing on and adjusting the differences of working documents and related procedures;
- iv) Building internal communication procedures within both organisations;
- v) Outlining the question as to 'who will communicate with whom about which authority on which issue';
- vi) Strengthening personal contacts and communication between staff and the modus operandi for WFP Liaison office to meet regularly with ECHO staff.

Recommendation: That a Senior Technical Group, consisting of high-powered technical WFP-ECHO officials from HQ level be established to study the different ways ECHO and WFP experience impediments, comparative advantages, and worthwhile co-operation between their organisations. Areas for consideration of the Group would include how to put into operation the outcomes of the 'strategic dialogue' as well as assessing ways to implement the recommendations of this evaluation report. Other issues for the group to consider are: the incompatibility of the organisations regulations for project applications, financial administration and reporting; the need to harmonise the perceived difference between the PRROs (which are regarded by WFP as its project document) and the project proposals as expected by ECHO (which are different in format and nature); revision of the needs assessment; the need to institutionalise best practice; advise on communication between both organisations -who communicates with whom on which levels of authority about which matters.

The above recommendation, of establishing a 'Senior Technical Group', is superseded by the UN-EC Framework Agreement¹, and its implementation should be within the understanding of the agreement.

Conclusion 22: In communication with representatives of NGOs in Kabul and in the Area offices, as well as in a meeting with donor representatives, many positive remarks were made about ECHO-Kabul and its technical, professional and personal commitment of staff -also its role of translating the policy of ECHO-Brussels in a clear and applicable way.

Recommendation: ECHO will be able to play an important role in Afghanistan in the near future. If the tasks of ECHO have to be phased over to the Delegation, then it is recommended that the current capacity of ECHO be retained, present but active at a lower level, to ensure that its activities can be revitalised quickly if needed.

Conclusion 23: The quality of the reporting of WFP leaves much to be desired even though the organisation has high-quality management systems (COMPAS, WINGS, Pipeline software); it is also said that the donors need more information about the spending of their funding. The financial and narrative reporting is extremely short and has very little detail.

Recommendation: The Senior Technical Group would be best placed to look into the future working relationship of the organisations. This would also imply advice on the nature of the FPA, Format of the Operational Contracts and reporting requirements.

LESSONS LEARNT

1. Food needs assessments should not only determine the question of whether or not to provide food but also the diversity of the food basket, taking into account on the one side the nutritional,

¹ Financial and Administrative Framework Agreement between the European Community, represented by the Commission of the European Communities and the United Nations, 2002

household and food security situation and, on the other, considering whether food aid is the most appropriate solution to the problem.

2. In joint operations between WFP and IPs it is important that IPs are involved in all phases of the project cycle and that WFP incorporates as much as possible the lessons learnt both by IPs and WFP in new programmes or strategies.

3. Monitoring of operations is of great importance but when it is done without impact measurement and without lessons learnt, WFP is missing key information for new programmes and strategies.

4. Pipeline management is a central management tool that needs to be strongly integrated with resource development and management at macro level, as well as management at country and area level.

5. The management information systems in WFP can be better used for reporting and to ensure transparency.

6. Decentralisation in WFP is a process that is beginning. The increasing autonomy in decision-making at area level needs to be supported by adequate information about the sourcing of the programme. For instance in Faizabad, the area office was made aware too late of the shortages in the pipelines and continued contracting NGOs with its ceiling of 2,000 mt. When it came to implementation the food was not available, causing serious tension between the local WFP area office and NGOs.

7. Information of food procured locally or regionally needs to be reported openly and in detail. Procurement of locally produced food assists to enforce local agricultural development. Beneficiaries need to be informed if food has been imported from other continents.

8. Food needs assessments should not only identify the main question -food or not- but should clearly show whether food procurement could be done locally or not, considering agricultural production. ECHO participates in most needs assessment missions so can underline this objective. Formalising and operationising agreements on this issue is a pre-condition.

9. Without harmonising procedures and regulations between ECHO and WFP, project implementation will suffer having a detrimental effect on the professional relations between the organisations, both unable to live up to their initial commitments. The two organisations have the same main objectives: combating hunger and saving lives. Harmonising procedures and regulations between ECHO and WFP will prevent the delays caused by long-drawn-out negotiations. In periods of emergency, professional relations have to deliver what was promised.