

Maximizing the Value of “Cash for Work”

Lessons from
a Niger land
recuperation
project:
CRS EARLI

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BEST PRACTICES



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



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(Emergency Agricultural Recovery
of Livelihoods Initiative)

INTRODUCTION

The following good practices were distilled from a recent Real Time Evaluation (RTE)¹ of an emergency project in Niger that is using cash for work and seed fairs to address food insecurity in the departments of Ouallam and Tillabery. The project was implemented by Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and financed by USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA).

What is an RTE?

An RTE is an internal rapid review carried out early on in an emergency response (usually between six to eight weeks after the onset of the emergency, depending on the scale of the emergency). It helps to identify what is being done, what is working, what is not working, and what needs to change to improve the appropriateness and effectiveness of the emergency response program. An RTE looks at where the response is at a given point in time and provides an opportunity for staff to step back and reflect on an emergency response. It is used to gain quick feedback on operational performance and identify systemic problems. Ultimately it is intended to ensure that a CRS emergency response benefits disaster affected people.

This is part of a larger effort to respond to the Sahel Crisis in which below-average rainfall and crop production shortages in 2011 have resulted in reduced food and livestock fodder availability and increasing environmental degradation. Lack of ground cover increases erosion and environmentally negative coping strategies are used to compensate for lack of production and livestock. Many vulnerable families are still recovering from the 2009/2010 food crisis. Cash for Work projects are especially important now before households' own livelihoods/agriculture activities begin.

We arrived at these good practices by responding to evaluation questions posed to the RTE team by project managers. Our responses were informed by the 2011 SPHERE standards², document review, observation, interviews and focus groups with project participants, community leaders and key informants. We hope this document will reinforce familiar good practices as well as highlight new ones.

1 <http://www.alnap.org/resources/guides/evaluation/rte.aspx>

2 SPHERE Project, Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards on Humanitarian Response, 2011 Edition.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. As resources are limited, systems of solidarity should be encouraged.

(SPHERE Core Standard 1: People-centred humanitarian response)

The extent of need in Tillabery Department in Niger is extensive. It is an area where, according to community leaders, there have been deficit harvests in 14 of the last 14 seasons³. According to Mr. Diambeidou Biga, OCHA Bureau Representative in Tillabery⁴, the cyclic nature of the crisis has reduced the populations' assets to such low levels that recovery is much more difficult. Based on focus group discussions, it seems the population's coping strategies have become increasingly negative each year for both households and their environment. Livestock and other assets have been sold and the environment has become more degraded as residents look to natural resources to meet their basic needs. Previously, residents could collect and sell straw as animal feed but it is no longer available and livestock owners have sold their animals. Women used to sell copto, a leafy plant for soups and seasoning but this is also no longer growing. Similarly, women made baskets for merchants to use for sorting cereal grains but since cereal is no longer available in the markets, there is no longer a market for baskets. Finally, trees are cut to sell as firewood, further increasing desertification and ensuring that Tillabery's rainfall remains scarce⁵.

Mutual aid is a consistent response to help meet basic household needs. Remittances that are sent home by a migrant family member are shared with others in the community. Women's associations take collections to distribute to those who don't have. Focus group participants explained that solidarity is the mutual understanding within communities that households share when they have and others don't.

NGO interventions are based on precise calculations for rations per person that will be distributed to households with an average number of six members, for example. In reality, these calories are consumed by more people than the target number as they are shared with neighbors and extended family. This system of mutual aid may diminish the supplemental calories given to individuals but it provides a smaller amount of calories to more people.

