MARKET-INTEGRATED RELIEF IN YIDA REFUGEE CAMP

Unity State, South Sudan
December 28, 2013
by Ruco Van Der Merwe
Case Study: Market-Integrated Relief in Yida Refugee Camp

Samaritan’s Purse International Relief
PO Box 3000 | Boone, NC 28607 | (828) 262-1980

Samaritan’s Purse is a nondenominational evangelical Christian organization providing spiritual and physical aid to hurting people around the world. Since 1970, Samaritan’s Purse has helped victims of war, poverty, natural disasters, disease, and famine with the purpose of sharing God’s love through His Son, Jesus Christ.

“Go and do likewise”... Luke 10:37d
AKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report could not have been completed if it was not for the hard work and dedication of the field team in Yida refugee camp who continues to provide essential humanitarian relief in the face of some very difficult conditions. A special word of thanks goes to them for their assistance and provision of logistical support. Abdulmajid Dictor Lalfa and Akiir Yong Akiir were especially helpful in carrying out focus group discussions and the miller assessments. SP South Sudan and SP Headquarters provided technical input and a final review of the document. WFP staffs at Juba and Yida levels were very helpful in providing detailed contextual information, data and feedback. Finally, Samaritan’s Purse is especially grateful to all the refugees and business owners who took the time to participate in the review process.
# Table of Contents

 Acknowledgements................................................................................................. 3  
 List of Abbreviations............................................................................................... 5  
 Executive Summary................................................................................................. 6  
 Program Background............................................................................................... 7  
 Study Objectives..................................................................................................... 8  
 Methodology............................................................................................................ 8  
 Limitations.............................................................................................................. 9  
 Implementation........................................................................................................ 9  
 Market Conditions................................................................................................. 12  
 Impact.................................................................................................................... 13  
 Recommendations................................................................................................. 18  
 Conclusion............................................................................................................... 18  
 References.............................................................................................................. 19
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BSFP</td>
<td>Blanket Supplementary Feeding Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FGD</td>
<td>Focus Group Discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GAM</td>
<td>Global Acute Malnutrition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GFD</td>
<td>General Food Distribution</td>
</tr>
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<td>GVD</td>
<td>General Voucher Distribution</td>
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<tr>
<td>IYCF</td>
<td>Infant and Young Child Feeding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAM</td>
<td>Moderate Acute Malnutrition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MUAC</td>
<td>Middle Upper Arm Circumference</td>
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<tr>
<td>PDM</td>
<td>Post Distribution Monitoring</td>
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<td>SAM</td>
<td>Severe Acute Malnutrition</td>
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<td>SP</td>
<td>Samaritan’s Purse</td>
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<td>SSP</td>
<td>South Sudanese Pound</td>
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<tr>
<td>SPLM-N</td>
<td>Sudan People’s Liberation Army - North</td>
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<td>TSFP</td>
<td>Targeted Supplementary Feeding Program</td>
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<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</td>
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<tr>
<td>VRN</td>
<td>Voucher Release Note</td>
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<td>WASH</td>
<td>Water, Sanitation and Hygiene</td>
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<td>WFP</td>
<td>World Food Programme</td>
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Yida refugee camp is located in Unity State which sits in the northern part of South Sudan. The refugee population arrived from neighboring South Kordofan State following fighting that started in 2011 and is still on-going. Over the last two years refugees have continued to stream across the border and today the population sits at 70,292. The camp has a fully array of services being provided on a routine basis with support from UN agencies (UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF, WHO, UNOPS, and UNHAS) and NGO partners (Médecins Sans Frontières, CARE, Solidarites, Non-violent Peace Force, Africa Action Help, and the International Rescue Committee).

This study was initiated in response to a growing demand for information in regards to the impact of a milling-voucher program which became operational in May 2013. Previous assessments had highlighted that refugees were exchanging large portions of their rations for milling services, resulting in reduced monthly food consumption below that of the allocated Sphere size ration. The program was intended to reverse this trend by providing refugees with access to milling services through the distribution of milling vouchers. All data collection and review of secondary data occurred during October 2013.

Main findings were:

- Households reported that GFD cereals last between 4-7 days longer per month than prior to the program.
- Percentage of ration being exchanged for milling services dropped from 27% before the program to 2% after.
- 93% of millers reported being able to procure fuel in Yida even during the rainy season.
- Fuel prices in Yida market experienced a moderate spike after program implementation however prices stabilized and adjusted to new levels of demand after two months.
- Participating millers reported a 41% loss in profits and a 20% reduction in hours of operation. Underlying factors contributing to this decrease are believed to be an increase in number of service providers and price-gouging prior to the program.

