SOUTH SUDAN JOINT MARKETS MONITORING INITIATIVE (JMMI) WORKSHOP.

DATE: 28th February 2024, TIME:9:30am- 1:00pm, Nairobi time VIA ZOOM

SESSION 1:

Introduction

The Joint Market Monitoring Initiative (JMMI) plays a crucial role in providing regular market information on the availability and price trends of basic commodities to guide market-based responses. JMMI has been used in South Sudan, with REACH leading the initiative in close collaboration with a variety of organizations under the umbrella of the South Sudan Cash Working Group (CWG). REACH consolidates and systematically analyzes the data collected by participating organizations. The information generated is intended to support decision-making by the CWG and organizations working in cash and voucher assistance (CVA).

The last JMMI in South Sudan was conducted in December 2023, with 25 organizations contributing data. The South Sudan CWG recognizes the potential for broader participation with the possibility of involving 56 more organizations and so increase the breadth of information collected.

This activity is part of broader efforts to support the systematic adaptation of CVA to high inflation and depreciation in the country.

Presentation 1: Overview of the JMMI Process and Key Achievements

The JMMI process:

JMMI data targets traders and is collected using an Open Data Kit (ODK) tool which allows data collection and submission using Android mobile devices. ODK can be used even without an Internet connection or mobile carrier service at the time of data collection.

REACH supports the partners by:

- Building their capacity to gather information, with training done remotely due to accessibility issues to most areas.
- Ensuring partners are all using the same methodology.
- Ensuring partners are using a common tool.
- Ensuring data is collected within the same period, which is 1st to 7th of every month.
- Cleaning and analyzing the data.
- Developing the JMMI facts sheets and updating the JMMI dashboard.
- Presenting the findings at country CWG meetings.

The Key 2023 achievements in South Sudan: From January to December include:

- 12 factsheets were published.
- 41 organizations participated in the process during the year.
- 14,624 key traders were interviewed from 60 assessed counties and from 76 assessed markets.

Panel Discussion

The panel discussion, with representatives from SPEDP (a national NGO operating in South Sudan), the World Food Programme (WFP) and Save the Children focused on exploring the motivations for organizations to engage in the JMMI Process, along with the challenges they face, funding limitations, strategies to boost participation, and the importance of harmonized data collection and training. Additionally, the panel discussed key advocacy points for organizations not yet involved and why increased participation is crucial.

Question One: What motivates your organization to participate in the JMMI Process?

JMMI Process Motivation:

SPEDP Perspective: SPEDP has been involved in JMMI since 2018. As an organization actively involved in cash-based interventions, JMMI supports the organization in determining the minimum basket expenditure for them to allocate effective cash transfer values. In addition, JMMI helps SPEDP to understand the impact of the cash-based transfers on the market dynamics - whether they are strengthening the markets or not and the rate of inflation. Another reason is the reduction of costs, as having readily available data helps the process of integrating interventions in untapped locations.

Save the Children Perspective:

- To inform MPCA design and modality. Without proper JMMI data, program design is very difficult.
- To determine cash transfer values and review its sufficiency to cover minimum needs.
- To understand the extent to which inflation is affecting targeted locations and adjustments that may be needed.
- To understand the effectiveness of the distributed funds in the lives of beneficiaries.
- For accountability to donors to demonstrate that cash-based programming is backed up by reliable data.

Question Two: What are the challenges that organizations are facing participating in the JMMI process?

SPEDP Perspective:

- Limited and/or short-term funding to consistently enable staff to engage in the data collection and contribute to monthly reporting.
- Displacement of populations due to conflict and flooding leads to sudden closure of markets.
- Internet connectivity issues in some of the areas makes it challenging to access the tool and upload the data in a timely manner.
- The unwillingness of some traders to be interviewed or to give accurate information creates discrepancies in the data.

Save the Children Perspective:

- Financial/resource constraints.
- Logistical issues in accessing hard reach areas.
- Technical issues such as poor internet in certain geographical areas make it hard to report on time or contact enumerators for clarifications or corrections.
- JMMI data collection is often anchored to specific, timebound, programmes rather than as a strategic priority in organizations.
- Staff moving to other organizations or positions with no replacements cuts the consistency and flow of information. Refresher trainings should focus on methodology and the accuracy of data.