In all villages visited, the RTE team found community-initiated self-help mechanisms that effectively re-distributed aid so that more people will

3 Key informant Interview with village chief in Tilabery Dept., Project ADVANCE, RTE 2010.

4 Key informant interview with Mr. Diambeidou Biga, OCHA Representative Tilabery Department, Niger, April, 2012.

5 "Seeing Wood, They Also Make Rain" <http://www.economist.com/node/17062713> Sept. 23rd, 2010



Cash for Work recipients awaiting payment. Daikaina, Tillabery. Heather Dolphin

benefit with smaller proportions of CRS' assistance. In one community, for every household selected, a neighbor's household was assigned who would also work on the site and receive half of the payment. In another community, the cash was equally distributed among all residents. More investigation is needed into the targeting method used in other villages and the participants' level of satisfaction with it.

While this is important to understand better, it is also worthwhile noting that support to the community's own self-help mechanisms is important in promoting community resiliency. The SPHERE standards recognize self-help as a cross-cutting theme for humanitarian sector interventions to bear in mind:

*"Community-led initiatives contribute to psychological and social well-being through restoring dignity and a degree of control to disaster-affected populations. Access to social and financial (...) support through (...) community activities helps to re-establish individual and community self-respect and identity, decrease vulnerability and enhance resilience."*⁶

This finding should be used to communicate and advocate at all levels the difficulty that short-term emergency initiatives face in achieving their intended results.

⁶ The SPHERE Project, Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response, 2011 Edition. P. 56



Freshly recuperated field of half moons outside Daibery, Tillabery.
Heather Dolphin



Water captured by recently dug half moons.
Souradja Mahaman

2. Protect and support primary production mechanisms. (SPHERE Food security – Livelihoods Standard 1: Primary production)

The Cash for Work/land recuperation interventions provide 1) protective measures to the environment, including trees of economic value, and erosion control as well as 2) productive measures, including high-value grasses for livestock pasture and the possibility that women without access to land may use recuperated land for production. According to the director of the Tillabéry Dept. of the Environment, productive seeds will hasten the fertility process, more so than grasses alone. Agents should therefore encourage farmers to adopt the same techniques in their own fields.



PRE-fertile half moons: Recuperated land as it appears before fertility is restored. Souradja Mahaman



Re-fertilized land: The same recuperated land demonstrating evidence of improved fertility. Souradja Mahaman

The data demonstrating the potential of these land recuperation activities to improve yields is impressive. Production yields exceeded their targets by 5 fold in a CRS 5 year Multi-Year Assistance Program in Burkina Faso evaluated in the 2008-09 season. Farmers who had used two or more of the promoted natural resource management practices (half-moons, zai pockets, stone bunds, and compost, etc.) obtained yields of 1,551 kg sorghum/ha and 1,138 kg millet/ha, compared to 620 kg sorghum/ha and 437 kg millet/ha on plots where none of the practices had been used. The magnitude of the increases was corroborated by farmers visited, with testimonies of doubling of yields or more by using these techniques⁷.

3. The disaster-affected population's safe access to market goods and services as producers, consumers and traders is protected and promoted. (SPHERE Food security Livelihoods Standard 3: Access to markets)

The RTE team found that certain communities are 7-10 km from a market where they will spend their payments. For better access to markets, EARLI (and other projects) can encourage communities to advocate that local leaders facilitate an effective transport solution. Some possible solutions might be a group purchase for an entire village or group of villages that affords community members access to either government subsidized cereals or offers a link with communities with cereal banks who would sell to EARLI participants. The important point here is not that the project implementer takes this on itself. In order to effectively contribute to development efforts, it is critical to empower project participants and their leadership to identify solutions to gaps that may still exist in the context of an emergency intervention. Project implementers and local leaders should rightfully see this as an opportunity to build back better – that is, use this emergency intervention as a chance to improve local infrastructure for the long term as well as to respond to this immediate need.

4. Link to long-term development initiatives.

Primary production mechanisms are still very fragile given the state of degradation in this zone, therefore EARLI might miss an important opportunity if it doesn't link its intervention to longer-term development projects (whether state or INGO sponsored). This strategic approach will more effectively contribute to sustainable solutions that address the root causes of the crisis. The recent implementation of a regional network of food security stocks (RESOGEST) is certainly a step in this direction. National and regional government actors as well as private sector and humanitarian actors agreed on the need for greater integration of long-term strategies in emergency interventions.

