



SYRIAN CRISIS 2013

CAFOD - External evaluation of DEC phase 1



Photo from WFP.org

The programme focused on the distribution of food parcels to conflict affected individuals, households in Damascus. [...] There is 1 outcome to which CAFOD and its partners are all contributing: 1000 conflict affected, vulnerable IDP and Refugee households in urban Damascus have improved access to diverse food items.

Final report

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

DEC	Disasters Emergency Committee
HH	Household
HFSA	Household Food Security and Access Scale
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
L/L	Lessons Learned
MONA	Middle East and North Africa
NFI	Non-Food Item
SARC	Syrian Arab Red Crescent
UNWFP	United Nations World Food Programme

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since 2011, the civil conflict in Syria has resulted in significant humanitarian needs. According to the revised humanitarian assistance response plan for Syria, 4.8 million people, including 4.25 million internally displaced people across the country, are in need of assistance.¹ Damascus city has not been immune to conflict: fighting is taking place in the suburbs and even approaching the heart of the city. Hundreds of thousands of people have been affected.

The Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) appeal was launched on 21 March 2013. CAFOD received £239,293 in funds from the appeal for the Syrian crisis, and undertook to plan and implement a response for the period 1 April to 30 September 2013 in partnership with two church organizations: the lead agency, Partner A based in Lebanon and the implementing agency, Partner B, based in Damascus. The project targeted 1,000 conflict-affected, vulnerable IDP and Refugee households in urban Damascus to improve their access to diverse food items.

The DEC project was deemed to be very effective, taking into account all the challenges of working in the Syrian context, in particular access restrictions due to insecurity, and the lack of experience and capacity of national organizations to respond to emergencies. Building the response on the existing church network and partnership was the key to success. The project partner, Partner B, faced the incredible challenge of shifting from a traditional social assistance model to a more professional and responsive working approach, incorporating increased resources and responding to the management requirements of institutional donors. This could only be achieved thanks to the lead partner (Partner A) who provided the necessary technical assistance and capacity building.

The DEC project was also an opportunity to gain and benefit from experiences and the 'lessons learned' (L/L) workshop which took place in November 2013. This has been clearly highlighted in the evaluation report, together with recommendations that address project weaknesses identified during the review process.

¹ 'REVISED Syria Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan (SHARP), January-December 2013', available at <http://www.who.int/hac/Revision_2013_Syria_HARP.pdf> (accessed 13 November 2013).

SUMMARY TABLE OF LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Indicators	Key questions	Lessons learned (L/L) - Main recommendations
Relevance/ Appropriateness	Needs assessment and project design	<p>Based on L/L, field staff consultation and project planning are taking place from the early stage of the new project.</p> <p>The project would have gained from having an emergency modus operandi and mechanism in place from an early stage.</p> <p>CAFOD needs to be more responsive in the emergency setting to ensure grant confirmation and the granting of emergency funding for immediate response from the early project stage.</p>
	Was the food response appropriate?	Based on L/L more comprehensive response to needs in the new project. Assistance may include housing support, clothes, Non-Food Items (NFI) and food aid.
	Did the voucher modality respond to beneficiary needs?	Based on L/L, more flexibility will be given to beneficiaries within the cash voucher approach in the new project.
	Was the use of voucher appropriate in the Syrian context?	It is recommended that CAFOD makes available more technical expertise and support to the partner and developing and documenting voucher use.
Effectiveness/ Coverage	Likely achievement of objective	<p>Based on L/L, it is positive that targeting and prolonged assistance to the most vulnerable families is being considered for the next project phase</p> <p>It is recommended that CAFOD includes a beneficiary satisfaction indicator in the log frame of the future project to ensure adequate follow up of beneficiary feedback.</p>
	Intervention timeliness	Based on L/L, it is very positive that some bridge funding has been provided by CAFOD and Partner C to ensure the continuation of the project partner (Partner B) assistance to beneficiaries.

	Coverage and targeting of beneficiaries	<p>Based on L/L, the project partner will increase its capacity and this will enlarge coverage and enable better follow up of beneficiaries and identification of those most in need.</p> <p>CAFOD's partners are encouraged to develop further targeting modalities and define more precisely vulnerability criteria for assistance linked to database and registration information. Analysis of beneficiary data would then support and document the response.</p> <p>It is recommended that CAFOD's partners maintain assistance to the most vulnerable families.</p>
Coordination and coherence	How was the partnership?	<p>Based on L/L CAFOD appears much more involved in the new project phase with questions and clarification requests at the initial stage of the project</p> <p>It is recommended that CAFOD supports the project partner to enlarge its partnership from other communities and this approach be given more emphasis in the new project phase.</p>
	Strengthening partner capacity	<p>It is recommended that CAFOD in partnership with the church partners (PARTNER A, PARTNER C) continues the capacity building of the project partner and attends regular project briefings/debriefings.</p>
	Coordination with other actors	<p>The project partner is encouraged to have more personnel dedicated to coordination with other actors</p>
	Project implementation	<p>Based on L/L, a project manager has been appointed in the new project phase and that additional human resources for reporting will be available. This will certainly enhance overall efficiency.</p>

