



Mali Food Insecurity Response 2012/13

Oxfam's response to food insecurity in Mali in 2011/12 recognised that pastoralists and agro-pastoralists had not recovered from the effects of the 2010 drought and food price hikes when they were faced with another looming crisis: inadequate rains, poor harvests and pasture, rising food prices and weak terms of trade. By December 2011, the Government's early warning system indicated that almost 1.7 million people were at risk. Oxfam and partners, also reporting a marked deterioration in food security, designed a phased programme including EFSL (Emergency Food Security and Livelihoods) and WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) interventions in Gao and Kayes. The programme was framed within Oxfam's wider Sahel food crisis response, classified as a Category 2 Emergency. In Mali, the response underwent a series of revisions. Firstly, it was extended in February 2012, from an initial target of 96,000, to meet the needs of 350,000 people. Secondly the coup in March 2012 which triggered a refugee and internal displacement crisis required a) suspension, b) resumption using remote programming and c) needs assessments in areas where Internally Displaced People (IDPs) were arriving. Early interventions by Oxfam and other agencies, combined with the effects of the conflict, proved insufficient to prevent a major food security crisis. By mid-2012, estimates indicated that 30% of the population, (4.6 million people), were at risk of food insecurity.

Evaluation Method

The evaluation was carried out by an external evaluator that applied Oxfam's Humanitarian Indicator Tool (HIT). This tool is designed to help evaluators assess the degree to which a humanitarian response meets recognised quality standards. The HIT consists of 12 quality standards, each with defined benchmarks. In applying the tool, the evaluator reviews the available evidence and rates the extent each standard was 'met', 'partially met', 'almost met' or 'not met'. Scores are then assigned against each standard and a cumulative total calculated. Three standards – timeliness, coverage, and measuring adherence to Sphere (international accepted standards) and Oxfam quality standards – are given twice the weight of the others, given their greater importance.



Figure 1: Map of Mali

http://www.lonelyplanet.com/maps/africa/mali/map_of_mali.jpg

Results

The response, in partially meeting the standards for timeliness, coverage and technical aspects, was shaped principally by the combination of a poorly articulated contingency plan together with significant delays in identifying and acting on the need to scale-up capacity. Crucially, despite reacting quickly to early signs of the emerging food insecurity crisis, Oxfam was not able to deliver assistance until three months later, when the number of food insecure Malians had risen to over 1.8 million. At this point, target coverage was also increased significantly, and by August had reached approximately 25% of the intended target number. Throughout, slow and difficult recruitment of French-speaking staff was instrumental in causing delays and low coverage. This may also have had a bearing on the partial and inconsistent use of technical standards and the late formulation of the Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) framework. A strength of the response, however, was in the quality of attention to and investment in partnerships. Joint assessments were followed through with joint design of the response in both Gao and Kayes. This paid additional dividends in retaining access in Gao following the withdrawal of Oxfam staff due to insecurity, with a remote programming model placing the partner in the principle implementation and monitoring role. Whilst limited to two partners, partnerships are considered to have been positive, especially because the programme has sought to strengthen the partners' emergency preparedness and disaster response capacities. Similarly, collaboration with other organisations was adopted for the Oxfam advocacy approach, The advocacy team's ability to accommodate political changes enabled Oxfam to contribute to establishing a commonly owned Humanitarian Charter among organisations in Northern Mali and shaping the UN discourse on Mali.

| Standard | Level of achievement | Rating |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| 1. Timeliness | Partially met | 2/6 |
| 2. Coverage | Partially met | 2/6 |
| 3. Technical aspects of programme measured against Sphere standards | Partially met | 2/6 |
| 4. MEAL strategy and plan in place and being implemented using appropriate indicators | Almost met | 1/3 |
| 5. Feedback/complaints system in place and functioning and documented evidence of consultation and participation leading to a programme relevant to context and needs | Partially met | 2/3 |
| 6. Partner relationships defined, capacity addressed and partners fully engaged in all stages of programme cycle | Met | 3/3 |
| 7. Programme is considered a safe programme | Not applicable | - |
| 8. Programme addresses gender equity and specific concerns and needs of women, girls, men, boys and vulnerable groups | Almost met | 2/3 |
| 9. Evidence that preparedness measures were in place and effectively actioned | Almost met | 1/3 |
| 10. Programme has an advocacy strategy based on evidence from the field | Met | 3/3 |
| 11. Programme has an integrated one programme approach | Almost met | 1/3 |
| 12. Evidence of appropriate staff capacity to ensure quality programming | Almost met | 0/3 |
| Final rating | | 19/42 |

Good practice & enablers

Despite the challenges faced, the programme was effective in using quality analysis for multiple purposes. This was based on the existence of Household Economy Assessments in both areas, which a) substituted for weaknesses in the contingency plan by focusing identification of the extent of deteriorating food security during assessments b) using this as evidence to advocate for increased levels of assistance c) informing the approach to vulnerability adopted in the response and d) beginning to integrate some resilience-oriented actions based on better understanding of households' livelihoods strategies.

Going forward

Some measures have already been taken following the review to improve the quality of programme results. For example, training courses have been held in Gao and Keyes, including on the MEAL plan and accountability measures, together with the development of a clearer definition of the ways of working between the technical programme team and the MEAL officers.

Photo credit: Simon Rawles