⁷ Best, Rupert. Final Evaluation MYAP CRS / Burkina Faso; p.l. 480 Title II Development Assistance Program; FY2004 – FY2009

CRS may also be the one to develop longer-term development projects in the area so as to address more systemic problems facing residents of the zone.

5. Where income generation and employment are feasible livelihood strategies, women and men have equal access to appropriate income-earning opportunities. (SPHERE Food security – Livelihoods Standard 2: Income and employment)

EARLI'S short-duration income generating activities (land recuperation) are rightfully accessible to men as well as to women. However, the physical capacity of women makes the work more difficult for them compared to men. Both donors and the GoN need to consider how to provide appropriate work for women that gives them equal pay for the time worked.

Land is most compacted and difficult to dig in the month of April in Niger. At the work sites visited by the RTE team, some men go to the site and finish early. Most people observed on the sites in the heat of the day were women. They told us that because the work is more difficult, women work longer hours and may need to return in the afternoon when the temperature has decreased in order to finish digging the same number of half-moons as the men. There are no alternative jobs for women, regardless of their physical condition. Women may work longer than men, but receive the same pay.

6. For those for whom the work is too strenuous, provide a cash transfer.

Cash for Work is not appropriate for everyone, least of all pregnant and lactating women, the disabled and the elderly. For households without



Woman digs half moons near mid-day in a recuperation site in Guineo-Bangou, Ouallam. Abdourhimou Adamou

members who are able to perform the work, a cash transfer is the most appropriate intervention. In this case 3-5% of households received cash transfers, however the RTE team still found senior women and those with hypertension working on the site. So the appropriate percentage in EARLI's case is more than 3-5%, but this figure will certainly depend on the context.

7. Alternative tasks should be available that are reasonable and appropriate for the capacity of both men and women, including those with limited physical capacity.

Although cash for work is designed to allow people the dignity of payment for their work, the tasks must be appropriate to the peoples' capacities. Focus group participants included women in their 50s and one who suffered from hypertension. Although they are not elderly, they are not in physical condition to perform hard labor in Niger's extreme April conditions.

8. To more effectively diminish gaps in aid, choose a uniform proportion rather than number of eligible households in each village.

Selecting a standard number of households for each village that doesn't take into account village size contributes to gaps in coverage. A small village that can choose 100 beneficiary households may be able to provide assistance to every member of the village regardless of their level of vulnerability whereas the vulnerable population of a large villages may not all benefit. Therefore designating the number of benefitting households per village based on a proportion of all households that applies to all villages will more effectively target the most vulnerable to receive aid. For example, it would be more efficient if the next project provided assistance to 10% of households that are the most vulnerable rather than a fixed number that doesn't adjust for village size.

9. Use participatory, transparent methods for identifying the most vulnerable households in a community.

Project EARLI used the ABC participatory method to choose households within villages, with the following steps:

1. A general assembly is called to inform the population how the project participants will be selected
2. Start by using the list of village households that is used for tax collection.
3. Ask for five key informants who know everyone in the village.
4. Share with them the process of determining the criteria for classifying households in the Category A (Least Vulnerable); Category B (Semi-Vulnerable); and Category C (Most Vulnerable) (Other NGOs have started to use the category (D) for Extremely Vulnerable, but CRS only uses A-C.)
5. The group of key informants determines the criteria of the three categories (A, B and C). (Each village will have unique criteria.)
6. The key informants categorize each household into one of the three categories.

7. A general assembly is held to validate the results with community members who have the chance to contest the results and come to consensus regarding an alternative proposition.