Efficiency	Mobilization of resources	<p>It is recommended that CAFOD is more responsive in the emergency setting by ensuring grant confirmation and granting emergency funding for immediate response from an early stage of the stage. CAFOD is encouraged to formalize specific internal mechanisms for emergency response in order to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobilize and allocate some flexible emergency funds at an early stage prior to finalization of all project details; • Have internal deadlines for signing contract agreements in cases of emergency funds or crisis situations; • Confirm quickly to the implementing partner if resources are to be made available within a few days so that preparation and action can be taken immediately.
	Cost efficiency	CAFOD partners are encouraged to review the voucher modality versus direct procurement in documenting market assessment, and to undertake risk and cost analysis. With increased capacity and experience, direct purchasing and storing of selected commodities may be more appropriate and cost effective if the market remains unstable. A mixed approach may also be suitable.
	Human resources and stress management	CAFOD partners are encouraged to provide more psychological support to the project staff. This could take the form of specific debriefing sessions in the presence of an experienced psychologist. This would help to decrease tension and avoid negative effects in the long run.
Impact/ Accountability	Individual impact	CAFOD's partners are encouraged to develop their impact assessment process to include profiles of beneficiaries, a baseline survey, and reporting of disaggregated data on gender, family composition, vulnerability and community of origin.
	Broader impact	Based on the L/L, the increased capacity of the project partner (Partner B) will help it to develop and implement new projects.
	Beneficiary consultation	CAFOD's partners are encouraged to collect and document beneficiary satisfaction and inputs with a post distribution monitoring survey.

	Next project phase – Recommendations summary
Emergency capacity	<p>CAFOD's partners are encouraged to develop:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Emergency capacity with flexible funding and timely decision making; - Emergency stocks ready for distributions. (In the case market and supplies remain volatile).
Staffing and follow up	<p>CAFOD's partners are encouraged to have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A full time project coordinator with coordination tasks with other agencies; - A full time M&E staff for regular follow up of distribution and for post distribution survey; - A full time data and reporting officer for daily, monthly and end of project reports; - Psychological support for the staff with regular debriefings and stress management exercises.
Technical support	<p>CAFOD is encouraged to ensure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Additional technical support for vouchers use and modalities, and market survey; - Additional technical support to M&E and analysis of data; - Additional technical support to case workers and training on vulnerability criteria and targeting.

PURPOSE – METHODOLOGY AND LIMITS

Evaluation purpose

The overall objective of the evaluation was to assess the overall relevance, effectiveness, impact, coherence, economy and efficiency of CAFOD's DEC Syria response project.

Specific objectives

1. To assess the extent to which the projects implemented by CAFOD's partners achieved the programme's initial objectives and outcomes, and consequently met the needs of conflict-affected communities.
2. To review how accountability standards were applied throughout the programme.
3. To assess CAFOD's ways of working and ability to respond to this emergency, and also CAFOD's added value.
4. To identify key lessons and provide recommendations to strengthen CAFOD's response to similar future emergencies in Syria and elsewhere.

CAFOD responded to the Syrian crisis by planning and implementing a response funded by £239,293 from the DEC appeal, during the period 1 April to 30 September 2013.

CAFOD and its partners were all contributing to one outcome: '1000 conflict affected, vulnerable IDP and Refugee households in urban Damascus have improved access to diverse food items'.²

At the end of the project, CAFOD commissioned an external evaluator who conducted a review assessment from November to December 2013.

Evaluation methodology

The evaluation methodology comprised four phases: 1) a desk study of relevant documents and the development of evaluation tools and planning; 2) a field phase collecting quantitative and qualitative data and information through interviews with various stakeholders; 3) synthesis phase and report writing; 4) debriefing.

Constraints and evaluation limits

Due to security constraints, a field mission to Syria was not feasible and access to beneficiaries was not therefore possible. Only very few of the project partner staff from Partner B could be met in Lebanon.

The initial plan to interview some beneficiaries by telephone in order to obtain beneficiary feedback was also not possible due to the partner's concerns about beneficiary security and data protection. Partner B withheld the beneficiary data for confidentiality reasons.

