

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PROGRAMME EVALUATED

Evaluated action: Assistance to war affected populations in Eritrea.
Part of the Evaluation of World Food Programme activities funded by ECHO (Afghanistan, Eritrea, Serbia, and Tanzania)

Country: Eritrea

Operation Contract: ECHO/TPS/210/1999/10002

Total amount: EURO 3,500,000

Sector: Food aid

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

Period of evaluation: The Eritrea evaluation was carried out from October 13-21, 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 ERITREA EVALUATION

The evaluation involved visits to the various headquarters in Brussels and Rome followed by a nine-day field visit to Eritrea. This included meetings with: key staff of WFP, the Implementing Partners (IPs), regional office staff of ECHO in Nairobi, the regional office staff of WFP in Kampala, and Government of Eritrea (GoE), officials and beneficiaries. Visits were also made to warehouses, Extended Delivery Points (EDPs) and Final Delivery Points (FDPs). Finally there were joint debriefing meetings.

The time allocated to the evaluation (9 days including international travel) 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.

INPUT IN WFP-ERITREA

The Operational Contract (ECHO/TPS/210/1999/10002) amounted to MEURO 3,5 for purchase and distribution of 11,380 mt of food. The project -according to the final report- procured and distributed a quantity of 11,379 mt.¹

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Concerning food aid, food security and nutrition sector

The food aid programmes have been well implemented by WFP/ERREC. The delivery and distribution were correctly done and IDPs and refugees in the camps have benefited as planned. No irregularities were reported nor observed. Outside the camps, indicators for malnutrition are much higher, for example in the drought-affected areas. Many (drought-affected) areas are food-insecure due to reasons more profound than the lack of rain, reasons such as lack of labour and lack of adequate agricultural inputs.

It is recommended that these overall food security problems in Eritrea be addressed through a broader approach, which has food aid only as one component. WFP can help the GoE by giving major support through VAM to the GoE structures.

Concerning the Implementing Partners

ERREC is an important partner of WFP and the two organisations have developed increasingly positive working relations. In addition to the direct food aid component, WFP has committed its support for a strong food security policy by offering its VAM services to be integrated into the national structures. In the current discussion concerning the base for the VAM Unit, the evaluation mission subscribes to the opinion that it should integrate with, or be a complementary structure to the GoE structures such as the National Food Information Centre

¹ For information concerning ECHO funding to other implementers reference is made to section 2.

(NFIS). WFP will facilitate and strengthen the unit and help collaborate amongst agencies concerning questions about targeting and criteria for needs assessments. In this way WFP can add important value to the process of developing VAM capacity in Eritrea.

The local administration, in close collaboration with ERREC, handles all distribution and transport. This has been done in a smooth and effective manner. There are no reports of irregularities and losses are minimal. The system of food redistribution within the communities is not entirely understood by the aid agencies. It would be good if more studies could be made on the cultural values underlying redistribution of the food within the communities as a cultural expression of sharing resources. Better knowledge of this process would lead to better understanding of the approaches of the local structures in the GoE and also in the communities.

There is also a need to carry out comparative studies to balance the current probable over-identification of people needing full rations. Over-identification, by inflating the imports of food, may be delaying the process of revitalisation needed in the farming sector.

Concerning logistics and pipeline management

ERREC is a competent implementer of the logistic operations. The organisation is cost-effective, competent and transparent. The losses incurred are minimal. The management systems of ERREC and WFP do not match very well but both communicate effectively. In view of the future funding decisions of ECHO it is recommended that a study be done comparing the cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit of agencies in Eritrea receiving ECHO funding, including WFP, ERREC and NGOs. It is suggested that in principle the organisation with most cost-effectiveness and other professional qualifications could be regarded as a candidate for funding by ECHO. Food aid should never become a political activity and an active monitoring role of other actors will be required.

COMPAS is an important and effective management information system. Introduction of COMPAS in ERREC is relevant as it would add to innovation in the organisation and eventually increase capacity. The evaluation team is supportive to the WFP/ERREC agreement that COMPAS will be handed over and managed by ERREC in phases, though still remaining the property of WFP. Equipment has been handed over and data entry staff transferred in September 2001. In the near future it is foreseen that two technical staff and a manager will be required to operate COMPAS in ERREC.

The capacity problems in the Port of Massawa are considerable and may cause major delays if the importation of food increases. WFP has provided assistance over the past years and additional support is needed in collaboration with other donor-funded activities.

Organisational sector: improvement of strategy and context of future ECHO-WFP co-operation

Working relations at country level are open and transparent but discussions between WFP and ECHO at HQ level about agreements on budgets took a lot of time; this delayed the arrival of the food. These discussions focussed on overhead costs, cost-benefit issues, and commodity costs. The ECHO Nairobi Regional Office carried out the negotiations with WFP in a very professional way. Working relations at HQ level need to be improved, as this would benefit the implementation of the mandates of both organisations.

Although negotiations on the budgets for the operational contracts were lengthy, the budget does not provide an acceptable degree of detail. This is partly as a consequence but also partly because WFP use a standardised reporting format by which the reports do not provide sufficient information and do not offer ways to identify lessons learnt and applicable best practice. This must be regarded as an aspect of implicit lack of quality in the ECHO-WFP working relationship, which needs urgent address.

