

## Addressing food-for-work concerns in the West Nile region of Uganda

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### Abstract

**The World Food Programme (WFP)-Uganda, along with the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, has begun implementation of an agriculture and marketing support project based on the food-for-work concept in the West Nile, a moderately food-insecure region, with some areas still recovering from recent wars. Implementing food-for-work projects raises several key concerns and questions among development experts involving targeted beneficiaries, administrative control of planning and implementation of projects, quality of assets created, and longer term sustainability. These are some of the questions of concern raised when analyzing WFP's Food For Assets project in the West Nile. The answers to these questions influence the overall effectiveness of the project to improve food security through increased agricultural capacity, better access to markets, and increased income. Recommendations to ensure better success include interventions through monitoring and evaluation, developing linkages with other development agencies and projects, accessing the proper expertise and training, and maintaining ongoing sensitization and planning meetings.**

**Key words:** Food - insecurity region, interactions, target beneficiaries

### Introduction

Through food-for-work, a common modality of developmental food aid, needy and vulnerable community members are given food to offset immediate nutritional deficiencies, while providing the labor for increased production or maintenance of valuable public goods. Ideally, the labor stimulates productivity, growth, increased income, and medium to long term self sufficiency of the targeted community or community members so that food assistance is no longer needed. However, there is a debate over how effective food-for-work projects are at reaching these goals. There are questions of concern that often arise when discussing food-for-work projects. Are the targeted beneficiaries the most vulnerable in a given society? Are resources reaching those targeted? Are food-for-work projects improving livelihoods by accelerating recovery from shocks, as with post-conflict rehabilitation? Does food-for-work foster income growth and wealth accumulation among chronically destitute? Does food-for-work make successful attempts to encourage investment, innovation, and access to new opportunities in a community? (Barrett, et. al., 2001) Other questions might be: Do food-for-work projects draw away from important agricultural projects? Do the projects create a dependency among the targeted communities? Are women given an appropriate opportunity to participate? Are logistical costs too much for a community to bear?

The World Food Programme (WFP) is implementing a version of the food-for-work concept in several regions in Uganda. Of particular interest is the West Nile region, an

area recovering from recent periods of instability and war. Within the last two years, WFP-Uganda has started an agriculture related project called Food-For-Assets (FFA) in several districts throughout the West Nile. The targeted communities in this part of Uganda spend the majority of their time trying to meet basic food needs, and therefore have very little opportunity to improve infrastructure or attend capacity building trainings designed to increase agriculture productivity and improve levels of food security. Through the provision of food aide, an attempt is made to offset the time needed for meeting daily food requirements, freeing up time for communities to improve upon and build agricultural related physical assets such as fish ponds, farm to market roads, and woodlots. They may also participate in agricultural trainings such as improved apiary techniques, irrigation methods, and crop improvement which are geared towards increases in agriculture productivity and increases in income that can contribute to the recovery, food security, and longer term stability of the region. As this is a food-for-work type project, it is important to understand how the aforementioned concerns apply to this particular FFA project in Uganda.

The objective of this paper is to analyze the FFA activities being implemented by WFP in the West Nile region, taking into account the various criticisms often given towards the food-for-work concept. There is an attempt to discuss how the West Nile activities are dealing with the recognized concerns, as well as what further precautions should be taken in order to ensure increased success in creating assets useful in bringing food security to the region.

## Methodology

The primary data presented here comes from observations and results of implementing the food-for-assets (FFA) component of the agriculture and marketing support project in the West Nile region of Uganda through May 2004. Most of the primary data used was collected during a nine month period while FFA was initially being implemented in Arua, Yumbe, Moyo, and Adjumani districts. Implementation is being coordinated by the WFP-Uganda office in Kampala, as well as by the WFP-Arua and Pakelle sub-offices in the West Nile region of Uganda. Data reports by field monitors was important for this research. A literature review, primarily relying on the works of Barrett et al (2001), was used to compile data which presents and analyses the various concerns and criticisms of food-for-work type projects. Additional documents, such as the WFP-Uganda Food for Assets guidelines have also been helpful in this research.

