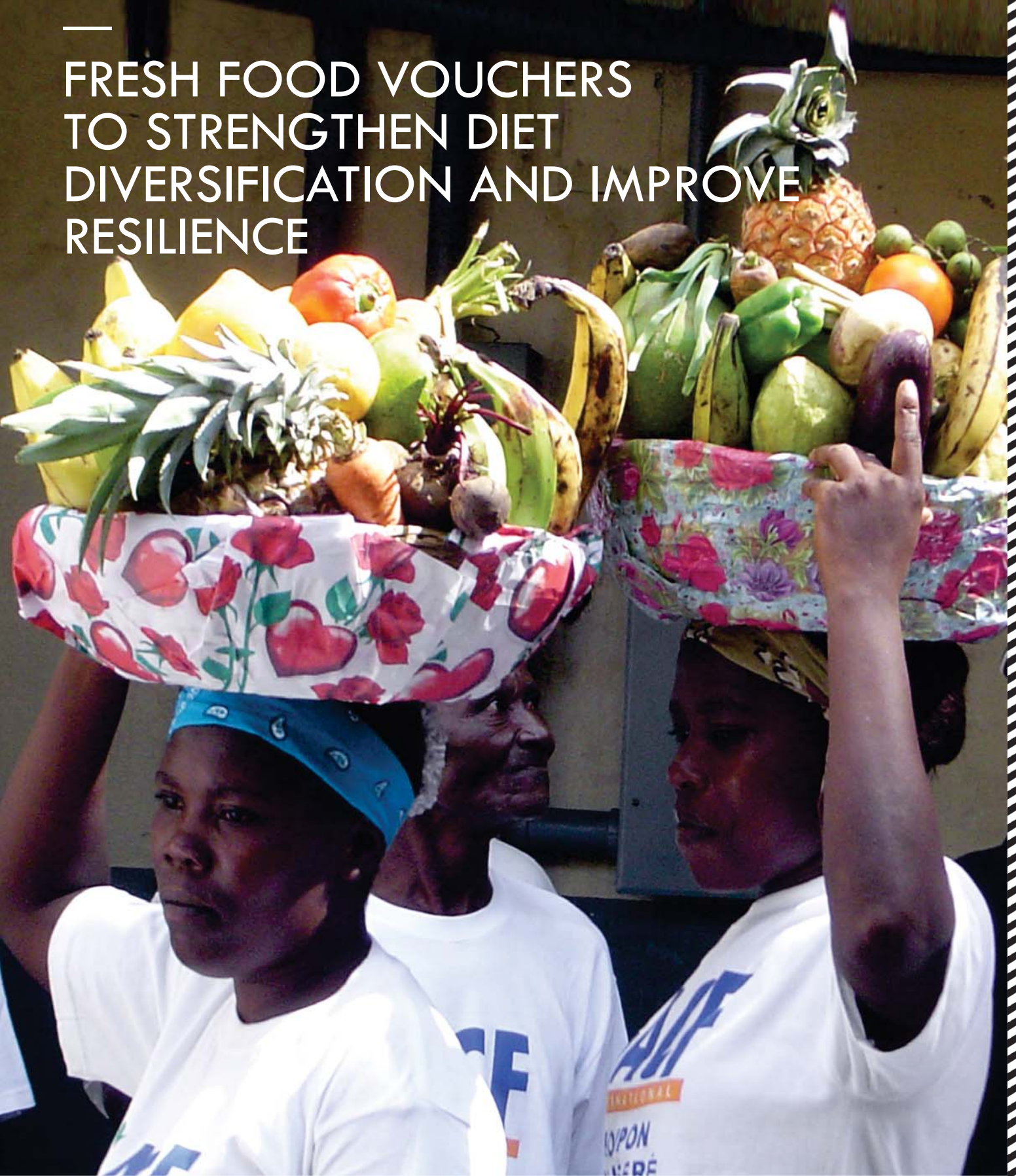




HAITI

FRESH FOOD VOUCHERS TO STRENGTHEN DIET DIVERSIFICATION AND IMPROVE RESILIENCE



In response to the 2010 devastating earthquake, Action Contre la Faim implemented a range of emergency activities, in Port-au-Prince and Gonaïves, including a pilot Fresh Food Vouchers (FFV) project to complement other food assistance and nutrition interventions. Building on lessons learnt, the pilot was then adapted and replicated in Gonaïves and again in Port au Prince in 2011 in the frame of a safety net approach. The latter programme aims at restoring food security for vulnerable households and to improve their nutritional situation. By ensuring access to fresh and staple food through the local market, ACF intends to support the local economy, to strengthen the beneficiaries' resilience and to improve the households' access to a diversified diet.





Humanitarian context

Background

In 2010, Haiti endured severe external shocks that substantially worsened the country's vulnerability.

On January 12, 2010, a category 7 earthquake struck the country killing 220,000 people and leaving 1.5 million homeless, 80% of which were located in Port-au-Prince, the capital city of Haiti.

In October, shortly after the earthquake, the country experienced a cholera outbreak affecting more than 250,000 people in just four months. The shocks left Haiti's food security situation even more precarious and in 2011 populations saw a drastic rise in their food price volatility.