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1 “Refugees in South Sudan - South Sudan - Unity.”
Yida camp came into existence in July 2011 following fighting in South Kordofan State between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Sudanese People’s Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N). The conflict resulted in the displacement of thousands of civilians with many of these fleeing into Pariang County, Unity State, in South Sudan. Thousands arrived with few household assets and in poor general health condition. SP was the first agency on the ground and rapidly mobilized an emergency response. As the camp population grew, SP partnered with WFP and UNHCR to provide emergency food assistance and nutritional support to the refugees as well as expanding into WASH and protection activities.

Mid-2012 saw fluctuations in GAM rates, which led to several assessments seeking to establish the root causes of continued food insecurity despite the provision of 100% GFD rations (Sphere standard), 100% food assistance coverage of population in need and a full array of nutritional services. WFP meeting notes and a WFP mission report from June 2012 highlighted that commercial mills were charging up to 7 SSP to mill a single malwa (USAID vegetable oil tin equal to about 3.5kg of cereal) or in-kind trade ratios between 1/4 to one and one to one. This meant that households were significantly reducing their total caloric intake due to costs associated with milling. Follow-up studies revealed that in July 2012, 39% of households noted grinding costs as a food security constraint and by December 2012, 63.6% of mothers with children under five years old in the household were paying to have their GFD cereal ration milled. Although grinding costs were never confirmed to be the primary reason affecting nutrition and food security status of households, it certainly was a contributing factor.

In response to the concerns raised by previous assessments, WFP and UNCHR launched an Interagency Milling Assessment in January 2013 to “determine the cost and availability of milling for beneficiaries in Yida.” The assessment went further to analyze the milling capacity within the camp to ensure that any potential programs would not run into supply side (milling service provision) challenges or ad-

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3 WFP, Mission Report: Escalating Malnutrition-related Mortality at Yida Camp, Unity State; WFP, Meeting Minutes: Discussion on Maize.
4 ACF, Integrated Nutrition and Retrospective Mortality Survey, 22.
6 WFP, Yida Interagency Milling Assessment.
versely affect the market. In May 2013, Samaritan’s Purse in partnership with WFP and UNHCR rolled out a milling-voucher program targeting the entire GFD caseload (70,292 as of October 2013) of Yida camp with milling services for 70% of their ration. The primary objective of the program is to ensure that beneficiaries maintain full access to their Sphere-size ration entitlement and protect infringement of costs associated with the milling of the rations.

**Study Objectives**

This assessment follows on earlier studies that were carried out prior to the implementation of the voucher program. Most of these assessed needs and analyzed existing market capacity for a milling voucher program. Given that the program has now been operational for six months, it became evident that additional analysis on how the program has impacted beneficiaries and millers was necessary. It is anticipate that this study will build on the existing knowledge and achieve the following objectives:

- Contribute to the larger body of case studies focusing on market-integrated relief. The project itself had the following unique elements which would hopefully add additional insights: voucher distribution integrated into GFD, blanket voucher targeting total refugee population and utilization of a rural refugee marketplace.
- Evaluate the impact that milling vouchers have had on household food security for refugees living in Yida Refugee Camp, South Sudan.
- Evaluate the impact the milling voucher program has had on millers.

Samaritan’s Purse was in a unique position to carry out the Yida evaluation as it is WFP and UNHCR’s partner for general food distribution, blanket supplementary feeding, targeted supplementary feeding, and milling voucher programs. What makes the study especially interesting is that milling vouchers were only introduced in May 2013 after the food assistance and nutritional programs had been in implementation for almost two years. This allowed SP to analyze the pre and post voucher household food security using routine data sources throughout the time period.

**Methodology**

The research and writing of this report took place from October 10th- 25th, 2013. Two weeks were spent in South Sudan meeting with relevant actors, field staff and beneficiaries. Secondary data covering 13 months was analyzed, which allowed for comparison of indicators before and after the voucher program commenced. The case study used both primary and secondary data from the following six sources:

1. Rapid Miller Survey – Between October 16th and 19th, the survey interviewed 15 of the 59 certified millers. Yida camp is currently divided into 20 blocks; 1 miller each was randomly selected from 15 of the blocks.
2. Market Price Monitoring – SP routinely tracks key commodity and service prices in Yida market. For this specific study diesel and petrol prices were analyzed.

