



ICRC Economic Security Programme

Review of the activities in Northern Uganda 2009

ICRC

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is an impartial, neutral and independent organisation whose exclusively humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflict and internal violence, and to provide them with assistance. The ICRC is present in Uganda since 1979, in assistance to people affected by armed conflicts. Presently, the ICRC has a permanent field presence in Gulu and Kitgum in northern Uganda, and whenever necessary, operates in other parts of the country from its operational hub in Kampala.

In March 2008, the ICRC shifted operations in northern Uganda from relief distribution in camps to assisting the internally displaced people (IDP) re-settle in villages of return. The ICRC "Economic Security" programme's main objective was to enable specific vulnerable sections of the population produce their own food and generate incomes, thus covering essential needs by end 2009. Thanks to detailed assessments, a vulnerability map was drawn using wealth-based criteria.

The ICRC's approach relied on three pillars: 1) Provision of seeds and tools in parallel to, 2) Cash-for-Work (CFW) programmes stimulating local economy, and 3) Micro-economic initiatives (MEI) which supported people generate incomes in a sustainable manner. These interventions supplemented distributions of Essential Household Items (EHI) carried out in 2008, as well as emergency relief assistance in support to households (HH) affected by fires and floods.

This document summarizes results of an internal ICRC review exercise (June/July 09) which seeks to take stock of the above-mentioned new approaches. It aims at highlighting achievements as well as shortcomings, so that lessons learnt could benefit other organizations deploying similar programmes.

Background

Return of IDPs to villages of origin (starting 2006/7) was almost complete on June 2009 (except parts of Kitgum). However, the return and re-settlement process did not equate *status quo ante*. In the past 15 years, population size increased, society and environment changed considerably, camp living conditions disrupted traditional community institutions, and a largely subsistence agriculture gave way to a cash and market-based economy. A wider set of aspirations, expectations and opportunities emerged whilst a culture of dependency set in.

In 2006, first returnees commuted to rebuild houses, open land, and use seeds provided (or produced) in camps to re-start agriculture. Favoured by good rainfall, they planted approximately two acres of land with a mixture of food and cash crops and, supported by the World Food Programme (WFP)'s "safety net", returned to partial food security in 2007.

In addition, a strong indication from donors as well as government could be noticed calling for a shift from relief to recovery (production, infrastructure and re-starting services) and from assistance in camps to assistance in places of return. Assistance volume, scope and geographical coverage decreased dramatically.

In October 2008, following a promising first rains season, 30% of northern Uganda was estimated food secure, 50% on the threshold, and 20% food insecure. The first harvest provided seeds for the next planting season along with surpluses, sold for higher prices (especially in Sudan).

With the withdrawal of food ration in 2009, the need for productive inputs and a successful first season became crucial. Those who returned late 2008 and early 2009 were able to open one to two acres of

land, benefited from the Cash-for-Work land tilling (supported by the ICRC and other organizations), seed distributions, fairs and vouchers. Unfortunately, rains were delayed, sporadic and patchy and many people lost whole or part of their crop.

The Livelihood Programme

Five different interventions were combined to enable people return to a situation where they could provide for their own essential needs: These programmes were:

- Seeds and tools for productive activities
- Cash-for-Work
- Micro economic initiatives
- Emergency response
- Distributions of Essential Household Items (EHI)

Seeds and tools for Productive Activities

The shift towards strengthening local market mechanisms through agro commodity vouchers and seed fairs (rather than direct distributions of seeds and tools) proved relevant and appropriate. The most beneficial intervention was seed fairs, which not only provided local farmers an additional income, but were perceived by beneficiaries as providing higher choice and higher quality.

The agro commodity vouchers did not give a comparable advantage and limited the number of participating stockists (6 compared to 1700 for the seed fairs exercise). Concerns were raised on agro input vouchers such as 1) how to support smaller stockists in increasing stake in such programmes, 2) how to increase the level of choice to beneficiaries and, 3) whether vouchers in northern Uganda could be used beyond the one-day validity period.

Beneficiaries chose seeds according to the season including those that would function as cash and food crops. Many of those involved in the exercise expressed a need for cassava which has several advantages over other crops (it is a local cereal staple, more drought-resistant and does not have to be harvested at once). However, the ICRC did not provide cassava because of availability problems of healthy cuttings and length of time to multiply (a minimum 12 months). Only two varieties with tolerance to brown streak have been released for multiplication and a very limited number of agencies such as FAO, NRC, OXFAM have implemented multiplication.

Cash-for- Work

The primary objective of Cash-for-Work was to allow people the flexibility to spend increased incomes on food, on other essential items (including school fees) or on creation of livelihood assets. The second objective was to develop local infrastructure and assets.