In response to this critical situation, and building on lessons learnt from two ACF similar projects, in April 2011 ACF implemented a "Fresh and Staple Food Voucher". Food vouchers were distributed to enable vulnerable households to have access to a variety of foods (fresh produce and staples), and also to make funds available for non-food expenses (health, education etc.). Selected local vendors also took part in the programme as food retailers and were able to benefit from technical trainings to improve the organization of their business. A pilot urban garden project was also implemented in the districts of Djobel and Carrefour Feuille (Terre Blanche zone).

Assessment

Two years following the earthquake, households in Port-au-Prince had not yet fully recovered: their resiliency to shocks as well as their food and nutrition situation was still severely eroded and the drastic rise in food prices which occurred immediately following the earthquake had not yet subsided.

According to UNICEF, chronic malnutrition affects 300,000 Haitian children and causes up to half of child deaths in the country every year.¹

As a response, ACF conducted a rapid market assessment² indicating that staple and fresh products were locally available and in sufficient quantity, however were not accessible to the most vulnerable populations due to high food prices. The family food basket used here as a benchmark showed that roughly 25% of expenditures in Haitian households was allocated to fresh produce. This confirms surveys taken by ACF on food and nutrition practices which indicated that households' eat fruits and vegetables less than two times a week.³

ACF found that the use of Fresh Food Vouchers, instead of a classic in-kind distribution of imported food was the most appropriate response to the lack of access to a nutritious diet. It was made possible due to the ease of access to markets and

payment institutions, and because staple food and fresh produce were available. Since the food supply was sufficient and the number of voucher beneficiaries' limited, there was little concern that the programme would lead to food price inflation. On the contrary, it was expected that the local economy would benefit from the programme, especially merchants and local fresh food producers.



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¹Steinlechner, Benjamin, "At a glance: Haïti. Fighting malnutrition and building capacity for child health in Haïti's camps", UNICEF, 13/04/2011.

²Based on EMMA methodology ; Albu M (2010) Emergency Market Mapping and Analysis Toolkit. Practical Action Publishing Ltd: United Kingdom.

³Action Contre la Faim, Rapport d'analyse des enquêtes ex ante connaissances, attitudes et pratiques en nutrition et hygiène, January 2012. (Unpublished document ; available from ACF France- 4 rue Niepce, 75014, Paris, France).



Programme overview and rationale

In April 2011, ACF launched a new food voucher programme in Port-au-Prince. Three districts were selected: Solino, Carrefour Feuille and Canapé Vert.

The objective of this programme was:

The improvement of the nutritional and economic situations of populations affected in target neighbourhoods in Port-au-Prince.

Through:

- 1. The support of diet diversification**
- 2. Preserving the main financial means of the family to ensure adequate access to basic goods and services (housing, education, and health care)**
- 3. The regeneration and support of the economic activity for vendors in target neighbourhoods**

Key activities of the programme :

• Fresh Food Voucher distribution

In addition to Fresh Food Vouchers (“Koupon Mangé Fré”) ACF implemented staple food vouchers (“Koupon Mangé”). ACF therefore chose to distribute staple food vouchers to supplement the diversification strategy achieved through the Fresh Food Vouchers. The additional economic support brought on by staple food vouchers enabled households to generate savings in order to reinvest in recapitalizing economic activities, to pay tuition fees or to rebuild or repair their homes.

• Sensitisation on dietary diversification, hygiene and care practices

Awareness sessions on food diversification, exclusive breastfeeding practices and hygiene were held in the targeted districts and during the distribution of vouchers. ACF also conducted interactive cooking demonstrations to reinforce messages on the nutrition value of certain products and on how these products must be stored and prepared.



Implementation

• Reinforce retail capacities

ACF offered trainings to reinforce the merchants' capacities and thus, their resiliency to shocks. The trainings focused on food safety management and marketing skills to help the merchants find new clients and to find ways to supply good quality food for their consumers.

• Growing-bag garden production

As part of the programme, ACF also implemented an innovative urban garden pilot project which included 200 households. The goal was to support fresh food growing in urban areas and to provide the means for vulnerable households to diversify their food consumption through the distribution of tools and vegetable seeds.

Community based nurseries were also created for the production of seedlings. ACF paid particular attention to the selection of these seeds in order to fit the households' eating habits and the seasonal variations. Additionally, beneficiaries could benefit from technical trainings offered by two agriculture instructors.

Beneficiary selection and targeting

Beneficiaries were selected on a participatory basis, and then on pre-defined conditions of vulnerability. From June to July, ACF conducted a vulnerability assessment and defined common criteria with other NGOs to select the households, paying particular attention to households with pregnant or breast feeding women and/or children under 5.

Food vouchers targeted 4,800 households which represented 28,800 individuals. There were 27,000 direct beneficiaries receiving food vouchers for four months and 300 vendors. In addition, 200 households were selected to be involved in the pilot garden project.

Setting the value

The food voucher beneficiaries received the equivalent of HTG 2,250 (approximately €45) per month for four months: 5 staple food vouchers of HTG 200, 5 fresh food vouchers of HTG 200 and one energy voucher of HTG 250.