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7 “Refugees in South Sudan South Sudan Unity.”
3. Post-Distribution Monitoring (PDM): As part of the GFD, SP routinely carries out PDMs two weeks following the food distributions. Data was collected and analyzed from January to September 2013.

4. Nutrition Data: This study examined routine admission data as collected by SP in Yida camp.

5. Food security and nutrition assessments: Any assessments with related data that had been carried out in Yida since the start of the camp.

6. Focus Group Discussions – Five FGDs were carried out on October 17th in Yida camp with groups disaggregated as follows: three groups of women, one group of youth and one group of boma leaders. Each group had 8-10 representatives.

**Limitations**

The data presented in this report should be reviewed keeping in mind several limitations and factors influencing the results.

- **Seasonality:** Seasonality plays a significant role in Yida camp where the rainy season has traditionally impacted access and mobility. Population mobility is generally limited during the rainy-season months (June-September) meaning that most new arrivals show up during the dry season (October – May). Road access has recently improved following improvements to the Yida-Bentiu route, which has resulted in better availability of goods on the local market and stabilization of prices. Household-level food production is not currently encouraged in Yida due to the nature of its proximity to the border and security concerns. As such, it is less impacted by the livelihoods seasonal calendar.

- **Sample size:** Data presented from post distribution monitoring and rapid miller assessment is not representative of the entire population and is only intended to give general insights.

- **Nutrition Data:** Nutrition has a host of complex factors influencing outcomes from infant and young-child feeding (IYCF); water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH); and availability of services. This study in no way intends to assume direct causality between the voucher program and subsequent nutritional outcomes.

**Implementation**

**Targeting**

In May 2013, WFP and UNHCR launched the milling voucher program in Yida refugee camp targeting the entire GFD caseload which stood at 70,292 beneficiaries (as of October 2013)\(^8\). A total of 59 millers were selected to be certified service providers for the camp. Beneficiaries are entitled to redeem their vouchers at any one of the participating certified milling locations.

\(^8\) “Refugees in South Sudan South Sudan Unity.”
**Voucher Value**

Vouchers are restricted to milling services and entitles each person to mill 3 malwas of cereal (approximately 10.5 KGS or 70% of a beneficiary’s ration). The average price of milling 1 malwa is approximately 3 SSP, meaning that the entire voucher value is equivalent to 9 SSP (3 USD) per person per month. Vouchers are distributed in accordance with household size, ensuring that the voucher program is equitably benefiting all households.

1 Milling Voucher = 3 Malwas Milled = $3 USD Value

**Partners**

The implementation of the project is divided between five actors. WFP and UNHCR are jointly responsible for printing and providing the vouchers to Samaritan’s Purse. They are further responsible for monitoring market prices and analyzing data from post-distribution monitoring. Samaritan’s Purse is responsible for distributing the vouchers to the beneficiaries and carrying out post-distribution monitoring. Certified millers are responsible for receiving vouchers in exchange for milling services. Equity bank is responsible for paying all the millers in accordance to the number of vouchers they present. Payments are supposed to occur on a bimonthly basis to ensure that millers have enough cash flow for continuous milling operation. As of November 2013, SP took over miller payments from Equity Bank.
1. Receiving Vouchers: Every month, Samaritan’s Purse, in partnership with the local WFP office, submits a VRN (voucher release note) to WFP Juba. The VRN is based on the anticipated beneficiary caseload for the upcoming month as determined by UNHCR’s registration figures. WFP is responsible for delivering the vouchers to the field location before the distribution cycle begins. Upon delivery, vouchers are counted, verified, and signed over to SP.

**VRN Sample**

![VRN Sample Image]

2. Distributing Vouchers: Voucher distribution is integrated into the existing GFD system as a way of improving cost-efficiency and accountability. The distribution process in Yida currently utilizes UNCHR’s innovative rapid food distribution (RFD) system which integrates bar-code scanners during the distribution process. In order to receive their ration, beneficiaries must present their ration card, which has a bar-coded strip on it. This strip is scanned upon entrance into the GFD area and it pulls up a photo of the individual to ensure visual verification. Once a beneficiary is visually verified, the bar-coded vouchers are scanned and the vouchers are linked to that specific household. If it is a household size four, then the software will require four vouchers to be scanned (one per person); if household size seven, then seven vouchers and so forth. At the end of the GFD, distribution records are compared with voucher-inventory records to ensure accountability.