Targeting for CFW programmes involved two separate criteria. Geographical targeting was undertaken to identify the poorest areas (eastern Kitgum, Amuru and Pader). Further targeting was done to focus on the poorest of three wealth categories within each community. Choice of projects for CFW was carried out through community meetings. Finally, community access routes, land tilling and dams were identified as projects to be implemented.

Micro Economic Initiatives

The micro economic initiatives were a smaller programme, limited to a few pre-selected options (market gardening using treadle pumps for irrigation, sunflower oil production, and bee keeping) supporting 680HH.

This project met mixed reactions. The scale of the programme was small compared to the overall number of households. MEI required intensive follow up and, questions arose on whether MEI are relevant in the early recovery phase, implemented within a two-year strategy, and whether other types of MEI such as provision of livestock and small shops would have been more relevant to northern Uganda.

Emergency Response and EHI

Emergency response was provided only when people lost property in case of fire outbreaks. EHI distributions were used at a lesser scale during the recovery process.

Effectiveness and Efficiency

In 2008 and 2009, the ICRC's general objective was to improve food and income for targeted IDP/returnee communities through interventions supporting livelihood. Two categories of interventions had been considered: 1) relief intervention (emergency response and EHI) and 2) livelihood support (agricultural support, community interventions projects). The minimum livelihood threshold/household (5-6 persons) to meet basic food/non-food needs was:

- cultivate four acres of land or have access to 900-1200 kg of cereals
- meet 2400 kcal of daily food intake
- have a daily income of over one USD to meet other essential HH needs
- consume five types of food commodity

The different interventions had the following outcomes:

- Seeds and tools distribution in 2008 enabled about 71,000 HH to plant and harvest between half and one acre of land, providing a 150,000 UGS income and 30 – 35% of the food requirement.
- In 2009, the ICRC supported 20,000 households through seed fairs, agro commodity vouchers and direct distributions (enough seeds and tools enabling them to plant two acres of land and harvest at least 50% of food requirement). Poor rainfall performance in the first season should however allow those who planted later an approximate 40% yield.
- Seeds fairs and agro commodity vouchers benefited local stockists, and provided with an income 1700 farming households selling seeds.
- An effective new partnership was enjoyed with the FAO, which collaborated in the planning process of the seed fairs programme. Information was regularly shared with concerned authorities, FSAL Cluster and other International organisations. Furthermore, many ICRC projects were implemented with the Uganda Red Cross (URCS) volunteers.
- The programme helped revive community tradition through collective approach (e.g. Project Management Committees). It provided a platform for private seeds stockists to gain experience, publicity and strengthen their financial position in remote rural areas.
- The Cash-for-Work programme provided incomes to almost 13,000 households in 2008 and 2009, helping clear almost 15,000 acres, rehabilitate two earth dams, open 39.8km of community access route and contributed about 100,000 UGS per household (roughly 30% of the annual income). Community access roads enabled trade and access to services in a number of isolated villages.
- MEI expected to cover 2300 households in 2008 and 2009, but only 680 HH are supported so far. Although households using treadle pumps had earn income and are in a food secure position, the number of households supported by this project is smaller than what was initially planned.
- The emergency response programme provided kits to households affected by fire and benefited 4428 in 2008/2009.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In retrospect, perhaps a greater focus needed to be placed on unpredictability of external context. Main difficulties encountered could be listed as follows:

- Time and labour required to rebuild shelters, create appropriate conditions for living, and engage in productive activities. Programmes should be flexible, inclusive with a complimentary package (agro inputs, CFW and appropriate EHI).
- In a rain-fed environment, diverse activities with quick income should be considered along with a safety net (provision of food, cassava cuttings or small livestock).
- An overlap between relief and recovery could be envisaged. In this case EHI, appropriate to re-settlement, could be provided even when people have already returned to villages.

- The unpredictability of the wider funding environment should be recognised and monitored.

As a result of poor performance of the first rainfall season, most people in the affected areas were unlikely to have enough seeds to plant for the second season. Therefore the ICRC, working in Amuru and eastern Kitgum, distributed in August 2009, sorghum and millet seeds to 13,000 households and expanded its CFW activities to cover an additional 3500 households. The ICRC's programme exit plan was extended until April 2010. In addition, the ICRC will maintain a provision to support 12,000 households with cash and food crop seeds in eastern Kitgum for the 1st season 2010.

As the ICRC's Economic Security Assistance activities are drawing to an end by beginning 2010, this document aimed at taking stock of recent activities and new approaches (CFW, MEI etc.) so that lessons learnt benefit organizations implementing similar programmes.

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