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SUMMARY EVALUATION REPORT LIBERIA PRRO 10454.0

**Food Assistance for Relief and Recovery in
Post-Conflict Liberia**

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NOTE TO THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

This document is submitted to the Executive Board for consideration.

The Secretariat invites members of the Board who may have questions of a technical nature with regard to this document to contact the WFP staff focal points indicated below, preferably well in advance of the Board's meeting.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This evaluation examined the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability of protracted relief and recovery operation 10454.0 “Food Assistance for Relief and Recovery in Post-Conflict Liberia”. The objective of the evaluation was twofold: i) to determine the degree to which project objectives had been achieved; and ii) to draw lessons from which to enhance performance in the next phase of the operation. The evaluation was carried out by a team of external consultants who conducted field research from 2 to 19 November 2008.

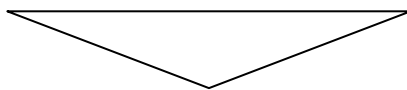
The evaluation found that there was a clear need for food aid in Liberia and that school feeding, which accounted for approximately three quarters of project commodities, was an appropriate activity that channelled substantial quantities of food to remote rural areas under difficult operational conditions. However, the evaluation also found that the operation design was weak: it sought to achieve too much in a situation where capacity to implement programmes was extremely limited at all levels, and the main activities did little to address the main causes of food insecurity and vulnerability in the country. The operation design could have been more closely linked to the findings of the 2006 comprehensive food security and nutrition survey, and could have considered transition issues and exit strategies more fully.

The operation became measurably more efficient during the period under review, owing to a series of management initiatives that resulted in better accountability at all levels and lower operational costs. However, although service delivery improved, monthly delivery targets were rarely met, and project outputs were generally below planned levels, owing to poor rural transport infrastructure and severe damage caused by rainy seasons.

It was difficult to assess the operation’s effectiveness, because an adequate monitoring and evaluation system was not in place, but the evaluation found that the impact was generally positive and significant. There was widespread agreement that the school feeding activity had been important in helping to: i) revitalize the education system in rural areas; and ii) encourage the return and resettlement of displaced people. Many participants in food for work had invested a portion of their wages in income-generation ventures, which had led to sustained increases in household income. WFP’s capacity-building efforts had helped to bring food security and nutrition issues to the forefront of policy discussion in Liberia.

Future interventions should seek to address the causes of food insecurity and vulnerability directly. Interventions should be more clearly focused, to bring them into line with prevailing implementation capacities, and should address issues of transition and the phase-out of activities. Protracted relief and recovery operation and school feeding guidance should identify more clearly the different types of transition and appropriate indicators to guide the timing of the transition process. Nutrition activities should be refocused to address chronic malnutrition through an expanded mother-and-child health programme.

DRAFT DECISION*



The Board takes note of “Summary Evaluation Report Liberia PRRO 10454.0” (WFP/EB.A/2009/7-C) and encourages further action on the recommendations, taking into account considerations raised by the Board during its discussion.

* This is a draft decision. For the final decision adopted by the Board, please refer to the Decisions and Recommendations document issued at the end of the session.



BACKGROUND

Context

1. By the end of 2008, Liberia had made considerable progress towards the consolidation of peace and stability, but still faced several significant challenges. Nearly nine out of ten families in rural areas had been displaced at least once during the 14 years of civil conflict. Poverty affected all segments of the Liberian population, unemployment and underemployment levels were high, and at least half of the population lived on less than half a US dollar per day. The WFP-led 2006 comprehensive food security and nutrition survey (CFSNS) found that 11 percent of all Liberian rural and semi-urban households were completely food-insecure, and 40 percent of rural households were highly vulnerable to food insecurity. Recent returnees were identified as being the most food-insecure or vulnerable group. Malnutrition and undernutrition were pervasive, with 39 percent of all children under 5 stunted and 7 percent suffering acute malnutrition. Chronic malnutrition (stunting) levels were more than 40 percent in nine of Liberia's fifteen counties, and between 30 and 40 percent in the remaining six.
2. The years of civil conflict had had a devastating impact on Liberia's education system: half of all adults had not received any formal education, and two thirds of women were illiterate. Nearly 30 percent of boys and 37 percent of girls aged 6 to 18 years were not enrolled in an education institution. Net enrolment rates were estimated at 46 percent for primary schools and 34 percent for secondary. Students' late entry into the education system led to many schools having teenagers in all primary-level classes. School dropout rates continued to be high, especially for older girls.