² From the CAFOD call for applications, 'Consultant for an external evaluation of our DEC Syrian response', 1 November 2013.

SYRIAN CRISIS INTRODUCTION

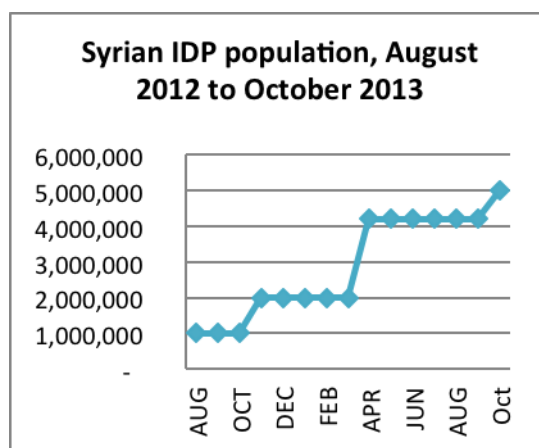
Since the start of the civil uprising in Syria in 2011, the civil conflict has resulted in significant humanitarian needs. According to the revised humanitarian assistance response plan for Syria, 4.8 million people, including 4.25 million internally displaced people across the country, are in need of assistance.³ Damascus city has not been immune to conflict: fighting is taking place in the suburbs and even approaching the heart of the city. Hundreds of thousands of people have been affected and recent reports indicate the spread of disease and growing starvation in some suburbs of the besieged capital.

The two years of conflict have exacerbated the divisions between communities in the country, with increased resentment towards those groups perceived as aligned with the government or conversely with the rebels. Moreover, the division of the country between government-controlled areas and rebel areas (with their own internal divisions and radical forces) makes the situation extremely complex for humanitarian aid and assistance.⁴ Reaching the most vulnerable people in their own communities and beyond has become challenging.⁵

Radical changes in the first semester of 2013

From January to October 2013, the Syrian pound fell drastically against the US dollar, decreasing from 67SYP to US\$1 to 200SYP to US\$1 after six months – and by as much as 300SYP to US\$1 on the free market (black market). The Syrian pound depreciation led to an increase in inflation and the rocketing of food commodities prices by 300% during the first period of the year. Flour and bread were the exceptions and remained affordable as prices continued to be subsidized by the authorities.

Figure 1: Syrian IDP population numbers according to OCHA estimate figures.



Source: OCHA bulletin.

Prior to January 2013, the Damascus area had been relatively spared by the conflict. From February to March 2013, rebel forces moved towards the capital. As a result, fighting spread in and around Damascus: insecurity became the norm and access to humanitarian agencies' offices and beneficiaries became more difficult and erratic.

During the same period, large displacements of the population occurred in Syria as a result of fighting, including in the rural areas around Damascus. By the end of August 2013, over 4 million people were estimated to have been displaced. The reasons for displacement and flight include the spreading violence, the destruction of homes and livelihoods,

³ 'REVISED SHARP'.

⁴ 'The parties in conflict have done so little on their own to care for the civilians they at one point purported to be protecting', according to the International Crisis Group. ICG, 'UN Should Mandate Unhindered Humanitarian Access To and Within Syria', 1 November 2013, available at <<http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/publication-type/media-releases/2013/mena/un-should-mandate-unhindered-humanitarian-access-to-and-within-syria.aspx>> (accessed 13 November 2013).

⁵ Challenging humanitarian access and insecurity limits humanitarian actors' capacity to deliver aid. See 'REVISED SHARP' in note 1.

and the lack of basic services. CAFOD's project partner, Partner B, reported that it was overwhelmed by the volume of assistance requests.

THE RESPONSE OF CAFOD AND ITS PARTNERS

CAFOD food assistance intervention began in April 2013 and was implemented by two church partner organizations. Partner A (Partner A) is based in Lebanon and was referred to as the lead partner, having a contractual agreement with CAFOD with responsibility for providing technical support and guidance. Partner B, based in Syria, was the project partner in charge of implementing the project.

The project aimed to assist 1,000 conflict-affected, vulnerable IDP and Refugee households in urban Damascus to improve their access to diverse food items. Overall, approximately 5,471 households and 23,080 people benefited from the food baskets, as summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Number of beneficiaries reached by response activities.

