

FINAL REPORT

ECHO-funded WFP programme in Serbia

August 19-23, 2002

QUEST-Consult

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PROGRAMME EVALUATED

Evaluated action: Food assistance to refugees and war-affected persons in the Balkan Region, in particular Serbia.
Evaluation of the part of the World Food Programme activities funded by ECHO (Afghanistan, Eritrea, Serbia and Tanzania)

Country: Yugoslavia (Federal Republic of) Serbia

Operation Contract: ECHO/TPS/214/1999/07180

Total amount: EURO 10,000,000

Sector: Food aid

Consultant/Evaluators: QUEST-Consult, Mr W Klaassen, Logistics and Team Leader, Mr A van der Heide (Food and Nutrition)

Period of evaluation: The Serbia evaluation was carried out from August 19 to 23, 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 SERBIA EVALUATION

The evaluation involved visits to the different headquarters in Brussels and Rome followed by a five-day field visit to Serbia. This included meetings with key staff in WFP, the Implementing Partners (IPs), the ECHO Field Experts and with beneficiaries. There were visits to warehouses, Extended Delivery Points (EDPs) and Final Distribution Points (FDPs). Finally there were joint debriefing meetings.

The time allocated to the evaluation, five (5) days, gave time to study all aspects of their assignment, but was a limit to the extent to which they could evaluate in depth.

INPUT IN WFP-SERBIA

The Operational Contract (ECHO/TPS/214/1999/07180) amounted to EURO 10 million for purchase and distribution of 13,975 mt of food. The project -according to the final report- procured and distributed a quantity of 13,109 mt. The total spending has been EURO 6,307,039. Of the grant of EURO 10,000,000 an amount of 3,692,961 was not spent and returned to ECHO. The difference between the ECHO contribution available and the amount procured by WFP represents 800 mt of vegetable oil. Although not acknowledged by the WFP final financial reports, also other budget lines such as communication equipment and evaluation were not spent. The delay in implementation was related to the long time involved in finding the most appropriate scenario for the funding of the project (scenario 2) and the relatively ineffective nature of communication between both organisations. This led to a slow and delayed signing of the contract. WFP mentioned the short duration of the contract with ECHO, a project cycle of 6 months with the possibility of an extension, as an impediment to spending the full amount. The administrative liquidation of the project in the ECHO Financial department has not yet been completed.

MAIN CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Concerning Food aid, food security and the nutrition sector

The food needs assessments were carried out in a professional way. WFP's mandate was to provide basic food such as cereals, beans, oil etc. and no fresh food such as vegetables, fruits etc. A clear overall picture of all the nutritional needs including the need for vitamins and micro-nutrients was not obtained. In consequence these deficiencies were not addressed. No clear picture of the psychological problems suffered by many of the beneficiaries, or the social settings of the need were collated. In the Serbian circumstance, poverty not hunger was the main problem. Basic foods like cereals, beans, oil etc. did not always match the nutritional needs of the target groups. The problem was not the availability of necessary foodstuffs but access to food. There is a need to improve the tools of food security and nutritional surveys, questioning whether food aid is the most appropriate intervention.

There has been a study done of alternative approaches as well as exit strategies. In consultation with donors, WFP has worked out an exit strategy; a phasing-out of social cases was also formulated in consultation with the Government.

Monitoring was done constantly, and included food distributions, and logistics. Household visits were made during which some indicators such as the household food economy, beneficiary situation, vulnerability and acceptability of the provided food were assessed. Monitoring was mostly done jointly with the IPs. Actual overall monitoring coverage is not known but according to the field staff of WFP and IPs in one of the sub-offices about 33% of the distributions and household visits were monitored. WFP Serbia is convinced of the effectiveness of its monitoring system and the information collected for its databank. In Eritrea and Tanzania all distributions were monitored by different post-monitoring systems, and no home visits were made. In respect to post distribution-monitoring Serbia performed comparatively better.

A quantity of data was collected during the monitoring work but no clear conclusions made on issues like the appropriateness of the composition of the food basket and the health and nutrition questions brought forward by IPs during the mission. These answers are necessary for evaluating the appropriateness of WFP's mandate. Monitoring still needs greater attention and should include qualitative and impact aspects. Systematic evaluations, with IPs, should be done.