Description of the Operation

3. Between 2001 and 2007, WFP provided assistance to Liberia through a series of West Africa coastal regional protracted relief and recovery operations (PRROs), also covering Guinea and Sierra Leone. As the situation stabilized after 2003, WFP shifted the focus of its humanitarian assistance to recovery. In July 2007, it moved to the two-year, single-country PRRO 10454.0, planned to conclude in June 2009. School feeding and agricultural rehabilitation were the cornerstones of WFP's recovery approach in Liberia, particularly as resettlement and reintegration had been hindered by the lack of basic social services and livelihood opportunities in rural areas. PRRO 10454.0 was designed to contribute to government efforts to achieve universal primary education and sustainable food security, while supporting institutional capacity-building and infrastructure development.
4. The overall objective of the PRRO was to: "contribute to the peace consolidation process through prevention of hunger, creation of conditions for vulnerable populations to restore sustainable livelihoods, foster access to education and increase government capacity in terms of food assistance management".
5. The PRRO included 15 activities under the five prevailing WFP Strategic Objectives.¹ All of these activities had been included in the preceding regional PRRO 10064.3; there was little substantive difference in terms of their design.

¹ All references to Strategic Objectives refer to those of the "WFP Strategic Plan 2006–2009" (WFP/EB.A/2005/5-A/Rev.1).



6. The main programme components and activities were:
 - food for education, to increase enrolment and attendance rates, enhance retention and narrow the attendance gap between boys and girls;
 - food support to local initiatives (FSLI) to rehabilitate agriculture and damaged rural infrastructure in counties with the highest rates of returned displaced people and refugees;
 - nutrition interventions, to support supplementary feeding programmes in areas with high malnutrition rates, focusing on acutely malnourished children under 5 and malnourished pregnant and lactating women;
 - general food distribution for 1,100 refugees from Côte d'Ivoire living in two settlement areas in Maryland and Nimba counties;
 - capacity-building to enhance national institutions' capacity to ensure timely and efficient responses to food security challenges.
7. The PRRO was originally planned to provide 53,632 mt of food at a cost of US\$50.6 million. The operation had three budget revisions:
 - The first addressed changes in landside transport, storage and handling (LTSH) and direct support cost (DSC) requirements.
 - The second addressed high prices and lower food requirements following the Executive Board's approval of development project (DEV) 10733.0 in June 2008. The DEV targets 62,000 schoolchildren previously included in the PRRO in five counties in southeastern Liberia.
 - The third addressed increased requirements for food assistance to an additional 220,000 people adversely affected by high food prices. The major component was the provision of school meals to 155,000 schoolchildren in Greater Monrovia, including schools that had been phased out from the PRRO in June 2008.

Evaluation Features

8. The mid-term evaluation had two main objectives:
 - to determine the degree to which project objectives had been achieved; and
 - to improve performance in the next phase of the Liberia PRRO and the new DEV 10733.0.
9. The evaluation focused on the period January 2007 to November 2008, covering the final six months of the previous regional PRRO 10064.3, followed by the first 17 months of the Liberia PRRO.

PERFORMANCE HIGHLIGHTS

Operation Design: Relevance and Appropriateness

⇒ *Needs assessment*

10. The 2006 CFSNS identified the counties with the highest levels of food insecurity and vulnerability – River Cess, Grand Bassa, River Gee, Grand Gedeh and Sinoe – and the population groups considered most vulnerable: recent returnees. This provided sound



guidance to the country office, enabling WFP to direct resources to those counties and population groups assessed as the most food-insecure and vulnerable.

⇒ *Internal coherence*

11. The evaluation found that the PRRO objectives were in line with corporate guidance on PRRO formulation, but considered that this guidance was somewhat weak regarding the articulation of different types of transition. Specifically, there is need for guidance on the selection of indicators to guide transition processes and to determine when activity phase-out may be appropriate. However, the PRRO document did articulate the planned phase-out of school feeding activities from Greater Monrovia.