Output/Indicator	Target	Achievements
Component 1		
Target households maintain or improve consumption of diversified food items	1,000 HH/ 6,000 individuals	Type A basket = $4,046 * 5 = 20,230$ beneficiaries Type B basket = $1,425 * 2 = 2,850$ beneficiaries Total beneficiaries = 23,080 beneficiaries
Distribute three monthly food rations to the 1,000 registered households during a period of four months		One-off distribution to 5,471 families 100 families received two baskets

EVALUATION ANALYSIS – PART 1: RELEVANCE AND APPROPRIATENESS

Needs assessment and project design

The initial project design was based on a good understanding of needs within the traditional community area of the project partner (Partner B) in Damascus. Partner B did not have an emergency response approach but rather a good understanding of needs through prior assistance to an already identified community or for Iraqi refugees. The DEC response was planned as a continuation and scaling up of previous intervention to assist already identified vulnerable families in addition to new IDPs, by providing them with four months' worth of food packages to address their food security needs.

Agreements and money transfers took time. By the time confirmations were made and funds available, the situation in the field had drastically changed. Many more IDP families were in need of assistance, and agreements with shops for food distribution had to be renegotiated due to inflation.

The initial plan was amended to decrease the number of distributions per family and to increase the total number of families due to the massive influx of new IDPs. *L/L workshop, 14 November 2013*

In June 2013, the project partner (Partner B) reviewed its intervention design in order to develop a much more responsive approach in light of the IDP influx. Some elements of the project design, such as the number of rounds of food distribution or food basket composition, were found by the project partner staff to be not adapted to the context or too optimistic, and therefore had to be reviewed.

Inundated by assistance requests, and with only three months of implementation left, it was clear that comprehensive vulnerability assessments and home visits were beyond the project partner's capacity. Therefore it was decided to provide one-time assistance to all registered families. In fact, vulnerability assessments of a very limited number of families were conducted, and one additional round of food assistance was provided to 100 families considered to be very vulnerable.

The evaluation found that the project design and response were successfully readapted to a more responsive mode and in the end could address the needs of almost 5,500 families rather than the initial 1,000. However, the targeting principle of assisting the most vulnerable was put aside in order to achieve this.

Without information on coordination (for instance, with WFP and SARC) and in the absence of beneficiary data analysis or a post-distribution survey, it was not possible for the evaluator to confirm whether, in covering many more beneficiaries, the partner had really targeted vulnerable families and avoided duplication.

Learning from experience and taking action: At the Lessons Learned workshop on 14 November 2013, staff from the partner organization felt that the project design would have benefited from more field consultation. The evaluation assessed the introduction of field staff consultation and project planning from the early stage of the new project to be a very positive development.

Was the food response appropriate?

The project partner (Partner B) confirmed that it faced a large IDP influx during the project period, with entire families from urban and rural areas fleeing conflict areas and taking refuge in more secure places such as Damascus. Arriving with few belongings and income, their situation was exacerbated by basic commodity price increases and shortages. Food aid, together with shelter, health and water, are among the most essential and urgent needs of the conflict-affected population that need to be addressed. The evaluation found that the food response was very appropriate to the context despite the fact that other needs were uncovered.

Learning from experience and taking action: It is very positive that a more comprehensive response to needs has been developed in the next phase of the project. Assistance may include housing support, clothes, Non-Food Items (NFI) and food aid.

Did the voucher modality respond to beneficiary needs?

CAFOD's partners used the commodity vouchers system with fixed items, amount and weight for which the beneficiary was able to exchange their voucher in pre-selected shops. The voucher did not allow the recipient freedom of choice as to what to purchase with their voucher.

Feedback from project staff and the complaint box confirmed that beneficiaries desired more freedom of choice and diversified food options. These findings would be further documented by a post-distribution survey.

Learning from experience and taking action: It is very positive that more flexibility will be given to beneficiaries within the cash voucher approach during the next phase of the project.

Was the voucher modality appropriate in the Syrian context?

In using vouchers for food basket distribution, the project partner (Partner B) delegated its logistics to shop vendors for purchasing, storage, packaging, and security issues. The evaluator believes that this approach was fully justified by the lack of the project partner's logistic experience and capacity to procure, store and distribute directly such large quantities. Security was also a major concern.

The commodity voucher was the best choice because of security issues (diversifying locations rather than having one warehouse where all the packages would be stocked). *L/L workshop, 14 November 2013*

On the other hand, the use of vouchers was neither smooth nor easy. The project partner (Partner B) faced many difficulties in achieving agreements with shop vendors. The evaluation found that the instability of the Syrian market (with unpredictable supplies and high inflation) is not a favourable environment for the use of vouchers for regular assistance – although one-shot distributions with short-term agreements with shop vendors, as it was the case in the current project, might be the exception. More research into the voucher approach and alternative options should be made, in addition to documenting the entire voucher process (in particular monitoring).