*Riddell, “Voucher Distribution Manual Yida, South Sudan”*
3. Payment: Once all of the distributions have been completed, a final voucher distribution figure will be presented to WFP along with empty voucher books and any remaining vouchers. Equity bank is then notified of the final amount to be transferred and coordinates with WFP and the millers to arrange for an appropriate time to carry out the cash transfer.

4. Reporting and Monitoring: There are two main elements that are routinely monitored for the voucher program. The first tracks project output in regards to vouchers received, distributed and returned. It is tracked in the same way that food commodity stocks are tracked and inventoried. The second monitoring piece tracks voucher impact at household level. This is accomplished via monthly post voucher distribution monitoring. Monitoring typically occurs two weeks after distribution.

Market Conditions

Yida refugee camp is located in Pariang County, Unity State, South Sudan. The population, primarily comprised of agro-pastoral Nubans, started fleeing to the location in 2011 when fighting resumed in neighboring South Kordofan State. The initial year and a half of the camp’s existence saw the population rapidly rise to over 65,000 however figures have largely stabilized since March 2013. The area surrounding Yida camp is extremely prone to flooding during the rainy season, which has led to significant access constraints. 2011-2012 rainy seasons saw camp access reduced almost exclusively to air support.

Following that rainy season, significant road work was done, which has since allowed for semi-reliable access to the nearest regional town and market of Bentiu, approximately 3 hours away by road in the
rainy season. The camp itself has one primary market and three secondary markets that function on a daily basis. There are generally a wide variety of goods available, including primary commodities (cereals, pulses, and oil), livestock (cows, goats, and sheep) and fuel (diesel and petrol), although seasonal fluctuations do exist. Most of these goods are sourced from Bentiu. The camp markets primarily serve the refugee population although there is also a small host community that access it. There are no banks or money-transfer services available in the camp. Cell phone network provision by Zain has recently improved. The following map gives a general idea of community assets, including grinding mill locations in the camp.

MAP 1.0

Refugee Crisis in Unity: Yida Community Asset Map

One of the primary concerns facing the voucher program was whether there would be market impact as a result of accessibility during the rainy season. In order for the project to function effectively, millers

10 REACH, ACTED, and UNHCR, “Refugee Crisis in Unity: Yida Community Asset Map.”
would require access to key inputs, such as diesel, petrol, machine parts, and maintenance services. If markets were not well integrated, or were inaccessible due to the rain, market disruptions would be likely. As displayed below, millers were asked based on previous experiences, what were the major factors contributing to price fluctuations for their milling services. Both direct inputs of fuel and maintenance were stated to be the primary contributing factors; only 27% of millers felt that overall prices were indirectly affected by access.

**FIGURE 1.2**
Factors contributing to price fluctuations

Using routine data collected from market price monitoring at Yida’s main market: the survey was able to evaluate the impact that the voucher program had on petrol and diesel prices. The graph below displays the commodity-price trends over time, where the red dots indicate the month in which the voucher program commenced. Data clearly displays an initial jump in market prices for both commodities although diesel was less affected. This was likely due to initial increase in demand related to the program beneficiaries, but also additional demand in relation to prepositioning for the rainy season. Inflation was noticeable over a two month period for petrol although markets have since stabilized and adjusted to the new levels of demand.

**FIGURE 1.3**
Price per liter for diesel and petrol
An interesting find from the study was that major improvements in access to Yida (compared to previous years) resulted in a stable market environment. Most millers noted that they were able to source fuel directly from Yida market without having to seek out regional markets. 77% of all millers were able to access maintenance for their equipment from within the camp; either by servicing the equipment themselves or finding someone locally to do it.

**FIGURE 1.4**
Where do you procure fuel?

- 7% Yida
- 93% Bentiu

**FIGURE 1.5**
How do you access maintenance for milling equipment?

- 12% Locally
- 23% Regionally
- 65% Personal Maintenance

Millers further noted that access was not limited to the dry season only: 100% reported being able to access fuel at least occasionally during the rainy season. Most of the millers also prepositioned fuel stocks in anticipation for the rainy season. The improved accessibility dissuaded a lot of the initial concerns regarding an increase in milling service demand within an insulated market.

