



## A CASE STUDY OF WINTER SAFETY NETS IN BALAKOT DISTRICT DURING THE PAKISTAN EARTHQUAKE OF 2005

### CONTEXT (SHOCK AND PRE-EXISTING SITUATION - POVERTY, MALNUTRITION ETC.)

Prior to the Pakistan earthquake of 2005 households in Balakot district were highly dependant on the market for their food needs, with only 30% of the requirements being met from own production. The market was the main source of food for most households, accounting for 70% of the requirements<sup>1</sup>. During the winter months, snowfall cuts access to the high altitude villages, and to mitigate against the winter period, a household's ability to stock food is considered an important condition for ensuring food security.

### SITUATION ANALYSIS (RESULTS OF NEEDS ASSESSMENT + MARKETS + POLICY)

An Oxfam GB food security and livelihood assessment<sup>2</sup> of the earthquake-affected populations conducted in September 2006 showed that households usually plan their food stocks in October and November when essential food and non-food items are purchased in bulk to cover the months of isolation due to snowfall (January and February). The assessment revealed that expenditures were likely to be higher during the winter of 200/07 due to the effects of the earthquake, and it was predicted that in rural Balakot area households might be forced to compromise their food security over the winter months in order to meet their shelter winterisation needs. To mitigate against this, one of the recommendations was to provide winterisation vouchers that were to be exchanged with traders for required essential food and non-food items.

### RESPONSE ANALYSIS (GOVT., UN, AGENCY POLICIES AND STRATEGY, RESOURCES AND CAPACITY, PRIORITIES, FUNDS AND TIMING)

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<sup>1</sup> **Save the Children (2005)**. *The impact of the earthquake on livelihoods in Muzaffarabad and Bagh districts. Azad jammu & Kashmir Pakistan.*

<sup>2</sup> **Rick BAUER, Lili MOHIDDIN (2006)**. *Preparing for winter: shelter, Food Security and Livelihood activities in rural areas of earthquake affected Pakistan.* Oxfam GB internal report. Oxford.

Oxfam emergency food security and livelihood intervention was launched in October 2005 in response to the earthquake, which devastated the North West Frontier Province (NWFP), Northern Areas and Azad Jammu Kashmir (AJK) in Pakistan on the 8<sup>th</sup> of October 2005. The programme was initially set up in Balakot tehsil (Mansehra district, Hazara division, NWFP) and extended in May 2006 to Bagh district. Oxfam made a decision not get involved directly in food distributions because the Pakistan team had already implemented a cash grant intervention in Shangla. During the relief phase (from November 2005 to April 2006), the response aimed at enabling earthquake-affected population to access winter basic food and non-food needs through provision of cash/vouchers and cash for work activities.

Analysis of the response showed that 1,500 vulnerable households benefited and around 90% of the cash vouchers were used for purchasing food. There were no price increases observed as a result of the voucher system. This was attributed to the Memorandum of Understanding, signed between Oxfam GB and the traders stating that they will maintain prices at the market level. However, it was observed that the amount of 1500PKR was not sufficient to cover the basic needs of a household because the household size was generally bigger than the 4 members used for calculation. The payment through cheque caused concerns among traders because it caused delays, especially for the traders who did not have bank account, or the ones who were in a different bank than Oxfam GB, which led to a delay of 10 days to clear the cheque.

#### RATIONALE FOR CHOOSING RESPONSE

The overall rationale of the winter safety net response like all other cash programmes was *to increase the purchasing power of the 4,000 earthquake victims of Balakot, and to protect their livelihoods. This was based on the needs assessment which projected that expenditures on food and non-food items were likely to be higher during the winter of 2006/07 due to the effects of the earthquake. In addition, it was predicted that households might be forced to compromise on their food security over the period in order to meet their shelter winterisation needs. While the more vulnerable households were likely to resort to harmful coping strategies such as sale of remaining assets and marrying off their daughters. To prevent the negative coping strategies Oxfam decided that provision of winterisation vouchers to be exchanged for the required essential food and non-food items would help mitigate against the vice. The choice of exchangeable vouchers was also an explicit request from the local Balakot traders whose businesses had been destroyed and they trusted that the vouchers could guarantee them a minimum market and boost their capacity to bring in supply.*