Recommendations

- The project would have gained from having an emergency modus operandi and emergency mechanism in place from an early stage. (See Part 4: Efficiency)
- CAFOD partners are encouraged to document the monitoring process of shop vendors and conduct post-distribution monitoring to yield beneficiary feedback.
- It is recommended that CAFOD makes available more technical expertise and support to the partner for conducting post-monitoring evaluation, and developing and documenting voucher use.

EVALUATION ANALYSIS – PART 2: EFFECTIVENESS AND COVERAGE

Likely achievement of objective

In spite of the challenging environment and the changing context, the project partner succeeded in achieving the overall objective that '1000 conflict affected, vulnerable IDP and Refugee households in urban Damascus have improved access to diverse food items'. By the end of the project, 5,471 families had been assisted with one food basket (equivalent to one month's food consumption) and 100 families received two food baskets.

The project received very positive feedback, both in terms of beneficiary opinions gathered through the hotline and information collected from the Household Food Security and Access Scale (HFSA). However, the results from the project indicators would have been clearer if the

duration of the food security coverage had been defined more precisely and an indicator for beneficiary satisfaction had been included.

The field presence and proximity to beneficiaries are the clear advantages and strengths of the project partner (Partner B) and should enable the organization to adapt its response according to needs and to achieve proper identification and targeting of the most vulnerable families. The evaluation found that targeted assistance rather than quantity assistance (blanket assistance) is a better fit for the project partner's capacity, which is thus in turn better placed to complement blanket food distributions by other large actors (such as WFP and SARC). This targeted approach could be further complemented by specific responses to emergency situations such as the Maaloula influx.⁶

Learning from experience and taking action: It is very positive that targeting and prolonged assistance to the most vulnerable families is being considered for the next project phase.

Intervention timeliness

The evaluation found that the project implementation faced delays. DEC funding is designed to respond to disasters and emergency situations; the DEC allocation to CAFOD was confirmed in March/April 2013 but food distributions did not take place until the end of August and into September 2013. Beneficiaries identified at the early stage of the project had to wait and find alternative sources of food and NFIs in the meantime: "food provision to beneficiaries was long overdue" (L/L workshop, 14 November 2013).

Various factors explain this delay, including the number of organizations and sub-agreements, changes in staff and internal modalities, and the bank returning the funds⁷. The overall process for releasing funds and agreeing on revised project modalities took time. It was only in early June that the agreement with the project partner was confirmed. As noted by project partners, the consequence of this was that "approval of baskets design and fund transfer were delayed" (L/L workshop, 14 November 2013. See also Part 4: Efficiency).

At an early stage of the project, the project partner (Partner B) had agreements with several shop vendors based on fixed prices, quantities and commodities for the food distribution. However, the high inflation linked to market instability that occurred during this period meant most shop vendors rejected the agreements. The project partner spent much time and effort to negotiate the arrangements again and to find vendors willing to agree to fixed prices.

Early on [we] had difficulty finding vendors: food availability was not sufficient, some vendors wanted pre-payment and didn't agree with the voucher project conditions. *L/L workshop, 14 November 2013*

The evaluation found that the intervention by the project partner (Partner B) was effective from the moment the agreement was confirmed and it received the initial funds, but that it subsequently faced security and operational constraints.

Learning from experience and taking action: The evaluation assesses as positive that some bridge funding has been provided by CAFOD (and other partners) to ensure the continuation of

⁶ Since early September 2013, the village and area of Maaloula of Christian community in the north east Damascus, has been the scene of battle between Islamist Al Nusra and government forces. Many Christian have fled the area taking refuge in Damascus.

⁷ Due to the mention of Syria on the bank transfer the bank has returned CAFODs first instalment.

the project partner (Partner B) assistance to beneficiaries. This has raised the possibility of conducting a lessons learned exercise upon which to base the next project.

Coverage and targeting of beneficiaries

The project's food distributions covered IDPs and urban families from Damascus affected by the conflict. Families were registered at the partner's two centres by caseworkers and all information entered into a database.

The project partner (Partner B) reported that IDPs were primarily assisted (over 80%) with support shared between communities. More detailed information on beneficiaries is not available and remains vague and inconsistent. The absence of data means further analysis of coverage according to family size or vulnerability situation is not possible.

As discussed above, due to the large IDP influx and increased assistance requests, vulnerability assessments and home visits of every family were beyond the project partner's capacity. Assistance in the form of one food basket was provided to all registered families but the project partner could not meet the greater demand.

Many families are still on the waiting list and the scale of the project could not respond to the needs. *L/L workshop, 14 November 2013*

Some vulnerability assessments of a very limited number of families were conducted, however, and an additional round of food assistance was provided to 100 families considered to be very vulnerable.

