

Workshop no. and title: 5. New Approaches to Food Aid

Main points of presentation:

- Kinds of food aid - in-kind food aid, cash transfer assistance, in-kind or in-cash food for work
- Kinds of distribution: general distribution, targeted distribution (geographic, social, economic)
- Kinds of ration: hot (easy to control), dry (not so easy to control as it is given to households)
- Elements of food security: at household level (availability, accessibility, usage/consumption) - most traditional food assistance is about making food available. Cash transfers etc. look more into making food accessible.
- Why does the form of transfer matter? Households often sell food aid to purchase what they need - getting the form of direct transfer right helps improve livelihoods... Yet, when markets are not functioning, cash transfers are of limited value. Getting the form of direct transfer right also minimises harm to markets.
- Main types of cash relief projects: 1. unconditional cash transfers to targeted individuals, 2. cash for work activities, 3. voucher mechanisms (food vouchers or seeds and tools vouchers)
- Cash transfers may offer advantages: choice, dignity, cost effectiveness, economic recovery, flexibility, empowerment. Studies indicate that most beneficiaries spend cash transfers responsibly for food, livestock, school fees etc.
- When to provide food aid in cash or in kind? It surely depends on the local context.
- Need for early livelihood responses - the tendency is to wait until the situation is very severe which means it takes much longer to get people back to their outset positions. Early interventions such as e.g. livestock feeding during periods of scarce pasture could be appropriate.

Main points of overall discussion:

- Difficult to challenge governments in times of crises. Instead of investing in DRR, governments let their funds flow to other areas, and assume that the int community will come in during times of crises/catastrophes.
- Food aid should be accompanied by food assistance, e.g. cash transfers. Mechanisms to identify non-food responses needed. How can we scale up approaches, e.g. from dealing with local to dealing with regional markets? Need for a coordinating mechanism. How is WFP working with this (P4P). NGOs are often implementing partners and it may go beyond their capacity if you want to scale it up.
- Issue of quality could hopefully be addressed through longer-term partnerships.
- P4P is a way to overcome market barriers.
- ECHO addresses climate change through livelihoods interventions and through awareness, training and long-term schemes. ECHO supports NGOs to take on this approach as well. ECHO is working on policy to address DRR. Want to move forward mainstreaming of DRR in relief programmes. The concept of DRR has not yet trickled down in the organisation and within partner organisations. Need for humanitarian and development actors to close the gap relief and rehabilitation.

Main challenges identified:

Why is it that the provision of food assistance is still dominated by the distribution of food commodities?

- Early interventions were food for work. FAC's idea was to get rid of surplus food. FAC today is much about hunger and ensuring food security.
- Food aid is good for the media, very concrete. Difficult to change the mentality of donors. It's a

challenge to overcome this traditional view upon food aid.

- Humanitarian actors have to look at other approaches when hunger becomes chronic.
- Beneficiary governments are more likely to accept short-term food aid than donors coming in with longer-term investments that may require governments to change. Food aid is very visible - also for beneficiary governments.
- In big crises there are often no markets that function so there is no possibility for giving cash. There is also a security issue.
- Getting cash is different than getting food in kind. Power struggles at household level may take place over cash transfers. A strong argument for cash is that it is much more empowering to receive cash than food aid - it strengthens people's human rights.

What are the factors inhibiting an expansion of other approaches to food assistance?

- Complexity of the way we work, e.g. security. Need for long-term commitment.
- We need a holistic approach to really deal with food security - we have to think outside sector programmes and in a long-term perspective.
- Danida is free to choose the approaches they want to use - the actual approach often depends on the actors working in the area in question. Donors are also learning step by step.
- Need to put more effort into needs assessment - that should also define the best approach.
- The question of cash is a matter of accountability. Cash transfers will require up scaling of monitoring. Practical adaptation is needed to work more with larger cash transfers and to ensure accountability. How can we actually implement cash distribution in a bigger scale?
- Cash will not solve all problems, e.g. nutrition.
- Biggest contributors to cash distributions have been governments. They have however not exchanged much information on experiences.
- Cash is also short-term if it is not made part of a long-term holistic approach
- Cash programmes are mainly being questioned when given by donors during emergencies. When governments provide cash at later stages of development, it is not so contentious.

Suggested actions:

- Holistic approach to food security
- New monitoring and evaluation machinery to monitor cash transfers

Influencing without giving food:

- Distribution system and targeting system to target the vulnerable
- Quality control of food (correct storage measures etc. can help save lives)
- Collaborating with governments to draft good food security policies
- Food technology - improve nutrition values

- Experiences have to be shared and documented to demystify cash-based livelihood support programmes - both for implementing partners and donors
- We truly need to start with an assessment of the local context to provide the right approaches and tools
- Need for access to funds for 'grey zone' (i.e. persons not yet starving)
- Re-think the way we work to truly start early recovery activities
- Higher acceptability of risk - the price for trying out new approaches
- More willingness among humanitarian actors to not work in a vacuum - more cooperation needed, also with governments
- Involving communities in sharing resources, rights-based approaches etc. - cash is not the only solution - transparency and accountability to users is also important.

