No. 6.2   Food Aid: Food for Work

What is food for work?

Food for work projects involve *paying workers with food rations in exchange for building vital infrastructure or doing other work with a community interest*. Projects are generally launched in partnership with the WFP, who provides the food rations.

Food for work projects usually *aim to increase the food security of households or communities*. They are normally implemented for a short period of time at the beginning of hunger gap, when people can devote time and energy to development opportunities.

However, the dual objective of food for work interventions, i.e., to provide food and deliver public works, often undermines the effectiveness of such projects.

For instance, so-called development projects performed as food for work may require resources additional to food (e.g., equipment, skilled labour, and building materials).

Such resources may not be available, often due to a lack of funding, bringing into question the quality and durability of the work.

Table 1 outlines some of the advantages and disadvantages or challenges associated with food for work.
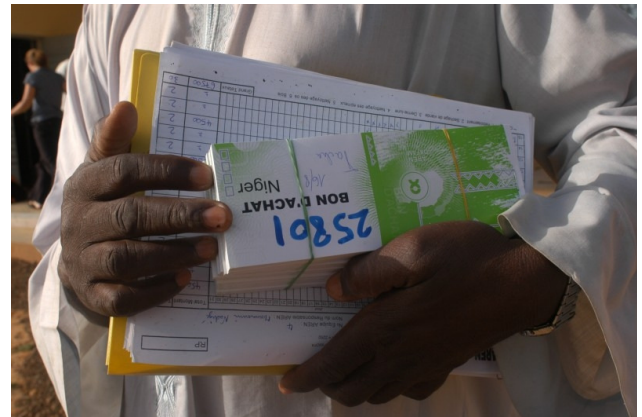

Fig. 1: Oxfam vouchers to be exchanged for food in return for community work in Dakoro, Niger
(Credit: Jenny Matthews/OXFAM)

When is it appropriate to implement food for work programmes?

Food for work projects may be implemented at the **alert phase** of a food crisis, to mitigate the food gap, or at the **acute phase** when people have the physical capacity to work.

They can also serve as **mitigation tools**, especially when orientated to the maintenance of infrastructure (e.g., road maintenance) or to improved management or protection of natural resources (e.g., water catchments or reforestation).

Criteria that must be present for food for work projects to be viable include:

- Appropriate timing (i.e., food for work intervention does not interfere with normal livelihoods activities);
- The food insecurity situation is not too extreme (i.e., people have the physical capacity to work)
- Communities can be organised around a common project;
- The food ration proposed fits to actual food needs (nutritionally and culturally) of the targeted population; and,
- The food distributed will not disrupt local markets.

Box 1: Food for work – a rough checklist of requirements

✓ Identification of food needs and habits, and market assessment
✓ Identification and organisation of community work
✓ Community targeting
✓ Calculation of working units, daily wages (as food ration), total labour days and thus total food ration requirement
✓ Identification of appropriate activities for men, women, elderly and disabled people (generally 20 percent of free food allocated to those who cannot work)
✓ Development of working monitoring and attendance system
✓ Liaison with logistics (e.g., food distribution plan, truck renting etc.)
✓ Technical inputs from relevant governmental services (e.g., when work involves public works, requires agricultural extension etc.)
✓ Market monitoring (to assess affect of food rations on local price fluctuations)
✓ If there is a partnership with WFP:
  - Ensure food rations fit peoples' actual needs and habits
  - Sign agreement with WFP outlining budget and responsibilities for both parties. *Note: WFP generally provides only food rations and a set fund support (per mT distributed) for implementation, which rarely covers staff, tool and other functioning costs.*

Table 1: Advantages and disadvantages or challenges of implementing food for work programmes

Advantages	Disadvantages/challenges
• Availability of foodstuffs ensured in deficit areas • Can contribute to lowering market prices, facilitating food access for greatest number possible • Simple to manage from an administrative viewpoint • Low costs project if food is provided by WFP (although real costs, e.g., food transport from production to distribution area, can be high) • Easy to target—self-targeting due to local wage • Creates community structures	• Dependence on WFP or legislation of food purchase • High logistic costs (food transport and storage) • Food does not always arrive in time • Food items distributed are not always appropriate for beneficiaries' taste and habits • Does not always cover ancillary costs (e.g., milling of cereals, fuel, etc.) associated with food preparation and consumption • Can disrupt local markets when distributions are done during harvest period (competition with sale of local produce) • Time dedicated to food for work may interfere with livelihood strategies • Only those individuals with physical capacity to work can benefit from the programme. It excludes, elderly, physically challenged or chronically ill people

What are the outputs or outcomes of food for work programmes?

The kinds of outputs or outcomes we could expect from a food for work programmes include:
• Food rations distributed meet beneficiaries' immediate food needs;
• (Possible) Decreased prices of staple foods on local market (when there is inflation of staple food price due to lack of availability);
• New and/or strengthened community assets are created with ownership and sustainability by the community; and,
• (Possible) Psycho-social support to affected people provided through occupational activities.

Are there any programme examples involving food for work?

Oxfam programme examples using food for work in its emergency response include:
• <u>Mauritania 2005</u>. Locust invasion and poor rains caused widespread food insecurity for agro-pastoralist households in the Aftout region. As part of a wider livelihoods and drought cycle management programme, Oxfam GB implemented an emergency response that involved food for work, support to cereal banks and de-stocking.
• <u>Afghanistan 2004</u>. Food for work projects were implemented after drought threatened the winter food supplies of the vulnerable rural households in Hazarajat. The projects were implemented in partnership with WFP and included food for road rehabilitation and improvement of agricultural infrastructure.

Where can I find further reading and more detailed information?

Oxfam GB EFSL Rough Guides
   – *1.1 EFSL Assessments*
   – *1.6 Market Analysis*
	The Sphere Project 2004. *Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response.* (Chapter 2)
	www.sphereproject.org

World Food Programme:
   – 'Food for assets' www.wfp.org
   – Fact sheets and case studies on food for work and food for training through Friends of the WFP www.friendsofwfp.org
	Research paper highlighting importance of good project design for meeting objectives:
	   Holden S. et al. 2006. Food-for-work for poverty reduction and the promotion of sustainable land use: can it work? *Environment and Development Economics* 11: 15-38

Who can I contact for more information and guidance?

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