Real Time Evaluation Summary of CRS-Benin’s Project HHELP and SAVE2

August 2011

✓ What:
  o A Real Time Evaluation was conducted for CRS-Benin and partner Caritas who are currently intervening via SAVE2 “Saving Assets with Vouchers during Emergencies” and Project HHELP: “Helping Households in Emergencies with Local Purchase”
  o The vouchers are redeemable for food at 6 weekly markets.

✓ Why:
  o To identify ways to improve the final 10 weeks of voucher/aid distribution, identify good practices and lessons learned, promote a learning approach within CRS and Caritas, and respond to questions posed in a recent donor visit.

✓ Where:
  o In the department of Mono, Benin

✓ When:
  o The RTE took place in August during the 10th week of a 20 week food distribution program

✓ How:
  o The RTE methodology used qualitative data from beneficiaries, non-beneficiaries, vendors, non-vendors, project and partner staff, and local and elected authorities to assess the intervention according to 6 criteria: Appropriateness/ Relevance, Effectiveness, Coverage, Connectedness and Sustainability and Impact

FINDINGS

STRENGTHS

• Caritas’ well-organized weekly market implementation model

• Significant increase in food security for 10,025 beneficiary and 500 vendor households

• Participants appreciate the quality and choice of products available

• Customers, competition, and profits have increased for small vendors (mostly women). They have been able to pay off debt, reinvest in inventories, don’t have to rely on husbands for household expenses

• Educational messages related to nutrition and hygiene and water storage (related to SAVE2) have taken hold and started to change health behaviors

• Reduced conflict in households

• Strengthened relationship between CRS-Benin and Caritas: Communication problems that CRS and Caritas faced at the beginning of the project are now largely resolved
CHALLENGES

- Slower-than necessary start-up process
- Poor coordination at the national level which impacted an effective assessment process
- Unsanitary display of food in the market
- Staying ahead of certain vendors who try to take advantage of the system on a daily basis (the lottery that determines their participation in the markets, quality control measures, selling pre-measured and insufficient quantities to beneficiaries)
- Ensuring vendors who come late can receive payment and reduce even more vendors’ wait times
- Improve precision of M&E data
- High printing costs
- Cyclical rains that have kept fields of Mono Department residents underwater and prevent a normal growing season.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The most time sensitive recommendations include:
- Reinforce good hygiene and nutrition messages using village chiefs who are already linked to the project
- Reinforce messages to both vendors and beneficiaries regarding the end of the project so that they prepare financially
- Improve the sanitary display of food in the markets
- Further reduce wait times for vendors in the MFIs and ensure late payment to vendors who arrive after their scheduled pay-out date.
- Systematize the monitoring and evaluation

Recommendations that are important before project close out and in preparation for the next phase are to:
- Put in place mechanisms to support finance and administration staff’s capacity to respond quickly during emergencies
- Document and upload to CRS Global all the finance, administration and monitoring and evaluation tools/templates to assist other country programs in the future
- Document challenges faced to maintain an equitable yet still market-based system with small retailers, some of whom attempt to take advantage of the system.
- Reinforce the community level network by developing leadership among youth
- In the long term, budget for additional costs of weekly markets and printing costs that permit beneficiaries to buy quantities that best suit their household needs.
- Where cost savings can be made if necessary is limiting the denominations (but not categories) of vouchers provided as beneficiaries tend to buy all of a given item (rice, corn, beans or oil) at a single vendor if not the rest of their weekly purchase as well.
- Document the cyclical flooding experienced by residents of the Mono River basin in order to advocate for longer-term solutions.