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Compassion to Victims of War: Food Aid to Internally Displaced Persons in Northern Uganda, 2002-2007

Using primarily qualitative methods, this research examines the quality, effectiveness, efficiency and relevance of food aid in addressing the food needs of internally displaced persons in Northern Uganda, a case study of Pader district, Awere sub-county. Over a twenty-year period, 1987-2007, the domestic and international donor communities allocated large sums of money and other forms of resources to Northern Uganda as a response to the humanitarian crisis which over the years arose due to the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) insurgency and the resultant conflict in the region and for the greater part, these contributions were earmarked for food aid. On the other hand, hunger and malnutrition continued to characterise the area. It is reported that more than the war ever did, hunger and disease inflicted on the northern region some of the highest death rates seen in the world in modern times. The study, therefore, mainly sought to examine the responsiveness of food aid to the food crisis in Northern Uganda; assess the quality, relevance and efficiency of food aid and examine the extent to which food aid has addressed risk and vulnerability and helped to build people's livelihoods. The findings of the research indicate that Pader district has for long suffered a range of shocks, for instance, the Karimojong raids, the LRA war, floods and prolonged drought causing food shortages and eventually the need for food aid interventions to help reduce the resultant effects of starvation, malnutrition, and hunger induced deaths among others. The food aid predominately provided by WFP through partner organisations (World Vision Uganda) to the district for about a decade is reported to have helped meet immediate and short term food needs. However, its case for addressing long term risks and vulnerabilities is not very evident and thus remains debatable. Furthermore, crucial aspects such as people's rights, priorities/choices and culture were also noted not to have been fully observed as well as the quality of the food distributed being poor in some instances, and hence minimising the effectiveness of the aid. The food aid distribution systems and structures employed were also noted to have been riddled with several imperfections thus reducing its responsiveness and further exacerbating vulnerability. In summary, food aid is recognised as a crucial tool for both recovery and development from a crisis. Therefore, clear systems and structures for more effective and inclusive food aid targeting and delivery are very vital to address immediate humanitarian needs, recovery as well as development needs in the short and long term respectively. It is recommended that traditional leadership or governance structures/mechanisms and institutions where existent, should be employed for more equitable, inclusive and thus effective distribution of food aid; Food aid actors should identify and implement food aid programmes that meet both short and long term food needs of affected communities in order to address protracted vulnerabilities. In addition, efforts towards sustaining benefits of short term food assistance should be developed to reduce dependency but also increase effectiveness of food aid beyond the emergency phase.

Keywords: Victims of War, Food Aid, Internally displaced people, Northern Uganda