The evaluation found that the blanket distribution was an appropriate response at the time but that it is not a sustainable response for the project partner due to limited resources and capacity. Targeting should remain a priority during the continuation of assistance.

Learning from experience and taking action: It is very positive that the project partner (Partner B) has increased its coverage by opening an additional reception and distribution centre. Four centres are planned for the next phase with additional caseworkers, which will enlarge coverage and enable better follow up of beneficiaries and identification of those most in need.

Recommendations

- It is recommended that CAFOD includes a beneficiary satisfaction indicator in the log frame of the future project to ensure adequate follow up of beneficiary feedback.
- CAFOD's partners are encouraged to develop further targeting modalities and define more precisely vulnerability criteria for assistance linked to database and registration information. Analysis of beneficiary data would then support and document the response.
- It is recommended that CAFOD's partners maintain assistance to the most vulnerable families.

EVALUATION ANALYSIS – PART 3: COORDINATION AND COHERENCE

Assessing the partnership

Prior to the conflict, few organizations were conducting assistance and relief work in Syria. The main organization was Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC). With the uprising and the increase of violence in the country, other organizations – primarily faith-based ones – sought to expand their relatively small-scale, traditional social assistance projects and began to support the affected populations. In this context, working and developing partnerships between sister organizations (local and international) is essential for aid efficiency and accountability in full respect of humanitarian principles.

The partnerships formed by the faith-based agencies (Islamic and Christian) appear to have a significant advantage in this respect, being able to tap into pre-existing local networks to identify and respond to needs as they arise. *DEC Syria Crisis Appeal 2013 Response Review*⁸

CAFOD implements its projects through partnership with sister organizations which take charge of project activities. Syria was not a traditional recipient of CAFOD aid prior to the DEC funding in early 2013. Its experience of the country was limited. CAFOD therefore chose a church partner (PARTNER A), a highly experienced organization base in Lebanon to lead the project and guide the project partner (Partner B) in project design and implementation of activities in Damascus.

The CAFOD partnership with the church partner (Partner A) and then the project partner (Partner B), a national actor in Syria and Damascus, was an effective option. However, different layers of agreements and payments delayed the response process.

It is very positive that the project partner (Partner B) proposes to enlarge its partnership in the field with other organizations including those from Muslim communities. This would reinforce project coherence in full respect of the principle of impartiality.

Strengthening partner capacity

The project partner (Partner B) faced many challenges during implementation when the needs of beneficiaries swelled with the IDP influx. Its internal structure and capacities to respond had to shift from a traditional social assistance model to a more professional and responsive working approach, incorporating increased resources and the management requirements of institutional donors.

Inevitably the restructuring process took time, but the project partner (Partner B) succeeded thank to the support of the lead partner (Partner A) within the DEC project period to reorganize its structure around two registrations and distribution centres and achieved wide distribution of food assistance.

The lead partner (Partner A) staff had regular follow up and contact with the project partner (Partner B) staff, providing guidance and advice. Several staff trainings were organized in Lebanon.

The regional support office (of Partner C) based in Beirut has also provided coordination support and trainings to the project partner (Partner B) within its general institution-building mandate. The evaluation found that the project partner's staff, and the organization as a whole, has gained tremendously from the project.

⁸ James Darcy, *DEC Syria Crisis Appeal 2013 Response Review: Final Report*, 18 October 2013.

The lessons learned workshop in the presence of all actors, including CAFOD, was a crucial exercise in this capacity-building process. It provided staff with an opportunity to reflect upon project achievements and challenges, to interact with CAFOD representatives, and to exchange views on DEC perspectives and requirements.

The positive support and good relationship between the different church members of the PARTNER C family contributed positively to the capacity building of the project partner.

Learning from experience and taking action: It is very positive that the capacity-building process of the project partner is continuing and a training plan is under development in coordination with church partners (Partner A, Partner C and CAFOD).

It is also very positive that CAFOD appears much more involved in the new project phase with questions and clarification requests at the initial stage of the project.

Coordination with other actors

The project partner (Partner B) has been active in coordinating its two centres, harmonizing its response, and exchanging data between the centres on its beneficiaries. However, coordination with other actors, mainly WFP and SARC, was reported to be difficult and no information was found in the reviewed documentation that the food assistance provided by the project partner (Partner B) was coordinated in order to avoid duplications or complement assistance provided by other organizations in Syria.

Recommendations

- It is recommended that CAFOD supports the project partner to enlarge its partnership from other communities and this approach be given more emphasis in the new project phase.
- It is recommended that CAFOD continues the capacity building of the project partner and attends at regular project briefings/debriefings.
- The project partner is encouraged to have more personnel dedicated to coordination with other actors.