It is recommended that a Senior Technical Group, consisting of highly powered technical WFP-ECHO officials from HQ level be established to 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 of the Group would include how to operationalise the outcome of the 'strategic dialogue' as well as an assessment of the recommendations, for the implementation of this evaluation report. Other issues are: 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; lastly, advice on the communication between both organisations - who communicates with whom on which levels of authority about which matters. It would also focus on operationalisation of the key recommendation in this report.

Given the limited time available for the visit to the country, it is suggested that a detailed study be implemented to address the indicative finding that cost-effectiveness is relatively low.

The added value of WFP-Eritrea is not related to its operational roles but rather to facilitation and capacity development of GoE structures and co-operation with NGOs. This is related to the policy of the GoE that operational activities will be carried out by Eritrea structures where possible.

It is recommended that WFP increasingly focus on the capacity development of actors in the food sector and provide support for the processes to the GoE as needed and appreciated. This is a relatively new situation for WFP but offers new opportunities to implement its mandate (annex 8) more in line with the policy of LRRD of ECHO. Reference is also made to conclusion 4.

Environment and durable solutions

Durable solutions and inputs are not included in the funding of WFP food aid programme as the funding of ECHO in WFP concerns food assistance and that does not offer many options for durable solutions. Projects with an environmental focus, including reforestation, introduction of fuel-saving cooking may be funded through other EC instruments including the European Development Fund.

CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

1. **Linking relief and development:** Despite the actual drought and its impact on food security, both for refugees and the rural population in the drought-affected areas, the linking of relief and development is more than necessary. As long as a real assessment of the reason for food insecurity is not made and institutionalised by the GoE, general food aid distribution cannot solve the main problems. Lack of labour, of short cycle seeds, tools and credit, for agriculture and the need for emphasis on family care are the real reasons why the drought has had such a negative impact. WFP with VAM expertise can strengthen GoE capacity.
2. **Gender:** Gender issues are not only about balancing male and female staff. Looking at hunger, vulnerability, access to food, malnutrition, means looking at the household, who is taking care of children, the position of women in food production, the existence of female-headed households, access to education for women in rural areas, labour availability in agriculture etc. WFP pays attention to gender in their food assistance for girls in school and literacy and training programmes. WFP also states that 80% of the beneficiaries receiving food at the distribution centres are women. The GoE is aware of the gender issues mentioned above but its overall approach is not yet institutionalised in the various governmental and non-governmental food and nutrition monitoring systems. The many temporarily female-headed households, where the men are either in military or social service, get enough attention but many of the women would prefer their husbands back instead of food aid, according to the interviews made by DIA.

3. **The elderly:** Care of the elderly in traditional societies is normally the responsibility of male children, a tradition disrupted by war and drought. Food aid programmes have indeed paid special attention to this vulnerable group. However, real caring can only take place if underlying causes are addressed.
4. **Children:** Children get special attention in all programmes through a system of nutritional surveys carried out by the MoH jointly with humanitarian agencies. Special feeding programmes for children means low malnutrition rates in the communities benefiting from food aid. However, areas not benefiting from food aid have much higher malnutrition rates.
5. **A corporate approach for WFP:** WFP has faced a challenge in Eritrea which is different to that of many other countries in the world -it has to prove its additional value where there is a good capacity in the local structures. At each level in the organisation this raises the question as to how, WFPs demonstrated unique skills and knowledge can be shared with the Eritrean institutions. If WFP adopts a profile in which it is strong as a facilitator, it would further strengthen its links with the GoE and show the outside world this special -somewhat developmental- quality of WFP. By demonstrating this quality WFP would probably gain additional support.
6. **Environmental aspects:** Rural population concentrations and migration cause considerable pressure on natural resources and environment. The size of the settlement is the main determinant of the degree of damage to the environment. This needs special attention as it can exhaust local resources and also lead to competition between the host population and refugees; ECHO is aware of these environmental concerns. Durable solutions and inputs are not included in the funding of WFP food aid programme given the nature of the assistance. Reforestation and fuel-saving cooking devices may be funded through other EC instruments including the European Development Fund.
7. **HIV/AIDS:** AIDS is a serious threat for food security in rural areas. Many young men are in the army and the social services, with high HIV-prevalence among soldiers transmitted by uncontrolled sexual activity. Their reintegration into society has a high risk factor and means in the long-term continuous food insecurity among the rural population. WFP supports a 'Food-for-Health' programme that aims to combat the spread of AIDS. This programme is carried out by specialised NGOs.

LESSONS LEARNT

- i) Based on the mandate of WFP, the activities and direction of the organisation requires fine-tuning from country to country. In Eritrea, WFP has taken a position of process facilitator, monitoring agent of food aid and identifier of new programmes. Local aspirations and capacities are strong and able to carry out WFP's historic mission of food supply operator, which challenges WFP to find new ways of implementing its mandate.
- ii) There is good capacity in ERREC; in the area of logistics, sustainability and development, there are issues which can be addressed. For instance, ITSH payments to ERREC could be done in foreign currency; the increasing shortage of spare parts could be met as in-kind payment.
- iii) Adoption of management information systems like COMPAS cannot be successful unless it comprises a full package of support, which includes secondment of professional staff, training of ERREC staff, and support to ensure adequate infrastructure.