



WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME Ecuador

ASSISTANCE TO REFUGEES AND PERSONS AFFECTED BY COLOMBIAN CONFLICT – Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation (PRRO)

Background

WFP works with local governments to introduce **innovative solutions** to promote the integration of the over 1,000 new asylum-seekers that enter Ecuador each month.

- Refugees and poor Ecuadoreans have poor diet diversity, consuming carbohydrates and fats, with little protein and micronutrients. Thus, **anemia** is still a problem for children and women; and **chronic malnutrition** is also high at 32.6 percent in children between 1 and 2 years of age. WFP works with the Government of Ecuador to eradicate chronic **malnutrition**, an important national goal, and to promote quality diets.
- About 43 percent of refugee households are headed by women; **94 percent suffer from gender-based violence** as many flee Colombia without male partners, leaving them vulnerable to abuse. Colombian refugees, especially women, face physical threats; labour exploitation, human trafficking and negative coping mechanisms. WFP is working with partners to confront gender bias and empower women to settle in their new environment.
- Almost 24 percent of Ecuadorian households and 68 percent of indigenous people live in **poverty** and are unable to find employment. Small farmers, especially women, have unstable livelihoods and limited access to markets. WFP procures food commodities locally and buys nutritious food products directly from local farmer associations with a special attention to women's farmer associations. WFP aims to empower these associations and **stimulate local markets**.
- During 2013, tension and **security incidents** have increased in the northern provinces. In April 2013, the Government of Ecuador declared the importance of defending its territory from Colombian irregular armed groups. During the second semester, the increasing presence of these groups in the northern border has resulted in several security incidents (against helicopters in Sucumbíos and San Lorenzo, as well as several clashes between Ecuadorian military forces and Colombian irregular armed groups).

PRRO Objectives

Following national priorities and in coordination with local governments, the objectives of WFP's PRRO in Ecuador are to:

- Meet the urgent food needs of the most vulnerable and non-self-reliant Colombian asylum seekers, without creating tensions between Colombian refugees and Ecuadorean populations. Relief activities ensure that the immediate food needs of new Colombian asylum seekers who require protection and assistance under international law are met.
- Support or restore the food and nutrition security of Colombian refugees and conflict-affected, vulnerable Ecuadoreans. The recovery component contributes to stability and self-reliance and includes actions which: 1) Support resettlement and livelihoods by improving skills through trainings, including gender specific trainings; providing incentives for Colombians to send children to school and promoting quality diets and good family nutrition; and 2) Improve livelihoods and family food and nutrition security through community-based integration activities that stimulate local food production and restore degraded natural resources. Women producers and farmer associations are prioritized and WFP has set targets to ensure equal participation of women in all PRRO activities.

Protection and Gender

WFP in Ecuador has integrated protection and gender strategies as part of the PRRO. Working with UNHCR and other partners, a number of innovative actions are now part of WFP's programme. WFP gives particular attention to women's special needs by providing: activities for children during training sessions, improved waiting spaces with information presentations, and reduced waiting times for transfers. Participatory information sharing and feedback opportunities enhance dialogue with the clients WFP serves, in order to better understand their concerns. As well, with UNHCR and others, legal, psycho-social and employment support, are part of the humanitarian package provided. An important component of WFP's efforts is to work to put an end to gender-based violence. WFP and partners provide support to women who suffered from gender-based violence through food assistance and training to women who end up in shelters, for example, in Sucumbios in partnership with UNHCR and the Federation of Women.



Innovative Strategies

WFP has incorporated the following innovative strategies in both components of the PRRO, among others:

- **Electronic Transfers:** An electronic card allows beneficiaries to access quality diets by purchasing at local stores fresh, healthy and diverse food (fruits, vegetables, eggs, meats and dairy products) locally produced by small farmers. The card is part of a technology or platform which allows WFP and partners to improve the efficiency of transactions; from the targeting of beneficiaries to documenting purchases, measuring outcomes, to financial accountability.
- **Gender Empowerment:** Women represent 52 percent of PRRO beneficiaries. With support of partner HIAS and the private sector, WFP set up activities for children during nutrition trainings, so mothers can concentrate and learn. In all activities WFP seeks to empower women. For example, small farmer associations that provide fresh products for the PRRO must have a majority of women participants. In Julio Andrade in Carchi, 94 women and 6 men openly discussed daily gender violence in their families and lives, and a high number of cases needing protection efforts were identified. The next step is to build a protection network to offer women further support.
- **Local Purchases in Partnership:** With a focus on quality diets and stimulating local markets, WFP works with variety local partners, including supermarkets, government shops, fairs and mobile shops. These diverse partners allow WFP to develop and test different procurement and distribution models to inform public policy decision making.
- **Strong Partnerships with Local Governments:** Decentralized government partners are central to WFP's implementation strategy. WFP and local governments plan, execute and cost-share for the implementation of PRRO activities at province and municipal level. Local government contributions, in kind-- logistics, human resources-- and financial reach more than US\$800,000 to date. WFP also strengthens capacities of partners in financial accountability, logistics, targeting and gender.

Project Results

At mid-term, the PRRO has achieved important results, including the following:

- The PRRO has improved the **food and nutrition security** of new asylum seekers, refugees and vulnerable Ecuadorians and their families. A mid-term evaluation, conducted at the end of 2012, found that the combination of food rations and conditioned electronic cards have had a **positive impact** on the food and nutrition security of targeted populations: 71 percent of households participating in the PRRO had reached an acceptable level of dietary diversity and 82 percent an acceptable level of food consumption, compared with only 18 percent before receiving WFP assistance. Families that had at least six months of assistance consumed products from seven out of 10 food groups, compared with only four upon entering the programme.
- The evaluation found that **electronic food cards** are an essential tool for improving dietary diversity; however, they must be **conditioned** to the purchase of nutritious foods according to recognized nutrition standards.
- WFP has **improved incomes** of small producers, with a focus on women, through local purchases made to small farmer associations. Currently WFP works with 23 associations regrouping 889 producers; 74 percent are women. Incomes of women farmers have increased by around \$25 per month in selected locations.
- WFP's work has helped **to reduce tensions**; integration of refugee population in host communities. For example, Colombian and Ecuadorian parents collaborate in joint meal preparation for children in more than 150 schools.
- This year WFP intends to evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of school meal activities in remote rural areas. Of interest is the dietary diversity of children in the programme compared with those who only receive the government's breakfast programme, anaemia levels and the retention of girls and boys in primary school.

WFP in Ecuador needs US\$2 million to continue innovative work to ensure that Colombian refugees, new asylum-seekers and conflict-affected Ecuadorians are food and nutrition secure.

Contacts: Deborah.Hines@wfp.org or Nelson.Ortega@wfp.org
WFP office in Quito, Ecuador: (593) 2 2460330 Ext. 1606 or 1619



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