### Scope

This paper presents some of the specific issues raised when analyzing the impacts of a food-for-work development project. The WFP-Uganda FFA project is analyzed here in terms of the identified issues. A discussion is held as to how WFP is dealing with the various concerns, and where further effort must be placed in order for FFA to be an effective development tool. Recommendations are made as to how various actors, such as WFP, community members, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and local officials might react in order to meet the goals of FFA. This paper does not include an exhaustive discussion of all possible concerns with food-for-work type projects. However, there is an attempt to address those concerns considered to be most relevant to the implementation of the FFA project in Uganda. Other concerns, especially some that deal with broader food assistance programs, have been left out of this discussion.

### Concerns impacting success of food-for-work projects

#### *Food-for-work beneficiaries*

Ideally, food-for-work projects target those people in regions with the highest levels of food insecurity. However, Barrett and Clay (2001) point out that several recent studies have found evidence that those who participate in food-for-work projects are not the poorest in a given region, even when the projects are designed to target the people with the greatest needs. One explanation for this is that food-for-work wages, in the form of food, are set too high. When this happens, the food-for-work projects substitute for work that would have been occurring naturally, in the project's absence. This decreases the additional benefits food-for-work is supposed to provide for those who cannot access current labor opportunities. In order to target those most in need, the food-for-work project should carry a high opportunity cost for those who are relatively better off, as they could be doing

something with their time that proves to be more lucrative. Therefore, the wage, in the form of food, offered by the food-for-work project must be low enough that only the most destitute are willing to participate.

Additionally, when wages are set too high, project managers commonly face excess labor supply and have to ration participation in some fashion, reducing the number of beneficiaries. This means a project would only be reaching a percentage of the original number of targeted beneficiaries.

It is also thought that people with higher status in a community are often the first to be chosen to participate in projects, such as food-for-work, ahead of the targeted beneficiaries. (Barrett, et al, 2001) This might be related to the fact that project managers are often able to use their discretion in choosing participants, and they may be more inclined to pick those prominent members of society.

Intended beneficiaries can also be missed if resources are only made accessible to a few administratively selected locations, limiting the geographic reach. (Barrett, et al, 2001) This might be a result of logistical circumstances; as it may be physically challenging to reach the most needy due to their location (e.g. in mountains that can only be reached by foot paths). Alternatively, there may be insufficient data to determine exactly which households in a community are the most food insecure.

It is the goal of WFP-Uganda to reach the most food insecure households in the West Nile. To this end, each district is allocated food by WFP based on the number of food insecure households reported to be in each sub-county. (WFP, 2002) WFP-Uganda bases the food allocation per participant on the principle that the community will own the asset created (whether it be training or a physical entity). (WFP, 2002) Therefore, the ration given to the participants is not considered a payment for their work, and is less than the monetary value of casual labor in the region. Those people willing to work for less than the normal working wage should be the target group. Ideally, the ration serves only as a useful food input for the household to meet the opportunity costs of not being able to pursue food acquisition strategies while completing the small scale project or training. The calculation is based on 80% of the monetary value of casual labor in the region. The other 20% is the contribution the community makes towards the development of an asset. This is not to say only the neediest people will benefit in FFA. It does, ideally, attract those who see the value of the asset created, so much so that they are willing to work below the average labor rate to see the asset created.

There may also be a concern that food-for-work projects only target those who are in the right physical condition to work. This might exclude those suffering from HIV-Aids, the elderly, children, or women. The fact that the FFA project gives workers rations for an entire household might help contribute to this potential problem. Those implementing the project have been instructed not to allow more than one member per household to participate in the project. There is an attempt to monitor this, but it is clearly not a simple task. Even if it is ensured that not more than one participant from each household is working on an asset creation project, it

may be difficult to take household size into account. Theoretically, one family could be split into two households, with one household being much smaller than the other. Although they are from different households, two people from the family might participate in a project. Two rations of food may then go back to the family. Such a situation is difficult to monitor, and there are not measures in place to do so. This example illustrates the complexity of resource allocation with FFA.

