



Evaluation of the Vulnerable Group Feeding Programme in Zimbabwe

Executive Summary

Oxfam GB Programme Evaluation

June 2008

Commissioned by: Oxfam GB Southern Africa

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This evaluation of the Vulnerable Group Feeding Programme was commissioned by OXFAM GB with the aim to evaluate the Food Aid Programme and provide recommendations for future programming.

It was carried out between April and June 2008 by a single consultant.

The methodology involved review of official reports and other relevant documents, interviews with OXFAM staff, focus group discussions in communities, interviews with beneficiary and non-beneficiary households and interviews with other agencies.

This report starts by highlighting overall strengths and weaknesses of the programme. It identifies strengths in the high level of participation by beneficiaries, apolitical food distribution processes, on-going reviews by OGB staff that generate evidence-based solutions to challenges and the good quality of reports produced. Weaknesses include low staffing levels, weak linkages between the VGF and other OGB programmes.

Regarding the programme design and implementation, it notes the concerted efforts made to abide by the key guiding principles of accountability, transparency, dignity and timeliness.

The VGF Programme was a very welcome initiative that came at a time when people were in desperate need of food aid following a harvest failure within the context of a declining macroeconomic environment. It was therefore an appropriate response targeting the vulnerable and food insecure households providing them with food commodities that met their basic nutritional needs.

Beneficiaries expressed a great deal of satisfaction with the rations, registration and distribution processes. They felt they were in control of most processes that they believed were fair and transparent. Some non-beneficiaries, however, pointed out that there were exclusion errors that resulted from the categorisation process.

The general view of most beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries was that the current food crisis affected everyone so that even those that had money could not access food because it was not available on the market. Their recommendation was that the available food should be distributed to all even if it meant reducing rations. One village committee member stated that, "It is better to limit the number of children than to give too much to a few households while others are starving."

Beneficiary perceptions were that the implementation of the programme went very well and indications were that the planning for the physical distribution was good. They were satisfied with the fact that in most cases they received what they had been promised. They were fully involved in managing the distributions.

The implementation that had a strong component of community mobilisation and gender responsiveness empowered communities to take ownership of food distribution processes. Despite the short time within which the programme had to be

implemented, communities were sufficiently mobilised and were empowered to take control.

OXFAM Great Britain (OGB) faced some challenges relating to the staffing situation. The budgeting process and planning for registration, monitoring as well as verification processes did not allocate adequate staff and other resources. As a result there were human resources bottlenecks that affected some aspects of the programme negatively. For instance, in many cases the same people that were responsible for registration were also the ones that did the distributions and verification. This compromised the targeting process and caused some inclusion errors.

In terms of the skills mix in the VGF teams, OGB was well prepared in as far as budget processes allowed. While the human resources capacity was over-stretched the quality of staff and the high level of motivation made up for the low numbers. However, in terms of material resources to be used in the programme, there were a lot of inadequacies particularly at the start of the programme. For example, Shurugwi District did not have computers during the initial stages of programme implementation. Kwekwe did not have a landline and there were no internet facilities. Communication facilities were inadequate across all three districts. The Gweru warehouse that put in a request for a generator in October 2007 did not get it until April 2008. The reason given for this delay was due to OGB's slow approval process.

WFP had certain expectations regarding OGB's involvement. Because their relationship was a partnership, WFP expected OGB to commit some resources towards the programme. OGB met those expectations by contributing the bulk of the financial and material resources to the start-up activities. Resources were diverted from other programmes to support the start-up of the VGF programme.

On the side of WFP, there was a lack of preparedness in the budgeting for activities. Having decided to adopt a new methodology, it was important to analyse the processes involved and assess the required resources. There was need for WFP to shift away from estimating the required resource input using the tonnage of items to be distributed. This completely neglected the high demand for person time in highly participatory processes. As a result such critical activities as monitoring and evaluations as well as verifications were compromised.

Most of the desired changes did take place but some could not be ascertained. To a large extent the programme succeeded in preventing households from disposing productive assets, there was a very high level of women's participation in the implementation, most local authorities did respect OGB's apolitical stance and OGB staff effectively networked with relevant government departments. The outcome of reduced malnutrition levels was difficult to ascertain in the absence of baseline data.

Recommendations.

The following recommendations were made to contribute towards strengthening of future programmes of a similar nature.

1. Allow more resources and time for registration processes.

2. Tighten screening processes so that only the deserving people benefit from food distributions
3. Ensure clarity in the categorisation guidelines.
4. Allocate adequate resources to verification and post distribution monitoring visits so that they are undertaken as per plan.
5. The budget should make contingencies for urgent cases that are identified during the course of programme implementation.
6. Develop guidelines that focus on indicators directly contributing towards food access as opposed to production potential.
7. Craft appropriate interventions for those in the category of transitory food insecurity so that their resilience is built and they can move out of the food insecurity situation.
8. Streamline transport arrangements within OGB to avoid time wasting.
9. Streamline documentation for greater efficiency in the use of time.
10. Ensure flexibility in the format of the narrative report to allow it to capture exciting processes.
11. Decentralise warehouse so that Kwekwe has its own.
12. To ensure urgent facilitation that is required in short-term responses, OXFAM should be prepared to action things quickly.
13. Field officers must be capacitated on gender so that they go beyond numbers and pay attention to the qualitative aspects of women and men's participation.
14. Gender awareness raising on sex abuse within a humanitarian context should include the dimension of possible abuse by humanitarian agency staff.
15. Carry out needs and capabilities assessments together with baseline surveys to inform the planning and design of future interventions.
16. Budget processes must be responsive to the new highly participatory methodologies that are adopted.

The following recommendations were made regarding important issues that emerged:

- In recognition of the predictability of hunger, OGB should move away from purely relief interventions and bridge the humanitarian and development divide.
- In targeting beneficiaries, OGB must give more weight to vulnerability indicators that directly relate to food access.
- Recognise the special circumstances of the HIV/AIDS infected and link up with other OGB programmes to provide the necessary support to meet their special needs.

ACRONYMS

| | |
|---------|---|
| AIDS | Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome |
| AREX | Agricultural Research and Extension |
| FDO | Food Distribution Officer |
| FDP | Food Distribution Point |
| FEWSNET | Famine Early Warning Systems Network |
| HIV | Human Immuno-Deficiency Virus |
| M&E | Monitoring and Evaluation |
| NGO | Non-governmental Organisation |
| OGB | Oxfam Great Britain |
| VGF | Vulnerable Group Feeding |
| WFP | World Food Programme |
| ZIMVAC | Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee |

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First published online by Oxfam GB in 2010.

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