⇒ *External coherence*

12. The evaluation found that the PRRO had been designed within the context of an evolving government policy framework and a United Nations approach that increasingly emphasized the shift towards development. It found that the PRRO fitted well with government priorities, including the Ministry of Education's focus on providing universal primary education and the government's Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy. The PRRO also reflected the main United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) priorities, which are based on the Millennium Development Goals. WFP played a crucial role in UNDAF and Common Country Assessment (CCA) discussions, and helped to ensure that food security issues were reflected where appropriate.

⇒ *Project design*

13. Given the limited implementation capacity of both WFP and its cooperating partners, and the extremely difficult operating environment, the evaluation believed that both the PRRO's geographic targeting and implementation and its selection of activities could have been more tightly focused. The PRRO was implemented in all 15 counties of Liberia; nutrition and FSLI activities had initially been implemented in 11 and 8 counties, respectively, but were later expanded to the others. The PRRO planned to implement 15 different activities.
14. The evaluation found that the educational objectives – the planned outcomes – of the school feeding activity, which accounted for the bulk of project commodities, did not necessarily take into account the transitional or recovery context of Liberia, and may have been more relevant in a longer-term development context. The evaluation believed that more corporate guidance was needed on the selection of appropriate objectives and associated output and outcome indicators for school feeding activities in emergency, transition or recovery and development contexts. Such guidance would help country offices to manage the transitional aspects of school feeding activities.

Outputs and Implementation: Elements of Efficiency

⇒ *Resource adequacy*

15. Since its inception, the PRRO experienced a significant shortfall in DSC funding caused by the transfer of 7,000 mt of commodities from the previous PRRO 10064.3 without accompanying DSC funds. This represented approximately 15 percent of the total commodities programmed to November 2008. As a result, the country office was obliged to undertake measures to reduce overall DSC costs, including reducing staff numbers by one-third, closing sub-offices, sharing office space with other agencies, and increasing the



DSC rate in budget revisions. Despite these measures, the DSC budget remained in deficit at the time of the evaluation. It was not clear whether the country office would be able to cover the DSC costs to the end of the operation in June 2009.

⇒ *Targeting and coverage*

16. The 2006 CFSNS showed a link between the level of food security and the rate of school attendance, providing justification for the decision to channel the bulk of project commodities through school feeding activities, especially in remote areas. However, the evaluation found that school feeding may not have been the most effective way of reaching some of the most vulnerable, because:

- an estimated 20 to 30 percent of primary-aged rural children from the poorest and most vulnerable segments of the population were not enrolled in school;
- the school feeding activity did not address the serious nutrition needs of the under-5 population;
- the school meal did not address short-term hunger;
- schools were closed during the height of the hungry season from July to September.

⇒ *Cost efficiency*

17. The operation became measurably more efficient during the period under review owing to a series of management initiatives that focused on better accountability at all levels and the lowering of operational costs. For example, a fleet management system introduced in 2007 helped reduce transport costs: the cost per ton per kilometre generally declined during 2008, and fuel consumption improved by more than 10 percent.

⇒ *Service delivery*

18. Given the constraints faced by WFP, service delivery was good. Poor rural road infrastructure, combined with severe damage caused during the rainy season, posed significant challenges to achieving delivery targets. WFP was unable to deliver commodities to some counties for several months. Most project outputs or deliveries of commodities were therefore below planned levels. From July 2007 to August 2008, actual deliveries on a pro-rata basis reached 87 percent of planned deliveries. The actual number of beneficiaries reached each month varied considerably, but was generally below the planned number for many activities.

⇒ *Monitoring and evaluation*

19. WFP had been dealing with high levels of commodity diversion in Liberia for a long time. During 2007–2008, staff devoted considerable time to addressing this issue. The country office established a Programme Internal Audit Unit in July 2007 to strengthen monitoring and reduce diversions. Most monitoring activities focused on the management and accountability of WFP commodities, rather than on overall project performance and the achievement of planned outcomes. These efforts, combined with those of government ministries, helped to reduce diversions significantly.