The energy voucher was created after an assessment conducted at the onset of the programme highlighted the fact that access to energy, especially to charcoal, was a key factor for food security (30% of the food basket expenses.)

- Food vouchers for fresh products were set to represent 75% of household expenses for this type of food.
- Food vouchers for staple foods were set to represent 25% of household expenses for this type of food.
- Energy voucher were set to represent 30% of household expenses for this item.

Programme impact

Payment method and costs

ACF strove to avoid any risks of counterfeit by creating different vouchers each month. Each round of vouchers were made with different colors and holograms. The use of holograms permitted to print basic paper vouchers locally without risking replication.

Beneficiaries were also given identification cards before voucher distributions. The voucher serial number corresponded to the beneficiaries ID card number.

• Partnership with Sogexpress bank.

ACF set up a partnership with the Sogexpress bank, a local money transfer agency to redeem vouchers to vendors. In the end, Sogexpress accepted to provide 8 voucher exchange points, located near the markets selected for the programme. In return, ACF accepted to suspend the voucher refund during Christmas to avoid any Western Union transactions slow down during this crucial period.

ACF conducted monitoring activities both during and after the project. The findings showed that the programme had an overall positive impact on the beneficiary's nutritional status and their capacities for resilience.

According to beneficiaries, the programme had a positive impact on their food diversification, giving them better economic access to a diversified diet and improved knowledge on good nutrition practices. The increased income generated by the vouchers permitted an overall reduction of 25% of the households' debt rate, and money saved was primarily invested in households' children education.

During Post-Distribution monitoring, focus groups affirmed that the voucher programme did not create tensions within the community, and rather reinforced solidarity within the community. In terms of nutrition and hygiene practices, the final Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP) survey showed a significant improvement of the food consumption score, with increased intakes of high quality proteins and micronutrients. Hygiene and breastfeeding practices were also notably improved.

As for stallholders, nearly 90 % affirmed that they generated more revenues than before the programme. This additional revenue was mainly invested in the capitalization of the merchants' businesses, but also in education and health care. For them,

the programme largely contributed to the revitalization of the local market and to an upturn in the local economy. However, ACF's final assessment showed that the economic impact for consumers largely depended on the location of the markets: markets situated near larger distribution sites were particularly advantageous for those clients close in proximity whereas the relocation of certain distribution sites for security reasons was a major disruption for consumers that solely relied on these sites.

Though this programme was generally successful in improving beneficiaries' diet diversity and productive assets, the short-term results do not necessarily indicate longer-term stability. Indeed, food diversification, proper hygiene and nutrition practices are intrinsically related to the increase of households' income, especially for the poorest. Poverty and other structural constraints need to be addressed for longer-term effects, which this intervention did not include.



Lessons learned and recommendations

- Devise communication strategies that can overcome challenges such as distance, location or time constraints to facilitate sharing information. Since nearly all beneficiaries have a mobile phone, it would be interesting for future programmes to use this as a means to inform beneficiaries of certain information.
- Bear in mind that the objective of supporting local food consumption through the purchase of local products with vouchers has to be put in the context of Haiti's dependence on food imports. Imported rice is often cheaper than locally produced rice, and allowing households to buy it represents bigger quantities, especially for the poorest households.
- Carefully choose the financing partner according to its capacities in terms of control systems, audit and transparency.
- The value of staple food vouchers (covering 25% of the basic needs of households) could be scaled up to cover a greater share of household expenditure on staple products and ensure greater food diversification (e. g at the last voucher distribution, the value of the staple food vouchers was re-evaluated upward which encouraged the consumption of fresh produce)
- Carefully assess the impacts of the location of distribution sites and analyze and integrate them to the site selection procedures (especially logistical ones). The reference markets could also be chosen after the selection of the distribution places.
- Reinforce the supervision of stallholders in the markets in order to avoid vouchers misuse.
- Ensure that non selected households could also benefit from the sensitization sessions on nutrition and care practices.

Contact details and further reading

Nathalie Wirt, Food Security and Livelihoods Advisor, ACF France,
nwirt@actioncontrelafaim.org

Julien Morel, Senior Food Assistance Advisor, ACF France,
jmorel@actioncontrelafaim.org



This document is part of a set of case studies on ACF Food Security and Livelihoods interventions which aim to reduce and/or prevent undernutrition. It has been developed by the ACF “Aligning Food Security and Livelihoods with Nutrition” Working Group, with the support of Elodie Ho in collaboration with ACF project managers. The layout was done by Verena Pandini. The aim of the “Aligning Food Security and Livelihoods with Nutrition” Working Group is to promote and scale up nutrition sensitive Food Security and Livelihoods interventions, within ACF as well as partner organizations. The Working Group promotes these interventions by gathering lessons, building evidence, developing tools and guidance and building capacity.

For more information on the “Aligning” approach, please refer to the ACF manual:
Maximising the nutritional impact of Food Security and Livelihoods interventions. A manual for field workers.
<http://www.actioncontrelafaim.org/fr/content/maximising-nutritional-impact-fsl-interventions>