EVALUATION ANALYSIS – PART 4: EFFICIENCY

Project implementation

The DEC project was the first institutional funding received by the project partner (Partner B) and at a level it had never experienced before. Given the short duration of the project, the challenging environment and the restructuring of the project partner (Partner B) to meet funding requirements, the evaluation found the response timely and within budget. Monitoring and evaluation concepts and tools were introduced and put in place by the project partner (Partner B). These outcomes were important in order to address issues with shop vendors or to adapt the food baskets. The project was managed directly by the project partner (Partner B) director who had a very strong commitment and contributed to the achievement of the project results. The lead partner (Partner A) played an active role for project follow up and reporting.

Learning from experience and taking action: It is very positive that the project partner develops its capacities. A project manager has been appointed in the new project phase and that additional human resources for reporting will be available. This will certainly enhance overall efficiency.

Mobilization of resources

As discussed above, project implementation and mobilization of resources faced delays. The DEC time frame was six months from 1 April to 30 September 2013. For various reasons, the overall process for releasing funds and agreeing on revised project modalities took time. Signed agreements between CAFOD and the lead partner (Partner A) took place on 17 May 2013, and between the lead partner (Partner A) and the project partner (Partner B) on 7 June 2013. Very little activity is reported before the signing of the agreements and money being made available.

The evaluation found that the project design and response was successfully readapted more responsive mode and could in the end address the needs of almost 5,500 families. However, the project would have benefited from having agreements signed and money made available at an earlier stage, giving more time for project implementation and thus less pressure and stress on project staff.

Cost efficiency

The interventions implemented under this project were located in areas where the lead partner (Partner A) and the (Partner B) had been involved in the past, enabling the project to build on pre-existing medical programmes, staff and partners' centres. The evaluation found that this contributed to the cost-efficiency of the project.

For food distribution, CAFOD's partners used a commodity vouchers system with pre-selected food items of fixed amount and weight for which the beneficiary could exchange their voucher in pre-selected shops.

The voucher approach is economically efficient on the condition that prices offered by shop vendors are sufficiently competitive compared to direct procurements in large quantities. It also requires a stable market and the possibility to invite shop vendors to tender.⁹ There is no indication that a tender process and market analysis were conducted in Syria. The project would have benefited in developing a comparative table with which to assess prices and commodity costs of direct procurement in large quantities against the shop vendors and voucher system.

It is very positive that blankets for the new project will be procured, stored and distributed directly by the project partner (Partner B). This approach has been found to be much cheaper than using a voucher system. This analysis should be conducted as well for food commodities.

Human resources and stress management

The project partner (Partner B) staff's capabilities and strong commitment were reported as the key to the success of the intervention. The reduced time frame of the project from six to three months and the increased number of beneficiaries put enormous pressure on the project's human resources to achieve the project's goal.

As we had only three months to address all the needs, we faced a lot of stress and we had to work after hours without day off. Project partner's *caseworker*, Syria

⁹ ICRC Resource Centre, 'Guidelines for Cash Transfer Programming', <<http://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/publication/pguidelines-cash-transfer-programming.htm>> (accessed 15 December 2013). Also visit <<http://www.livelihoodscentre.org/>>.

The project partner staff operates in a very tense and difficult environment. Everyday they interact with people affected by conflict, often with difficult stories and social problems. This certainly adds additional pressure and stress on the staff.

The evaluation found it to be very positive that the project staff is invited on a regular basis to Lebanon for training outside the conflict zone. Nevertheless, more psychological support is certainly needed during these sessions. Care for the Caregivers concept is a good practice to introduce in the program to help staff to understand and cope with traumatic stress.

Recommendations

- CAFOD partners are encouraged to work on regular reporting and analysis of data.
- It is recommended that CAFOD is more responsive in the emergency setting by ensuring grant confirmation and granting emergency funding for immediate response from an early stage of the stage. CAFOD should develop more predictability of funding to ensure assistance.
- CAFOD is encouraged to formalize specific internal mechanisms for emergency response in order to:
 - Mobilize and allocate some flexible emergency funds at an early stage prior to finalization of all project details;
 - Have internal deadlines for signing contract agreements in cases of emergency funds or crisis situations;
 - Confirm quickly to the implementing partner if resources are to be made available within a few days so that preparation and action can be taken immediately.
- CAFOD partners are encouraged to review the voucher modality versus direct procurement in documenting market assessment, and to undertake risk and cost analysis. With increased capacity and experience, direct purchasing and storing of selected commodities may be more appropriate and cost effective if the market remains unstable. A mixed approach may also be suitable.
- CAFOD partners are encouraged to provide more psychological support to the project staff. This could take the form of specific debriefing sessions in the presence of an experienced psychologist. This would help to decrease tension and avoid negative effects in the long run.