10. Identify with communities the most strategic, long-term benefit of recuperated land.

If land recuperation is the nature of the work, it is important for communities to think through and with the extension service, designate the most strategic use of this land to ensure its maximum and equitable use. This should be a public transparent process to ensure accountability and the results should be evaluated (e.g. 2-3 years) after an intervention.

11. Provide initial payment in short order.

In the context of food insecurity, the target population is likely weak and under nourished, therefore payment should not be delayed more than a single week after work has begun. Even if the payment schedule changes to bi-monthly after the first payment, the designers should be sensitive to the fact that workers may be critically undernourished while performing hard labor.

12. In a public forum like a general assembly, recognize the dedication, the additional hours worked and the spirit of community service given by management committee members.

Because this is community led work and because the national policy does not permit some members to be paid more than others regardless of the



Bank officers pay CFW participants as CRS staff monitor the activity.
Souradja Mahaman

nature of the work, it is important to recognize the service of community management committees, especially given the greater demands of their work. This provides a valuable opportunity to celebrate their efforts and at the same time, motivate others to find other opportunities to express their own leadership potential in benefit to others.

13. Reinforce work quality messages

Management Committee members must be empowered with the authority to dismiss participants who produce poor quality work and make no effort to correct unsatisfactory performance. Tolerance for poor quality work creates conflict and perpetuates sentiments of dependency and entitlement.

14. Prioritize spending on tools according to project's food security and natural resource management objectives

Beyond a minimum amount of tools, it is up to the community to optimize their use and organize their schedules in a way that will facilitate access to the appropriate tools at needed times. Message reinforcement may be needed to explain that the objective of the project is not to equip the village with tools, but to give the community an opportunity to address their food security and natural resource management needs.

15. Recognize the long-term value of educational messages

Although Cash or Food for Work represent short term interventions, add longer-term value to the initiative with educational health and environmental messages during the payment events that have the potential to contribute to lasting solutions.

16. A witness system facilitates identity control when paying workers

While individual identity cards may not be a reality in the project intervention zone, at a minimum, management committee members and community leaders must be present at each payment event to witness that the people paid are the same people who have done the work; or alternatively, the local authority can attest they have been authorized by the worker to collect the payment.

17. Eliminate risk in the work environment

In the Niger land recuperation activity context, it is appropriate to provide a sufficient number of masks to protect against dust and first aid kits for injuries.

18. Authorize early spending.

The instrumental factor enabling CRS to implement quickly was the authorization CRS received from OFDA to begin using \$300,000 of the \$1 million grant to initiate project activities. This practice is much

appreciated by CRS and we'd like to promote it to all emergency interventions donors.

19. Assume a leadership role in the coordination effort among humanitarian actors in the zone. Coordination is not easy and requires the initiative of all actors for it to be effective. Leadership in this area provides multiple benefits:

- Your agency is aware of what others are doing so that you can eliminate any duplications and proactively fill any gaps;
- Your agency becomes influential in affecting change within your projects' operating environment;
- Your agency becomes visible to others including potential donors

20. Assess results using M&E tools.

Questions that surface in the RTE can be investigated using the project's M&E system. This will ensure the system is used for decision making by collecting data that are valuable and prioritized by project management.

- EARLI will be using post-distribution surveys to learn about the actual targeting methods applied in the remaining villages, whether participants are satisfied with the alternate targeting methods and from their perspective were the most vulnerable members chosen? As participants hadn't received payment at the time data was collected, more information should be collected regarding who in the household spends the cash? Who decides what to buy and what is purchased? Monthly reporting formats can also capture additional lessons learned and good practices identified throughout the course of the project.
- The M&E System will also be the vehicle for collecting data on market prices before and after the payments to determine the extent to which CFW is increasing food prices in the region.
- M&E can provide the tools for documenting what is learned using the complaint committee mechanism.
- Given the need to know completion rates in order to make payments every two weeks, data collected daily and synthesized weekly should be available at a minimum every two weeks rather than monthly.

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