⇒ *Partnerships*

20. Partnerships were often weakened by other agencies' inability to attract sufficient funding to fulfil their intended roles and obligations. As a result, WFP continued to provide



strong leadership in the transition context, where other actors could have been expected to lead and assume greater responsibility for activities that fitted better with their mandates and areas of expertise. By the end of 2008, the Government of Liberia had started to assume greater responsibilities in school feeding and mother-and-child health (MCH) activities, but still relied heavily on WFP for both food resources and support to strengthening implementation capacity.

Results

⇒ *Effectiveness*

21. To assess effectiveness, the evaluation considered the extent to which the planned outcomes outlined in the PRRO document and logical framework summary had been achieved. This involved the assessment of 15 activities under five Strategic Objectives, implemented in 15 counties. The PRRO established targets and performance criteria for each objective, but the country office was largely unable to gather and analyse outcome data. The complexity of the operation required substantial investment in monitoring and evaluation (M&E) capacity, which was not put in place.
22. In spite of these constraints, the evaluation found no evidence or suggestion of significant nutritional difficulties among the refugees receiving regular general food distributions. Regarding school feeding, there was some evidence of improvement in the gender ratio for enrolments in WFP-assisted schools during 2007, and indications of relatively high attendance rates in the WFP-assisted schools visited by the evaluation team. Regarding nutrition activities, it seems likely that the provision of WFP food assistance encouraged mothers to attend MCH clinics, and contributed to the improved nutrition and treatment adherence of people living with HIV and of tuberculosis patients.

⇒ *Impact*

23. The evaluation found that the PRRO had made a significant contribution to consolidating the peace process during a difficult period of transition, largely through the school feeding activity, which channelled substantial quantities of food into food-deficit rural communities. First, there was widespread agreement among stakeholders in Liberia that school feeding had played an important role in revitalizing the education system in rural areas and encouraging the return and resettlement of displaced populations. The evaluation also found that the monitoring and recording programme used to manage the flow of food commodities through school feeding activities was largely transparent and credible, and had made a major contribution to strengthening the capacity of county-level ministries, especially of education.
24. Second, the evaluation noted that a survey of participants in infrastructure projects supported by the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), including food assistance recipients under the PRRO's FSLI component, had identified a number of positive impacts. The survey found that many participants had invested a portion of their wages in income-generation ventures such as farming and petty trading, which had led to long-term increases in household income. It also confirmed the importance of skills transfer through practical on-the-job training. It was also felt that participation in these activities may have reduced domestic violence. More than 90 percent of survey respondents felt that project participation had helped to promote community peace and reconciliation.
25. Third, WFP's capacity-building activities had helped to bring food security and nutrition issues to the forefront of government and United Nations policy discussions in Liberia.



WFP played a major role in development of the National Food Security and Nutrition Strategy, the government/United Nations Joint Programme for Food Security and Nutrition, launched in mid-2008, and the National Nutrition Policy. WFP also supported the establishment of an institutional framework for national food security monitoring, including setting-up a household surveillance system and a market price data collection system. WFP support to school feeding and nutrition activities helped to improve accountability at the level of local and county authorities.

Sustainability

26. There was evidence that many of the benefits of the WFP intervention were sustainable. The WFP-assisted refugee community had become largely self-supporting. Farmers in WFP-assisted agricultural rehabilitation activities continued to benefit, especially where they had individual ownership or rights to the land. The school feeding programme helped to reinforce a widespread and strong appreciation of the benefits of education in Liberia, which could mean that food incentives may not be required to encourage enrolment and attendance in the future.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall Assessment

⇒ *Relevance*

27. The evaluation found that the 2006 CFSNS had provided sound guidance on prioritizing and targeting project resources, but that the operation's design could have been more closely linked to needs assessment findings. The evaluation also noted that – given the limited implementation capacity of both WFP and its partners, and the difficult operating environment – the PRRO's geographic targeting and selection of activities could have been more tightly focused. The design of the PRRO was weak in that it: i) tried to do too much given the extremely limited implementing capacities available; ii) did not identify mechanisms for transition or activity phase-out when appropriate; and iii) the main activities of the PRRO did not directly address the main causes of food insecurity and vulnerability in the country.

⇒ *Efficiency*

28. Major improvements in overall efficiency during the PRRO were the result of management initiatives to increase the accountability of WFP, government and NGO partners; the evaluation found that the level of diversions had been substantially reduced. However, the poor state of rural transport infrastructure resulted in monthly deliveries that were often less than planned, especially during the rainy season. The transfer of commodities without accompanying DSC funds at the start of the operation posed considerable difficulties, which were still outstanding at the end of 2008.