Although the food is designed to meet some immediate nutritional needs, it should be pointed out that WFP believes it is not the food, but the actual assets rehabilitated or created in the region, that will be the primary means for longer term food security. Therefore, it is also necessary to monitor to what extent entire communities benefit from a created or rehabilitated asset.

### **Participation of women**

In order to target women, particularly woman-headed households, communities are encouraged to include women participants when making proposals for carrying out a FFA project. Some projects may even be designed solely for women. It is required, before a proposal is accepted, that women make up at least 50% of the project management committee (PMC) of each project. (WFP, 2002) As seen in

Table 1 Project participants in two West Nile districts, April 2004

Arua District				
# Of Projects	Participants			Beneficiaries
	Male	Female	Total	
10	217	241	458	2,290
7	175	155	330	1,650
2	90	90	180	900
6	410	410	820	4,100
6	140	140	280	1,400
3	103	103	206	1,030
6	170	175	345	1,725
40	1,305	1,314	2,619	13,095
Yumbe District				
10	414	475	889	4,445
4	65	26	91	455
14	346	543	919	4,595
28	825	1,044	1,899	9,495
68	357	381	4,518	22,590

Table 1, there has already been success in bringing women into the various community projects.

### **Decentralization system**

As Burnett and Clay (2001) said, administrative decision making might mean that projects only go to specific areas. These might be the areas where the need, community motivation, etc., are not necessarily the strongest. For example, those in power might be able to direct FFA projects, so that assets are beneficial to their particular personal needs or desires. This might be the case if somebody with power is able to create an asset on his own property. This concern is lessened to a degree in Uganda, with the presence of a decentralized governing system.

Decentralization gives district governments political and administrative control over services. It frees local management from the constraints of central government, and improves the ability of local councils to plan, finance and manage projects and services they have identified as important. (Asiimwe, 2002) With this system, donors and NGOs can work directly with local level officials, not having to clear everything through the central government.

Through the decentralized system, local governments (at the sub-county level) call upon community groups at the parish and village level to identify and propose projects that are then incorporated into the sub-county three year development plan. WFP-Uganda takes advantage of the decentralized system by supporting those projects that have already become part of these plans. This helps to eliminate some of the problems that might arise from people in seats of power delegating which projects are to be chosen. This also removes the tendency for the donors to decide which projects are the best suited for the community to undertake, it is a bottom up approach.

### **Contractual agreements**

In many cases, land might be required in the creation of an asset. It is likely that this land will have to come from somebody within the community, or be allocated to a community group by the local or district government, opening up the possibility for disputes over ownership and management of a particular asset. This is a particular problem if it involves something of high value, such as a food storage facility or a wood lot. In these cases, it is of great importance for the local government, land owners, community, and project management committee to devise the appropriate contractual agreements that designate ownership and management responsibilities. Such an agreement is not a guarantee that land ownership will not remain an issue, since long standing traditional ownership, or government decisions at a higher level, could be used to nullify any written contract. It is likely though, that contractual agreements will assist in future problems that arise.

### **Quality and sustainability of assets created**

Barret *et al.* (2001) point out that the quality of goods created through food-for-work projects should not be taken for granted as being valuable to the communities targeted. In

**Table 2. Project proposals (Archambault, 2004)**

Project Type: Name:	Community Group
Expected start/finish dates:	# of participants:
Male: Female:	
Expected Outputs/Timeline (what things will be created physically?... ponds, road, etc):	
Expected Outcomes (How will the community benefit from the created asset?) :	
Inputs/assistance required:	
Expected Sub-County Contributions:	
Expected Community Contributions:	
What is the management strategy?	
Management committee established? women_____	# of men:_____ # of women_____

many cases projects may turn out to be less helpful to a community than intended. The rehabilitation or creation of a community asset takes cooperation within the community, adequate managerial resources, and significant non-labor inputs to ensure that the asset gives added value to a community. In the case of West Nile projects, non-food items (NFIs) may be things such as implementing tools, cement, iron sheets for roofing, culverts for roads, and technical expertise. In many cases the need for food-for-work projects is a result of increased scarcity of non-food resources from donors. (Barrett, *et al*, 2001) Therefore, purchasing necessary inputs to make assets valuable has proven to be difficult. A direct consequence of these factors is improper maintenance of poor quality and inappropriate assets.