#### PROGRAMME SUMMARY

The objective of the Winter Safety Net Programme was to address the remaining winter needs of 4000 affected households residing in 3 different Union Councils of Balakot tehsil. The Programme was implemented in the 7 villages of Satbani UC and 6 villages of Balakot UC. The villages were chosen because of their highland location and accessibility problem during winter months, as well as their distance from main markets, which was considered to increase the food insecurity conditions for the most vulnerable households during the winter period. Beneficiary households selection criteria was based on; 1) vulnerable households without any support and those

included widows, elders, orphans and the handicapped among others, 2) households with low level of income and households with more than 2 dependants. The selection criteria was defined and presented to village committees who were charged with the responsibility of registering the beneficiaries on the basis of the criteria.

The registered beneficiaries were then crosschecked by Oxfam team before the final selection was agreed. Every beneficiary selected received 3 vouchers of £50 each, giving a total of £150 per beneficiary. The amount was calculated to cover basic food needs for 3-4 members per household for one month. Eleven traders in Balakot main market were selected for receiving the vouchers. The selected traders were not beneficiaries of the business cash grants component, and they were selected from among the most vulnerable traders in the markets, but still able to run their business and to provide a good range of commodities. Different types of trades were selected: six general stores, one crockery shop, two clothes shops and two gas shops. Beneficiaries were allowed one week to use the vouchers and the vouchers were collected from the traders every 10 days. Traders were paid by cheque by Oxfam. A total of 1,500 vulnerable households were supported with their food needs for the current winter period, but the proportion of female-headed households is not available.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE WINTER CASH SAFETY NETS PROGRAMME

The objective of the intervention was to address remaining winter needs of 4000 affected households residing in 3 different Union Councils of Balakot tehsil. Oxfam provided cash hand outs and tickets/vouchers, which were exchangeable in selected shops in Balakot.

## PRACTICAL ISSUES

Reduction in number of staff following closure of earthquake programmes and base camps led to inefficiency in data collection. This was compounded by restrictions in getting visas to Islamabad, which made field visits for data collection difficult.

## MONITORING SYSTEM

The winter safety net programme was not well designed as it lacked key M&E processes. There was no baseline survey and data collection was only done at the distribution sites and during post distribution monitoring at the household level. There were no formal regular information on markets and prices, which was critical for this kind of intervention and should have been conducted on a more formal, regular basis to enable price comparisons before/after the intervention. There was no formal evaluation at the end of the programme, thus making it difficult to charge the impact.

## PERCEIVED IMPACTS AND BENEFITS OF CTP (INCLUDING NEGATIVE BENEFITS)

- The market was biased towards voucher traders, and traders who were left out of the voucher system were disadvantaged
- Calculation of household basic food needs, based on a family size of 4 was way below the estimated average family size in Pakistan of 8 members, which led to insufficient funds for covering basic food needs and the activity failed in its objective.
- 90% of the cash vouchers were used for purchasing food, but this might be because the amount of 1500PKR given to beneficiaries was not sufficient for covering the basic needs of a household
- No increase of prices were noted, but this might be because it was specified in the Memorandum of Understanding between Oxfam GB and the traders, that they were not to increase their prices above market rates.
- Payments to traders through cheques sometimes took 10 days to access the money from the bank after the deposit, which angered the traders.

## LESSONS LEARNED

- The voucher system allowed people to buy commodities according to their main needs as there was virtually no restriction.
- The selection criteria of beneficiary families were not clear, particularly by pegging it on at least 2 dependants per family, which led to all households in a village being included in the programme.
- Needs of beneficiaries should be taken into account in terms of the cost of basic food for a typical family for the duration of the winter period and not just for one month as was the case in this intervention.
- The food gap between food already stored by the households and the additional food needs for the winter should have been analysed to determine the gap, but it was not done.
- Communities should be more involved in the definition of selection criteria, instead of them being simply recipients of decisions made by the organisations.
- Explanations on the voucher system should be clear and transparent and not biased, which ended up encouraging beneficiaries to go to specific traders rather than all the recommended traders
- Future interventions need to put into place much stricter targeting criteria, taking into consideration the cash transfers from the government and other agencies.
- A final evaluation should have been conducted to document the level of achievement and whether the implementation process was correct