

Monitoring food distributions: a Zambia Red Cross Society experience

The countries of southern Africa were severely affected by drought in 2002 and 2003. In addition, the high prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the region, including Zambia, meant the drought had a greater than normal impact.

The Zambia Red Cross Society (ZRCS) undertook extensive food distributions in response to the drought. This is a traditional National Society activity, but monitoring impact at the household level has been undertaken less frequently. The International Federation recruited a food security delegate to help National Societies in the region to increase their capacity to monitor the impact of food distributions. With the delegate's help, the ZRCS was able to develop such a system, which meant it could better demonstrate the impact of its work and would be able to refine distributions to improve the quality of programming.

The intervention

The food distribution monitoring system was developed to:

- ensure that those registered for food distributions receive the correct amount of food;
- record the impact of the food distributions at household level;
- monitor the accuracy of targeting based on the agreed criteria; and
- enable the improvement of the food distribution system.

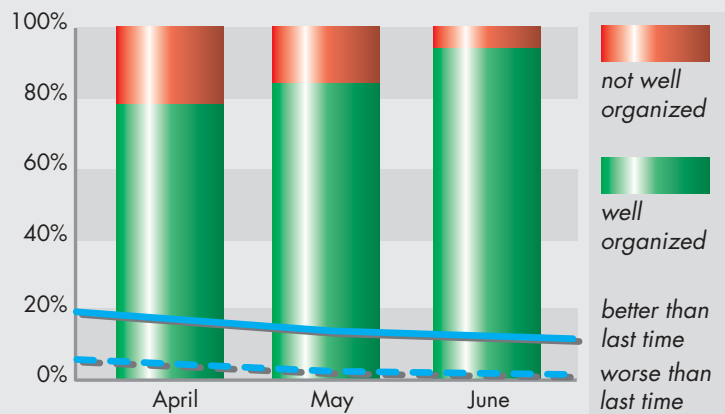
Two monitoring forms were developed. One was used for monitoring at the distribution point, with 10 per cent of beneficiaries being selected at random by monitors to fill in the questionnaire. The other was used for control at the household level, with monitors interviewing ten households chosen at random every month. Information collected covered:

- who received the ration;
- the benefits of the ration;
- organization of the distribution; and
- targeting.

Impact

In general, the monitoring system enabled a better understanding of the impact of food distributions. More specifically, the results indicated that 57 per cent of men and 43 per cent of women were interviewed by the monitors at the distribution point. As the sample was selected at random, this percentage provides an indication of the proportion of women who are responsible for collecting food rations. This sort of information helps to devise food distributions that better fit the needs of the majority of the

Beneficiary satisfaction with ZRCS food distributions



recipients – in this case, with women's roles and responsibilities. The organization of distributions is important in order to reduce the time it takes for people to receive their ration entitlement and prevent disorder. To assess this, beneficiaries were asked at the distribution points about the way food distributions were organized. The graph above demonstrates that beneficiaries felt that the distributions were well organized.

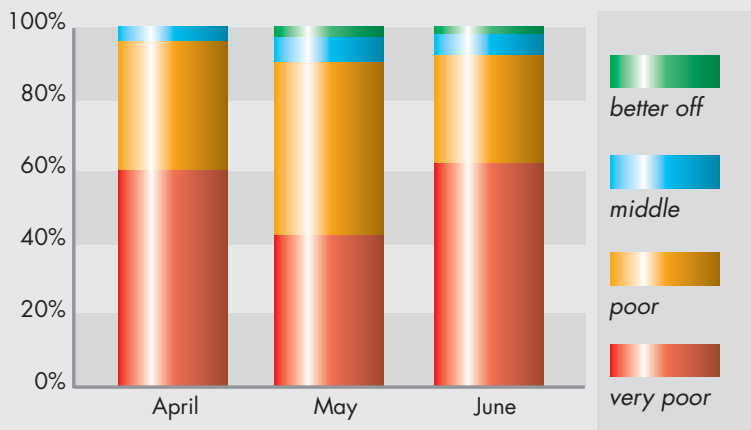
The reasons some beneficiaries gave as to why they were not satisfied with the way food distributions were organized included:

- family size was not well registered;
- distribution took too long;
- crowd control was bad;
- queues were not respected; and
- trucks with food were not on time.