Question Three: How can organizations navigate the issue of limited funding?

Key discussion points:

- Mainstream JMMI data reporting in the organization's overall plans and deliverables.
- Incorporate JMMI into current programs by delegating specific data collection tasks, such as training sessions, to existing staff members.
- Increase the number of staff who are conversant with JMMI so that when someone leaves or is absent another can fill in.
- Onboard student interns and volunteers who can support in data collection, analysis, and administrative tasks, helping to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the initiative.
- Having a dedicated budget line for JMMI in programs budgets.

Question Four: What Strategies can be incorporated to increase participation of Organizations in the JMMI Process?

Key discussion points:

- Create awareness across more sectors and clusters to understand how the value of JMMI supports their work.
- Conduct more training to ensure active and quality participation by partners.
- Make training available via an online platform which can be accessed anytime by partners.

- Increase the number of trained staff so there are no gaps when a member of staff leaves or is absent.
- Involve government agencies, especially those line ministries directly involved in markets to help increase the market monitoring to more areas and ensure continuity of data collection.
- Enhance coverage by integrating gender and protection considerations, linking markets with these sectors to involve more local actors across various regions.
- Involve local partners in the CWG and those who are not members who have more coverage.

Question Five: What are the considerations to ensure harmonized data collection and training?

Key discussion points:

- A lot of discussions are ongoing on how to harmonize the data collection process. The methodology used to collect the data is largely the same for most organizations, but the differences lie in the calculations. Some organizations use averages while others use medians.
- Key things to consider are:
    o Price differences and what factors cause this.
    o How to close the funding gap for local organizations involved in the JMMI initiative.
    o JMMI is restricted to collecting data only in the 1st week of the month. Prices are bound to change within the rest of the month creating discrepancies in the data analyzed.

Question Six: What are key advocacy points for organizations that are not involved in JMMI data collection?

- JMMI is feasible and can be done at low cost.
- Demonstrate the benefits of JMMI to humanitarian and development contexts.
- Demonstrate the value addition of JMMI to high level management to integrate JMMI into their strategic plans.
- Harmonize the methodology of JMMI data collection so as not to contradict the programming activities.

Question Seven: Why should organisation increase participate in the JMMI process?

- To increase the coverage of more geographical areas to give a more comprehensive picture of the price trends and markets.
- When more partners contribute to the data collection, the number of data points for analysis increases, and this improves data accuracy.
- The quality of analyses improves when more than one organization can provide insights into specific geographical locations.

- If one organization is absent in a specific geographical location, the JMMI process is not compromised and there is continuity of data collection.

Plenary

Question One: Is there a section in the JMMI questionnaires that targets the chamber of commerce or traders' union?

JMMI questionnaires do not have this question, but this is captured in other assessments like the Rapid Markets Assessment. State level CWGs leads are being trained and sensitized on how to engage with the Chamber of Commerce and trade unions to work together in price monitoring and market supplies.

Question Two: The sense of responsibility in the data translates into the overall quality of data. How then can organizations ensure that volunteers and interns have a sense of responsibility over the data collection process?

- Volunteers should be well trained on the methodology of JMMI data collection and the standard units for commodities.
- A field supervisor should be deployed to monitor the data collection process.
- The field supervisor should review the data before uploading to avoid any errors.

Question Three: How can organizations mobilize government agencies to participate in the JMMI process?

WFP has a memorandum of understanding with the Ministry of Agriculture as part of their joint project on early warning systems to include the market aspect. The Ministry collects data on Consumer Price Index (CPI) and, alongside this, relevant staff are trained to generate JMMI market information.

Question Four: Is there a way to bring more partners on board to have a better understanding of the patterns in different markets across different geographical zones?

There is flexibility and REACH is seeking to expand this process to include more partners and more markets. Many areas lack coverage, presenting an opportunity to engage additional partners and gather insights into the functioning of these markets.