EVALUATION ANALYSIS – PART 5: IMPACT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Specific impact

The HFSA survey confirmed the positive impact of food distributions on households in reducing hunger. However, due to the one-time distribution (with the exception of the 100 families who received two food baskets), the positive impact did not last long. It is not clear how families coped before the distributions and after all food commodities have been consumed.

In the absence of beneficiary data breakdown and analysis, it was not possible to analyze the coverage of needs according to the ration provided and to Sphere standards¹⁰. However, the sharp increase in all commodity prices during the period of the project, and in particular during Ramadan, made the food response by the end of August very appropriate in responding to beneficiary needs at that time.

Following beneficiary consultation, food basket content was reviewed and adapted but quantities did not fully match the needs of very large IDP families (six people and above, and often more than ten) as food baskets were designed for an urban context. Two food baskets were proposed: one for one or two family members; and one for three family members and more.

Families were larger than anticipated coming from rural areas compared to typically smaller families in the urban areas. *L/L workshop, 14 November 2013*

The evaluation found that the project achievements were substantial. The lessons learned drawn from the DEC project will help to improve any future response considerably.

Broader impact (How has partnership benefited from the project?)

The evaluation found that partnership between the different organizations has evolved positively. The project has helped to increase understanding between organizations in the spirit of trust and transparency. The exchange of experiences and expertise was very well received by the project partner (Partner B), which was keen to adapt. As an example, CAFOD and Partner A promoted accountability principles towards beneficiaries and proposed different tools – a hotline and complaint mechanism – that were integrated into the project with positive results.

Learning from experience and taking action: The increased capacity of the project partner (Partner B) will help it to develop and implement new projects.

Beneficiary consultation and involvement

The project partner (Partner B) made real efforts to involve beneficiaries in its project response, to inform them, and to get their feedback. This therefore ensured accountability towards beneficiaries.

Thanks to suggestions by CAFOD and Partner A, the project partner (Partner B) has established a complaint mechanism and hotline. The two components are important sources of information and enable the project staff to react quickly in cases of abuse or wrong practice by shop vendors.

Feedback boxes were effective for ensuring overall satisfaction of beneficiaries. Many responses were addressed immediately (e.g. distributing vendor contact details to beneficiaries to verify shop hours). *L/L workshop, 14 November 2013*

¹⁰ Initial proposal indicates that the rations will aim to meet at a minimum 60% of the SPHERE standard of 2100 calories per person per day for a period of 3 months.

Recommendations

- CAFOD's partners are encouraged to develop their impact assessment process to include profiles of beneficiaries, a baseline survey, and reporting of disaggregated data on gender, family composition, vulnerability and community of origin.
- CAFOD's partners are encouraged to collect and document beneficiary satisfaction and inputs with a post distribution monitoring survey. In the Syrian context, this could be done through telephone interviews.

ANNEX

Terms of Reference

1. Objectives of the evaluation - Overall objective:

- o To assess the overall relevance, effectiveness, impact, coherence, economy and efficiency of CAFOD's DEC Syria Response Programme

Specific objectives:

- o To assess the extent to which the projects implemented by CAFOD's partners have achieved the programme's initial objectives and outcomes and consequently met the needs of conflict affected communities;
- o To review how accountability standards were applied through the programme;
- o To assess CAFOD's ways of working and ability to respond to this emergency and our added value;
- o To identify key lessons and provide recommendations to strengthen CAFOD's response to similar emergencies in the future in Syria and elsewhere.

2.2. Evaluation criteria

The evaluation should assess the following elements:

- o Relevance/appropriateness
- o Connectedness
- o Coherence
- o Coverage
- o Efficiency
- o Effectiveness
- o Impact

This list, based on DAC evaluation criteria, is not intended to be exhaustive. More specifically, in line with the DEC evaluation policy and the priorities of the DEC accountability framework, the evaluation should specifically investigate the following:

- o the extent to which proposed objectives and outcomes have been achieved
- o the extent to which the Code of Conduct and Sphere Standards have been respected
- o the level of involvement of and accountability to beneficiaries
- o the extent that past lessons or recommendations have been fulfilled

With reference to CAFOD's added value, the following specific questions should be answered:

- o Was CAFOD's involvement relevant, appropriate, coherent, and timely? What was the specific contribution of CAFOD to the programme? What should have been managed differently?
- o How has working in partnership benefitted the overall programme? How has CAFOD's partnership approach benefitted partners, and supported the work of the partners in the programme?