With such a high satisfaction rate, perhaps the most crucial criticism of the distributions was that family size was not well registered. Cross-checking against data collected at the household level revealed that family size was not incorrectly registered, leading to the conclusion that beneficiaries were feeding more people than their actual family.

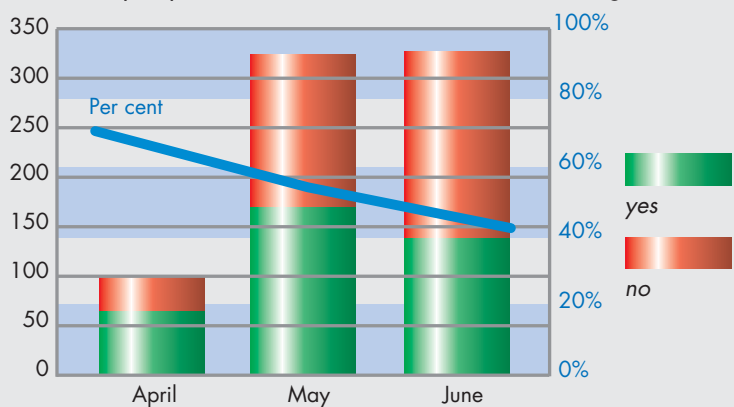
Only 2 per cent of those interviewed at household level reported that they received assistance from other organizations. This indicates that the ZRCS was not duplicating its assistance with other organizations. The following graph provides an analysis of the targeting. Households were targeted on the basis of socio-economic criteria. That the targeting of beneficiaries by the Zambia Red Cross Society is efficient is demonstrated by the fact that it was consistently able to target poor and very poor households in the communities in which it works.

Vulnerability of beneficiaries monitored at household level



The majority of households reported using the food in a number of ways: 99 per cent of households reported that they consumed the food distributed, while 64 per cent of those interviewed said that the food distributions enabled them to save money, which could be used for other food and household costs. The food distributed was also given to others as a gift, sold or fed to livestock. Thus, the food was used to support both the households' nutrition and their food security. It was also possible to determine whether the ration was shared with more people than those registered for food distribution.

Do more people eat from this ration than those registered?



The graph above indicates that beneficiaries were sharing their food with more people than those registered as being in the family unit. On average, half of the respondents stated that the food was shared with people other than those registered. However, the proportion of those reporting sharing of food with additional people fell in June, most likely as a result of the harvest.

When undertaking food distributions it is important to realize that households may have other sources of food

that they access during times of hardship. The ZRCS food distribution was not a full ration designed to fulfil the total requirements of households. Some households were able to supplement their rations by purchasing food, eating the produce from their gardens and/or consuming wild foods. However, the monitoring system identified an average of 18 per cent of respondents who claimed they could not supplement the ration with other sources of food. This finding is important as it may suggest that these households need further support or, at the very least, that their situation needed to be reviewed.

Lessons learned

- The development of the monitoring system enabled the Zambia Red Cross Society to determine the impact of its food distributions.
- The monitoring system enabled the ZRCS to determine the quality of the service it was providing to its beneficiaries and make alterations to the distribution as necessary.
- Monitoring enabled better reporting to donors on the impact of their donations on the situation.
- The forms were relatively simple to use: they were not too long (one side of the paper used in length) and volunteer data collectors were trained. Mistakes, therefore, were kept to a minimum. Further training is, however, recommended for future monitoring in order to improve the quality of data collected by volunteers.
- The forms used could be modified to check the amount of food received per beneficiary. This would help to monitor the accuracy of "scooping" of food portions.
- It is vital that ZRCS headquarters oversee implementation of the monitoring system in the field and analyse results on a monthly basis. This will ensure that forms are being completed in a uniform and correct fashion.
- Setting up a monitoring system and analysing data collected requires time and personnel. The data analysis function was neglected until July when the backlog was quickly addressed.

Conclusion

Monitoring of programmes is crucial to improve programme quality and accountability. Monitoring highlights the impact that programmes are having and can also help project managers to adjust the programmes in order to improve quality. It is important to consider monitoring as part of normal programme activities rather than as a separate activity. Monitoring requires financial and personnel resources.

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