⇒ *Effectiveness*

29. It was difficult to assess the PRRO's effectiveness or the achievement of planned outcomes owing to the lack of a comprehensive M&E system to collect and collate the large number of indicators required. There was limited evidence that school enrolment



ratios had improved slightly during 2007 and that attendance rates in WFP-assisted schools were relatively high.

⇒ *Impact*

30. Regarding the wider impacts, the evaluation found that the PRRO school feeding activity had played an important role in revitalizing the education system, especially in rural areas, and encouraging the return and resettlement of displaced populations.

⇒ *Sustainability*

31. The evaluation found that some of the benefits of WFP food assistance were likely to continue beyond the cessation of WFP assistance. In particular, the school feeding programme seems to have reinforced a widespread and strong appreciation of the benefits of education in Liberia, and food incentives may not be required to encourage enrolment and attendance in the future. The evaluation found that the PRRO had contributed to recovery processes, and many activities had enabled beneficiaries to improve their situations in sustainable ways.

Key Issues for the Future

32. Operations in Liberia need to take into account the difficult operating environment and the limited implementation capacity in the country. Future operations should therefore have more focused geographical targeting and fewer activities. Future operations should also pay greater attention to transition issues and activity phase-out strategies.
33. Future operations should address more directly some of the causes of food insecurity and vulnerability in Liberia. The design of future operations may need to be changed to:
- address the causes of chronic under-5 malnutrition;
 - ensure that food is available during the hungry season;
 - address short-term hunger among schoolchildren; and
 - ensure access to more remote areas, where food insecurity and vulnerability may be expected to be highest.
34. WFP has been particularly successful in strengthening county-level line ministries to monitor and manage food commodity usage. WFP should continue to prioritize these efforts and encourage government counterparts to apply the new skills to other areas of their work, as appropriate.

Recommendations

⇒ *Headquarters and regional bureaux*

35. It is recommended that the Programme Design Service (OMXD) strengthen PRRO guidance regarding the identification of different types of transition and appropriate indicators to guide the timing and phase-out of activities during periods of transition.
36. It is recommended that OMXD review school feeding guidelines and provide greater guidance on the selection of appropriate objectives and indicators for school feeding activities in emergency, transition and development contexts. Guidelines should clearly address the design and implementation of school feeding in transitional contexts.



37. It is recommended that WFP review its financial procedures to ensure that commodities transferred from one operation to another are accompanied by appropriate levels of funding for other direct operational costs (ODOC), LTSH and DSC. In some cases it might be necessary to modify the current arrangement whereby cash is always linked to commodities.

⇒ *Country office*

38. It is recommended that the country office seek ways to simplify and focus future operations, to bring them more into line with operational constraints and WFP and partner capacities for managing and implementing food assistance. Regarding operation design, objectives must be clear, activities should be fewer, and indicators must be appropriate so that WFP and its partners can more easily collect and collate outcome data and measure progress in achieving objectives.
39. It is recommended that the country office significantly strengthen its capacity for programme M&E to ensure that WFP is better able to measure progress towards achieving objectives and planned outcomes.
40. It is recommended that the country office consider shifting the focus of its nutrition interventions from acute malnutrition to the causes of chronic malnutrition. The country office should investigate the feasibility of an expanded MCH activity to provide blended food to all pregnant and lactating women for up to six months and to all children aged 6 to 24 months, within a defined area with high chronic malnutrition rates. Such an intervention should be commenced provided that health facilities have the capacity to manage food assistance in addition to their other responsibilities.

ACRONYMS USED IN THE DOCUMENT

CCA	Common Country Assessment
CFSNS	comprehensive food security and nutrition survey
DEV	development project
DSC	direct support costs
FSLI	food support to local initiatives
LTSH	landside transport, storage and handling
M&E	monitoring and evaluation
MCH	mother-and-child health
NGO	non-governmental organization
ODOC	other direct operational costs
OMXD	Programme Design Service
PRRO	protracted relief and recovery operation
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNMIL	United Nations Mission in Liberia