Project quality is a major concern for the FFA projects being implemented in the West Nile. There are some measures in place to encourage starting only those projects that have a good chance of being completed, and whose proposed value to the community is outlined in the project proposal. Project proposals must also mention plans for managing the project after its completion, to ensure some level of sustainability. This is one job of each project's management committee. See Table 2 for what is required in the project proposal outline. Sub-county officials are guided by WFP not to approve any projects unless the issues outlined in the proposal have been discussed and put on paper. Such planning and discussion can be a tool for reaching a higher FFA success rate.

### Project proposals and impact on quality

There are several key points that decrease the quality of projects at the proposal step. One common problem is proposals that plan for an unrealistic number of participants. In some cases the number has been too high. This might be an attempt to increase the number of people receiving food, or a result of poor technical guidance in creating project proposals. One example was a project designed to dig a 10 meter by 10 meter fish pond. The community group wanted 200+ people to work on the project, an unrealistic number for that type of project. Some projects had small number of participants, even as few as five. In these cases, the projects appeared to be proposed by families, as opposed to community groups.

It has been noted that in many of the projects approved so far, there is a vague sense of long term project management and maintenance (Okello, 2004 a) This could have serious implications on sustainability of projects. This has particularly been an issue with the opening of market access roads. Once roads are created, there is a necessity to ensure roads are properly maintained by the community. Proposals for maintaining roads, as opposed to creating roads, are generally discouraged. If road maintenance is supported with food aide it might be difficult for a community to find the incentive to continue maintaining the road after the food is

exhausted. the benefits it provides for improved access to markets, should be the incentive for keeping up a road. Asset maintenance may only prove to be of importance to a community if they find their asset is something of value after completion. This draws attention to the importance of beginning only those projects that make sense and have a clear added value to the community. Additionally, it is recommended that sub-counties limit the number of projects they take on, as it might be difficult for the community facilitator and sub-county committee to keep up with too many projects occurring simultaneously. It is suggested that sub-counties approve a few projects at a time, and only move on to additional projects upon completion of the first projects.

### ***Community facilitator and project quality***

In order to help with the completion of projects and creation of proposals, each sub-county has identified a community facilitator (CF), who can assist communities in the implementation of projects. It was agreed that WFP would pay a stipend as an incentive for CF's to participate in the projects. (Odeke, 2003) This amount has been set at 20,000 USH (~\$10 US) per month. Additionally, WFP agreed to provide a bicycle to each of the sub-counties to distribute to their (CF), for greater ease of transport to project sites. The CF generally has very limited basic education, but is chosen because he or she understands how projects should be implemented, and can work under the supervision of more technically educated and experienced sub-county officials. CFs have also been given some additional training by WFP staff, to ensure they understand project expectations.

In an ideal world, these projects would be completed with very highly trained experts who could ensure that all projects are properly planned, implemented, and managed. However, reality limits such possibilities. There are typically not enough resources to hire experts to work in every sub-county. It is important for WFP to ensure that it considers the human capital available, and creates realistic goals for the project, when planning projects.

### ***Locating non-food items—linkages to other projects and organizations***

As mentioned, locating the necessary non-food items (NFIs) for a project is vital for project success. It is typically the recommendation of WFP-Uganda that no projects are approved unless all required NFIs are secured, or there is certainty that these items will be made available. This includes locating the necessary technical expertise for proposed training programs. Some projects have begun in the West Nile before such NFIs are secured. A practical example was reported recently from Yumbe district, where a group planned to build a community store, but was not able to find a source of iron sheets for the roof, and therefore the project had to be put on hold. In this case, it was actually thought the sheets would come from WFP. (Okello, 2004 b) WFP cannot provide all the necessary complimentary resources. This is a point that needs to be repeated often to communities. It is key that WFP and sub-counties not spend

time and resources on projects unless all needed NFIs have been gathered. An incomplete asset does not help FFA to meet a high level of success in the West Nile.