**FIGURE 1.6**
Can you access fuel during rainy season?

- 20% Sometimes
- 80% Yes

**FIGURE 1.7**
How did you prepare for the rainy season?

- 7% Preposition
- 93% Nothing

A large portion of the assessment sought to evaluate how the voucher program has impacted business for millers. The initial assumption was that the increase in demand for milling service would have a positive impact of the millers. However, 60% of millers reported that business had actually gotten worse. As displayed below, millers reported an average decrease in profits of 41%, or 620 SSP, and an average...
reduction of two hours of operation per day. The assessment itself did not examine the reasons behind the decrease in business, however discussions with project staff suggested that this was primarily due to an increase of milling-service providers during the project start up, as well as pre-voucher price-gouging that inflated profits. This would explain the decrease in profits as business was spread out across an oversupply of milling-service providers and prices for milling services became fixed.

All of the millers surveyed felt that the current payment system was not functioning well and asserted that this was due to delayed payment. Several millers reported running out of prepositioned fuel stocks resulting in a temporary closure of business until they were paid and able to restock. Additionally, millers noted that there is a lack of adequate information being communicated by the partners in regards to schedule of payment or reasons for delays. It appears that there is little differentiation between the roles of SP, WFP, UNHCR, and Equity Bank; as such the perception of poorly managed payment schedule negatively affects all partners. All of millers stated that they preferred the current system of vouchers for cash as the transfer modality, over banks or alternative systems. Overall, the millers were unwilling to consider alternative cash-transfer modalities although this was likely influenced by the unreliability of the existing transfer process.

**Households**

Data for the evaluation of voucher impact on household food security primarily came from FGDs, PDMs, and nutritional data. All FGDs noted that the voucher program resulted in their food rations lasting longer. Groups noted that rations are lasting between 4-7 days longer every month, since they no longer have to sell or exchange rations for milling services. One FGD noted it has improved feeding for young children since they can now easily serve them porridge. As displayed below, the PDM data corroborates information from the FGDs.
Cereals are reported to last on average four days longer following the start of the voucher program.

Prior to the voucher program, households were exchanging approximately 27% (average across FGDs) or 8.1 days of rations for milling services. Since the voucher program started, that figure has dropped to 2% (average across FGDs). One FGD noted that 10% of beneficiaries sell or exchange their vouchers when they desire access to alternative goods or foods (such as meat and onions). The “youth” FGD added that vouchers can be exchanged for food with millers at a rate of one malwa of ground sorghum for one voucher.

Nutritional data from the SP TSFP program was collected and analyzed to see whether any patterns arose in connection to the start of the voucher program. It should be noted again that this by no means intends to ascribe correlation between the voucher program and nutritional outcomes as the nutrition is extremely complex and influenced by numerous factors in Yida such as IYCF, WASH, seasonality, and availability of services. The graph below displays TSFP new admissions between September 2012 and October 2013. Average TSFP new admissions were reduced by 165 per month following the start of the voucher program.
Recommendations

There are several recommendations and lessons learned that could be applied to both the Yida case and other similar contexts. It should be noted that these recommendations are based purely upon the findings from this study, and as such, there might already be programming responses attempting to address these issues.

1. Pre-voucher market assessments should carefully consider whether supply meets programming demands but also ensure that the project does not encourage the oversupply of services. The Yida case highlighted that a rapid and unchecked increase on supply side can actually have a net-negative impact on profits for service providers.

2. Millers voiced the need for routine information on the status of payments and project updates. This would be an easy component to integrate into all future voucher programs and will likely result in higher confidence in the partnership.

3. Apply “do no harm” principles to all actors involved in the project cycle. Ensure payments are done on time and include a penalty in contractual agreement for delayed payments. The Yida case revealed that several millers were suffering business losses due to delayed payments and an inability to find capital to restock milling inputs.

4. It would beneficial to integrate a routine-monitoring tool that evaluates program impact at the miller level and allows for process adjustments. If programming is truly intended to be market-integrated relief, the market partners should be viewed as beneficiaries and their business outcomes considered crucial to overall program success.

Conclusion

The findings from this assessment indicate that the voucher program has successfully been able to improve household food access. Households are significantly less likely to exchange their ration for milling services and now have their rations stretching an additional 4-7 days per month. Over the course of the project, TSFP admissions have also seen significant declines. The strength of this correlation would be an interesting topic for further research. Despite initial concerns regarding market integration and access due to Yida’s remote location; the majority of millers indicate routine access to goods on local and regional markets. The markets have been able to adjust to the new levels of demands for program inputs (fuel and maintenance services). Future milling programs should carefully consider the millers as a key beneficiary group and ensure monitoring tools are in place to routinely evaluate project impact on their businesses.