Interested partners can contact REACH to organize training and kickstart the JMMI process.

Question Five: What is the status of people with disabilities access to markets?

JMMI targets traders since the questions are focused on market functionalities.

Question Six: Is there a plan to conduct the trainings face to face? Internet connectivity issues pose a challenge on how well enumerators are trained.

There are plans to organize regional trainings where partners gather their enumerators together and REACH sends a facilitator to conduct the training. Online training will also continue, and enumerators can access this to refresh their skills.

Question seven: How can the JMMI take advantage of other existing data sources such as WFP VAM?

There needs to be harmonization of methodologies used by the two processes.

SESSION TWO:

This second session focused on:

- Sharing lessons and best practices of what has proven effective or ineffective within the JMMI context.
- Exploring challenges faced by individual organizations or collectively.
- Exploring solutions to help improve the quality of data collected by increasing the understanding of the collective JMMI tools.

Presentation: Challenges/pitfalls experienced by partners during JMMI data collection

In this session, REACH provided an overview of the some of common challenges experienced during data collection exercises.

- Units of measurement
  - There are 4 units of measurement for
    - JMMI: weighing scale (kilograms),
    - JMMI mug,
    - Malwa and
    - Bottle (0.5litres).
  - For pre-packaged items, their weight should be converted and recorded in kilograms.
  - Quotations should have the same type of item and volume measured using the same unit of measurements.
  - Failure to use the JMMI mug as the common unit of measurement creates discrepancies and inaccuracies in the comparison of data.
- Errors in inputting the collected data into the JMMI tool or use of different tools other than the JMMI tool.

- Every item must have 4 quotations - some enumerators record only 1 or less which makes it difficult to analyze the data. In smaller markets, at least 2 quotations can help in the analysis but not less than that.
- Type of data collected – the enumerators should ensure that there is uniformity in the data collected for a similar type of items, e.g. sorghum grain that has white and brown types should each have separate quotations since the price also varies.
- Stock current/duration - this is indicated in the JMMI tool (housed in ODK) to determine how long the traders will have the supplies.
    - This is classified in terms of days, weeks, or months. The minimum entry for days is at least 5-6 days, weeks is between 7 to 21 days and, 22 days and above is a month.
    - The buying price must be lower than the selling price.
- JMMI data should be collected in the first week of the month from 1st to 7th.
- The enumerators should tick off the checklist during reporting to ensure they have exhausted all the information required.
- Weather conditions, like heavy rain, pose challenges for enumerators in the field whereby they are unable to capture all the required data.

Solutions

- Data quality: This can be achieved through a field officer/supervisor guiding the enumerators and reviewing the collected data before it is uploaded on the tool to reduce errors.
- Capacity building: for organizations and partners involved in the JMMI to refine skills and share best practices.
- Managing staff changes: organizations are encouraged to notify REACH when staff members depart so that arrangements can be made to train new team members, minimizing disruptions to data collection processes.

Plenary:

Question One: What are some of the challenges faced by local and international organizations in collecting JMMI data?

Agency for Women and Children Development (AWACD) perspective.

AWACD is a national NGO that has been collecting data for the past 14 months and have experienced the following challenges:

- Unwillingness of the traders to give the right information - as they have a limited understanding of the importance of JMMI and how it benefits them. There is need for awareness creation in the communities and markets to ensure they volunteer the correct information.

- There is a need to train enumerators on proper data collection methods in terms of how to connect with communities, how to ask questions and the right kind of questions to ask.
- Suspicion from traders and other market actors regarding the reason for collecting the data and the use.
- Funding: National NGOs are facing limited funds to maintain qualified enumerators who can regularly collect data. AWACD caters for the needs of their enumerators in terms of transport and meal allowances to facilitate their movement to and from the fields. The Board of Directors has given a commitment to support the AWACD team in the field.
- Access - with the war/ fighting, and flooding in parts of South Sudan, enumerators are unable to reach the markets in these areas due to security concerns. This in turn makes it difficult to have data to be analyzed to guide interventions.