WFP encourages communities undertaking FFA projects to link with other organizations, NGOs, community based organizations (CBOs), and government agencies that are able to provide required NFIs. Alternatively, WFP encourages FFA projects to link up with already established projects that are finding it difficult to cover the costs for the community labor needed to carry out the projects, as the food can free up time for community members to complete a project. (Odeke, 2003)

To date there have been very few linkages developed on an implementation level. This may be because many of the communities have started out with projects that require fewer resources, and some are able to take advantage of a few additional NFIs (primarily hand tools) provided to sub-counties by WFP. Also, some of the delays might be because NGOs and other implementing partners have not been able to devise a plan that best links existing resources to FFA projects. However, these organizations have voiced an interest in participation. (Odeke, 2003) It is very important that WFP continue to encourage these implementing partners to work with sub-county officials and local communities to see how these linkages can be practically arranged on the ground.

One example of an important linkage that has been created involves a World Vision water project. It is a 41km gravity water flow system being constructed to serve a population of about 1000 people in Arua District. World Vision has supplied technical expertise and plastic pipe fittings, as well as handled the construction of reservoirs and installation of pumps. The local community in turn provides labor, which supported by WFP food items. (Okello, 2004a)

In order to foster these synergies, discussions have been held with leaders of various partnership organizations and program carrying out projects in the West Nile. Several key programs that have the potential to create important linkages with FFA projects are mentioned here.

### ***1) North West Small Holder Development Project (NWSHDP)***

This government supported project has five key components designed to help small-scale farmers transform into commercial farming—prod—production enhancement, market opportunities, rural infrastructure enhancement, micro-credit schemes, and co-ordination and management. The NWSHDP project provides much of the technical expertise needed, such as training in post-harvest handling, using ox –traction, and improving marketing skills. They are also able to give some physical support such as culverts for road openings and guidance for establishing agro-forestry and seed multiplication projects. One difficulty with NWSHDP is the length of time it takes to disburse funds in Kampala that are

earmarked for the West Nile region. NWSHDP covers all the districts where the AMS is located. (Odeke, 2003)

## 2) *Here is Life*

Here is Life is a religious oriented NGO based in Yumbe District. The organization has had a long lasting presence in Yumbe, and generally is well received by the community. The organization is involved with activities such as agricultural trainings, production of honey, and forestation projects. There have been efforts to encourage Here is Life to submit proposals of its own, as a community group within a sub-county. (Odeke, 2003)

## 3) *Community Empowerment for Rural Development (CEFORD)*

This is an NGO active in the Moyo, Arua, and Adjumani Districts, and is primarily involved in capacity building. They are hired by other organizations or district programmes to undertake capacity building programmes or trainings. In Moyo, CEFORD has linked with CBOs involved in agro-forestry, vegetable growing, ox-traction, bee keeping, zero grazing, and goat herd improvement. (Odeke, 2003)

### *Logistical issues concerning food distribution*

Another concern that must be addressed is the timing of the distribution of food to the beneficiaries. As Barrett et al (2001) point out, timing of food distribution is an important consideration when looking at the effectiveness of a food-for-work project. Ideally, the FFA project being implemented in the West Nile is designed to give food to compensate individuals for the time spent working on a community development project—time that would have otherwise been spent assuring daily food needs for the household are met. Therefore, it is important that these beneficiaries are able to receive their food in a timely manner. This food should also be easily accessible to the beneficiaries. Attempts should be made to ease the burden of picking up food from the designated storage location.

There is an attempt by WFP to distribute food for all ongoing FFA projects on a monthly basis, to each sub-county. It is then the responsibility of each sub-county to store food, and distribute to the beneficiaries via the community facilitators and each project's PMC. . This could be difficult for projects that are located far from the sub-county headquarters. Most food must be transported to these sites by bicycle. There have been several requests to have WFP send food directly to project sites, but this is not a logistical possibility.