The priorities of the beneficiaries expressed by the IPs are: help with the physical and mental consequences of war and support for the local economy. ECHO, in consultation with WFP and the IPs, should adapt food aid making it part of a package that focuses on rehabilitation and development.

WFP relations with Implementing Partners

Implementing Partners regard WFP more as a 'top-down', 'food-moving organisation' instead of a partner. A relationship based on mutual respect with implementing partners should be established in order to improve impact and outcomes. IPs for instance said, that apart from ad-hoc contacts, there was no official communication; no regular co-ordination meetings were held with an agenda.

In separate meetings with both evaluators IPs stated that WFP does not consistently require IP reporting; there is no follow-up from WFP if an IP does not report. If this is the case WFP remains therefore largely unaware of IP experience, losing information on best practice and impact and also losing transparency. A tool to assess and strengthen IP operational capacity is therefore lost.

Although the WFP-UNHCR MoU¹ implicitly regulates the working relations, tasks and responsibilities of both organisations, all participants should be aware of the risk of operational repetition between organisations. The consultants positively subscribe to the idea in WFP that the organisation should be in charge of the full cycle of food procurement, transport and distribution. This would shorten the chain of operators and hence reduce the risk of repetition and potentially optimise the operational costs of project implementation. See next point. A precondition is that WFP reporting be improved and that it develops techniques of communication that include the beneficiaries.

Concerning Organisational aspects WFP–ECHO

The relationship between ECHO and WFP will be further shaped by the recently adopted UN-EC Framework Agreement². This implies that the WFP-ECHO Strategic Dialogue meetings as well as the proposed Senior Technical Group, see below, will derive its orientation from the Framework Agreement.

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

¹ Memorandum of Understanding between the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the World Food Programme (WFP), July 2002

² Financial and administrative framework agreement between the European Community, represented by the Commission of the European Communities and the United Nations, 2002

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 both organisations, their consequences and effects;
- ii) Clarifying roles of both organisations in view of their mandate and objectives;
- iii) The problems caused by incompatible working documents and related procedures;
- iv) Internal communication procedures within both organisations;
- v) An outline concerning the question as to 'who will communicate with whom about which authority on which issue';
- vi) Strengthening, personal contacts, communication between staff and the modus operandi, by the WFP Liaison office meeting regularly with ECHO staff;

The budgets and the operational contracts, agreed between ECHO and WFP, do not provide an acceptable degree of detail. As a consequence, reporting does not give sufficient information, identifying lessons learnt and applicable best practices. This is a structural problem that cannot be addressed at the operational level, but only at the executive level of both organisations.

A Senior Technical Group needs to be established, consisting of highly powered technical WFP-ECHO officials from HQ level. This group should study the different ways ECHO and WFP experience impediments in their co-operation and identify areas of comparative advantage and worthwhile co-operation for both organisations. Areas for consideration by the Group would include; how to put into operation the outcome of the 'strategic dialogue'; an assessment for the implementation of the recommendations of this evaluation report; the incompatibility of the regulations for project applications; financial administration and reporting; harmonising 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; proposing ways to institutionalise best practice while also advising on the communication between both organisations-who communicates with whom on which levels of authority about which matters.

Across both organisations, WFP and ECHO have organisational structures, procedures and regulations differing in several ways, to some extent incompatible and hampering effectiveness. To address this, the top leadership in both organisations has set out a number of strategy meetings (Strategic Dialogue). The Strategic Meetings should be continued and in addition a high-powered technical working group be established to implement the recommendations made in this report.

WFP operates well with large quantities of food over great distances and can work well under political pressure and with host governments. ECHO should continue to work with WFP in large programmes, while improving planning, systems for monitoring and reporting. For smaller programmes both competent I/NGOs and WFP may be considered.

A detailed study concerning cost-effectiveness has not been possible due to time constraints. Costs have been assessed in discussing the cost factors with different actors, however this does not allow for conclusions, but only indicates that the costs of the WFP system are high. A detailed study on cost-effectiveness should be implemented which does focus on operational factors.

RELEVANCE

i) Was there a need for food aid?