International Rescue Committee (IRC) perspective:

- In each field office, IRC appoints a dedicated focal person responsible for ensuring quality data collection.
- One of the organization's strategic plans is to transition to 50% use of cash interventions. To do this, quality JMMI data is required. As a result, IRC is in the process of setting up a team of experts to support the JMMI process from collection to analysis.
- Quality assurance of the data-before submitting/ sharing the data, the organization has a technical expert who reviews the entries for due diligence.
- Tool should capture GPS coordinates and time of when entries are made to remove doubt of the legitimacy of the data entered.
- The traders should also sign the checklist to ensure accountability and responsibility for the quality of data entered.
- The errors of failing to input 4 quotations are because sometimes some markets have 1 or 2 traders per item. Other times these items disappear, and the markets are left empty. The enumerators input this information failing to indicate why there are no 4 quotations which seems like an error even if the data is accurate.

Question Two: What is the best way to convince traders/ local leaders to provide information i.e. the price?

Improving JMMI data collection strategies:

- Create awareness on the importance of JMMI data through training and workshops.
- Help traders understand the JMMI process and its role in humanitarian interventions so they understand their role in giving correct price information.
- Work with a local trade union to help trickle down the importance of JMMI data and process.
- Create a good rapport with the traders.
- Refrain from pressurizing traders when collecting the data - interact in a friendly way without interrupting their business.

Question Three: What can organizations do differently to improve the JMMI process?

Sustainable data collection strategies:

- Establish strong relationships with local actors like trade unions. Organizations can support them with some of their needs like printers, trainings, capacity building and resource mobilization to boost their cooperation.
- There is a need to motivate the enumerators by increasing their funds to create a conducive working environment for them in the field. More funds will also ensure that organizations retain their well-trained enumerators.
- Sustainability measures to ensure permanent offices in counties where the capacity of local actors has been built, to ensure continuity once staff move to another place. This will also support the development of these markets.
- To have a sustainable JMMI data collection (monthly report), organizations need to integrate this in their strategic plans and approach donors to support this process, including making provision for enumerator expenses to be charged to existing programs. For donors whose mandate is purely humanitarian, an effective advocacy angle would be to show the linkage between market infrastructure and market sustainability with humanitarian aid.
- Coordination at the local level is needed, including sharing of information between agencies to ensure continuity of data collection.
- Capacity building in the JMMI process through dedicated team of staff who are well trained in collecting multisectoral data and collaboration between regional offices and local actors.

Next Steps

1. Share slides on common data cleaning mistakes.

2. Arrange a refresher training course every 3-6 months for partners to review common mistakes and emphasize best practices.

3. Establish strong relationships with local trade unions and provide support as needed. Ensure adequate funding for data collection to retain experienced enumerators.

4. Organizations should explore ways to make data collection sustainable, such as training dedicated staff and involving trade unions.

5. Organizations should explore ways to link local traders and build their capacity.

6. Organizations should consider translating JMMI data into simple terms to show its value to traders and trade unions.

7. Organizations should consider involving traders in data collection for their own benefit.

8. Organizations should consider having backup staff in case of staff turnover.

9. Organizations should develop a strategy for a sustainable market collaboration through JMMI and their programs in South Sudan.

10. Continue exploring how data collection for JMMI and VAM process could be better aligned.

Useful Links:

IRC Market Assessment https://dataviz.vam.wfp.org/economic/market-assessment

Annex: List of organizations who participated in the workshop.

Humane-Aid for Community Organization (HACO)

Danish Refugee Council

Adventists Development and Relief Agency

Agency for Child Relief Aid (ACRA)

Greater Upper Nile Organization (GUNO)

Child's Destiny and Development Organization (CHIDDO)

Polish Humanitarian Action

GOAL Global

Norwegian People's Aid

Centre for Emergency and Development Support

Street children care initiative (SCCI0

South Sudan Cash Consortium

Catholic Relief Services

Tear Fund

Inkomoko South Sudan

Hope Restoration South Sudan

Malteser International

REACH Initiative

World Food Programme

Save the Children

CALP Network

SPEDP