To help ensure that food is distributed in a timely manner, it is of paramount importance that project management committees and sub-county officials keep proper records, so that the food allocations (based on the # of projects and participants for a project) are clearly understood. Timely requests for food allotments from WFP will make the process more efficient. There is a need for research into how sub-

counties can assist in having food distributed directly to project sites. However, this might add costs to the sub-county, which is already responsible for providing adequate and secure storage of the food items.

## **Final discussions and recommendations**

As discussed in this paper, to see success in this project, it is important for WFP, and other involved actors to focus on the areas of concern that often accompanies food-for-work themed development projects. It is important that the targeted beneficiaries are the actual beneficiaries during the implementation stage of the project. Communities should take ownership of the projects, from choosing what assets needed to be created and rehabilitated, to the planning, implementation, and management of the assets. All assets created should add value to the communities, and this can only be done if there is proper quality control at all stages of planning, implementing, and monitoring of projects.

The analysis and discussion throughout this paper has pointed to the measures being taken by WFP and other actors to implement a successful project. There are also points of concern that WFP and actors must keep in mind. Provided here are suggestions that consider the various actors involved with the FFA project in the West Nile. These are not an exhaustive list of recommendations, but they may be a starting point for increasing the odds that WFP's FFA project will be successful.

### *Monitoring and Evaluation*

This is where WFP's monitoring and evaluation will be most important. There are monitoring and evaluation tools developed, but they have yet to be implemented. It will be important for these tools to be used to monitor the demographics of the FFA participants, particularly the make up of households benefiting from the food and assets created. An ongoing understanding of who is and who is not being reached would provide the basis for making informed changes concerning who is being targeted. An organization must be diligent in monitoring whether or not the slated beneficiaries correspond with the actual beneficiaries.

### *Developing linkages*

NGOs and other partner organizations should make the effort to link their various projects with the FFA projects in the region. The food resources are available to help improve community assets in the region. Improving capacity and infrastructure is the mandate of many different organizations, so it is only natural that these linkages should occur. It may be necessary for these different organizations to create memorandums of understanding with community groups, local government offices, and perhaps even the WFP, to make these partnerships official. These linkages might also help each organization further understand the work each organization is doing, so that efforts are combined, rather than duplicated.

***Training and expertise***

It is important for WFP to find opportunities to further train community facilitators, and maintain a project-monitoring system through WFP field staff. It is necessary for additional expertise to be provided from some of the government offices, including the engineering, agriculture, and forestry departments at the district level. These resources are supposed to be accessible to communities to implement the FFA projects. However, it might be necessary to encourage the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, the government agency responsible for FFA, to encourage district level officials to make it a priority to add technical input into the FFA projects.

***Sensitization and planning meetings***

WFP has conducted many sensitization meetings on the district, sub-county, and community levels in order to help all parties understand what the goals of the project are, and how it should be implemented. (Odeke, 2003) This type of sensitization should not cease as FFA moves further along in the West Nile, rather it must be ongoing, and any problems that arise, such as questions of ownership of assets, should be discussed during these meetings.

Sensitization and planning meetings should also be ongoing between government officials and local community groups, even in the absence of WFP. These meetings should discuss issues related to expectations of project proposals, project management strategies, and contractual agreements. Memorandums of understanding should be signed, so all parties are in agreement on issues of responsibility and ownership. Project management committees (PMCs) of the different projects should also meet regularly. It should be stressed that PMCs are a useful tool, and their existence should not only be something on paper. Part of sensitization should be explaining to communities the vital role the PMCs have in the success of asset creation or rehabilitation.

***Final thoughts***

Indeed food-for-work, when implemented appropriately, has the potential as an effective tool in Uganda, and other parts of Africa. The concept of 'food-for-work' is not a foreign one in the traditional community setting in Uganda and other parts of Africa. Ugandans are familiar with the term 'lejaleja,' a Swahili word meaning to work for a little money or food to keep one going for the day. It is a coping mechanism in which people work in somebody's home or garden in exchange for food or money. Payment is usually measured in terms of the work accomplished. Additionally, communal work is common in Africa, where food or alcohol is prepared as a token of appreciation for community members who help to repair a road, build a hut, or work in a garden. In these

cases, the focus is on the accomplished task, not the food received afterwards.

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