Serbia is not a food-deficit and low-income country; it was exporting surpluses during the period of sanctions. Food aid was an appropriate choice in 1992 while phasing out food aid now is fully justified.

ii) Were the needs correctly identified?

Needs were identified every year by means of JFNAMs. WFP is only mandated to distribute basic food items like cereals, beans, oil etc. The needs of special vulnerable groups such as children, lactating

mothers, elderly etc. are different but WFP could not fulfil them. Given the fact that the problem was not availability of food but that of poverty and a lack of access to good, healthy food, more emphasis should have been given to alternative strategies.

iii) Was the response to the need quick enough?

It took both organisations more than one year to finalise the agreement on Operation Contract ECHO/TPS/214/1999/07180, which is totally inadequate in a real emergency situation.

iv) Was the targeting of the beneficiaries correctly done?

Targeting was through strict selection criteria set up by joint agency meetings and in the case of refugees, worked out by the UNHCR. However, a perfect system of targeting was not possible due to various unknown factors such as the grey economy in which many beneficiaries are probably active.

v) Was a Gender Policy in place to make the programme more relevant?

The country did not face starvation but poor access to a balanced diet. The ration was adequate in calories but not adapted to the needs of children, pregnant and lactating women and the elderly. In the JFNAM, gender was an issue but a stronger gender approach was needed regarding the special needs of women who are the main caretakers as well as being vulnerable.

Nutritional and household food economy and food security surveys were not carried out although poverty studies were made and there was information from JFNAM and VAM bulletins. The problem of "caretakers" can be assessed in all the above-mentioned studies if specially requested in the ToR.

vi) Was the nature and capacity of the logistic system relevant to the requirements of the programme in Serbia?

The logistics system infrastructure, both hardware and software components, are well chosen and well managed. However, the information systems are under-utilised by WFP: a large body of detailed information covering the whole logistics cycle operations and financing is not entered in the reports. This poses a limit to the continuing improvement to operational efficiency.

vii) Has procurement been done in a way most relevant to rehabilitation in the country?

In the Operational Contract Echo had with WFP, food was to be procured locally. WFP explanation is that this was not done on the request of the then new government who advised that the country had depleted national food reserves - although Serbia has a grain surplus.

EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROGRAMME

i) Did the programme achieve its purpose?

The planned benefits were delivered and received. Targeting was done according to strict criteria but certain IPs did not always agree with the results due to differences in interpretation of criteria. Monitoring was done according to WFP standards, in accordance with the recommendations of the JFNAMs and in line with the Government's 'poverty' selection criteria. However, not all IPs agreed to these standards. Energy requirements were supplied in sufficient quantities but the distributed food did not always meet the real nutritional needs. Within strict definitions, there was targeting and monitoring. This did not mean that nutritional status was improved.

ii) Unplanned effects and shortcomings?

No unplanned effects have been identified. A serious shortcoming was the under use of reporting from IPs and food aid monitors. This information could have been used to augment LRRD, to plan new approaches or systematic nutritional impacts, for feedback for ongoing programmes and better planning for new programmes. LRRD is in all emergency situations a logical follow-up to the first response but the operational contract does not contain specific LRRD related objectives.

The lack of internal or external evaluations in the Serbia programme -as in all other countries visited- is a serious shortcoming.

iii) Effectiveness of the logistic arrangements and activities

WFP is an effective mover of food, but the assessment of the evaluators, score it low in cost-effectiveness; this is an issue which WFP is increasingly focussing on by implementing internal and comparative studies. Improved use of the LTSH matrix for monitoring the actual cost as compared to the budgeted cost and the establishment of procedures for reprogramming budgets and operations,

are recommended. A detailed study of the cost-effectiveness of the WFP programme by the evaluators has not been possible given the time available to cover the whole programme.

EFFICIENCY OF THE PROGRAMME

i) Operational capacity of the partners?

Although the operational capacity of most of the partners is up to standard, it is recommended that WFP provides for capacity assessment and organisational capacity development of the IPs, as practised by other international organisations.

ii) Efficiency of the logistic system and linkage to the management system

The effectiveness of output delivery of the logistics system is up to standard. However, the costs are high, with inadequate detail in the operational budgets and reporting. Both budgets and reports should account for spending on each phase of the logistics cycle, procurement, storage, handling, transport, etc. Linkages between 'internal control' and 'management control' need to be formalised and reinforced. In its planning and operations WFP does not use indicators of efficiency in order to monitor the efficiency of the operations against pre-set and flexible planning benchmarks.

IMPACT

i) Overall objectives achieved?

The overall objectives have been achieved but poor nutrition due to poverty was not really addressed. Support to refugees has been achieved but not necessarily nutritional improvement. WFP's role was not one of improving the nutritional status, but rather of alleviating some of the consequences of poverty on the poorest groups of the population.

ii) Whether the desired wider impact could have been better achieved otherwise?

The programme was merely a food distribution activity of limited scope.

SUSTAINABILITY

Food aid -even though it focuses on the basic needs of the socially disadvantaged cases, as is the case in Serbia- is never sustainable but helps poor and vulnerable people to survive.

ADEQUACY OF THE PROJECT BUDGET FOR ITS PURPOSE

The available budget exceeded requirements.

CROSSCUTTING ISSUES

- 1 Linking relief and development:** In Serbia an approach towards LRRD is carried out in the ongoing PRRO in which long term Relief and Rehabilitation interventions have been proposed. However, it is difficult to do the R&R with refugees, either in collective centres or in the community. The refugees have a clear objective - either to go home to Croatia or Bosnia Herzegovina or to become Serbian citizens. These possibilities are subject to political and legal procedures, which cannot be accomplished by food aid alone.
- 2 Gender:** Caretaking in the households is the work of women. Only the caretakers can guarantee good nutrition. Distribution is done to the families: men and/or women, with the food mostly collected by men (using a private or a borrowed car) or single women; some of the old women transport the food on foot; pensioners may refuse the food because of its weight and ask for cash or vouchers. These facts were well known at the level of the IPs and food aid monitors, but no clear solution had been found by WFP and the other implementing partners like UNHCR or SRC. WFP argues that 98% of the food is eaten by the beneficiaries and no one has ever refused the rations.
- 3 The elderly:** It was said by IPs that among pensioners, whether refugees or social cases, a number of elderly were selling their ration in order to get cash to purchase special food or non-food items. Other reasons given were, the heavy weight of the ration and a lack of transport and problems such as the lack of an elevator. According to WFP this was a minority.

- 4 Children:** The food ration was not well suited to young children who need vegetables, fruit, milk, meat etc. -as do other groups. WFP food aid programmes in general should pay attention to the real needs of families by making it possible for them to get a balanced diet.
- 5 HIV/AIDS:** Is in many development countries a serious threat to food security. In Serbia WFP does not acknowledge it is a priority to take into account, as the mission found in Eritrea and Tanzania.

LESSONS LEARNT

- i) In complex and changing political situations like in Serbia and in the absence of a 'food deficit' and an 'underdeveloped' socio-economic situation, a good macro-monitoring system of the programme at policy level is essential in order to be constantly aware of real needs, alternatives and exit strategies.
- ii) Full participation of IPs in all phases of the programme, including evaluations and sessions on "lessons learnt", is essential for i).
- iii) Despite the agreement with ECHO, no local procurement was implemented. This was not communicated to ECHO, and grain was imported into a country with a grain surplus. WFP noted that at the time, food was short in the country and at the request of the government it did not procure locally.
- iv) If a more thorough problem analysis is not done at the beginning, then a mismatch of aid and problems may occur. The problem raised in Serbia was the composition of the food basket in the light of the needs of special vulnerable groups like children, the elderly and pregnant and lactating women. JFNAM are principally mandated to carry out food needs assessments of a good quality in a broader context but can mention the problems. In Serbia it was done. A thorough problem analysis which includes the impact of food aid and alternatives is therefore in addition a necessary tool. This analysis can lead to discussions as to whether only mandated food is given or whether other alternatives are better, perhaps in combination with food aid. This could prevent situations where only "mandated food aid" is given.
- v) Based on the match between the mandates of both organisations and their policies, a serious effort is needed by WFP and ECHO to harmonise procedures and regulations and hence improve effectiveness and efficiency of the programme and strengthen the professional relations between staff in both organisations.