

## Emergency food assistance: Lessons learnt from a post- earthquake operation in Haiti

Immediately after the earthquake in Haiti in January 2010, GTZ launched an emergency food aid project together with several partners. The following article gives an account of experience with, and success factors in, such a measure.

In its immediate response to the Haiti earthquake, the German Ministry of Economic Cooperation (BMZ) provided one million euro for emergency food aid. Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) organised procurement and transport via its country office in the neighbouring Dominican Republic, making use of an ongoing Development-oriented Emergency and Transitional Aid (DETA) project to deploy staff and facilities to organise on-site distribution. Leogane, a badly hit town 35 kilometres west of Port-au-Prince, was chosen for the intervention, and food distribution began on the 22nd January 2010. In selecting distribution points and carrying out the distribution, GTZ co-operated closely with the local administration, local emergency committees and UN and Canadian security forces based in Leogane. The implementing partners included Deutsche Welthungerhilfe, Arbeiter-Samariter-Bund, Kindernothilfe, CARE Haiti and Help. By the time the operation ended, on the 23rd February, 135,860 boxes had been distributed containing ten-day rations of wheat flour, rice, beans, oil and sugar (a total of roughly 1,000 tons of food in all). The operation helped mitigate acute food shortages in Leogane and surrounding areas.

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### ■ Lessons learnt

**Rapid response.** Because a DETA project was already running in another region of the country, it was possible to react promptly and effectively in the wake of the earthquake. Indeed, GTZ was operational just two days after the earthquake had struck. The support of the GTZ office in the Dominican

Republic also allowed for very fast procurement, packing and transport of the food assistance.

**Co-ordination.** Aid agencies were unable to reach areas outside of Port Leogane immediately after the earthquake. According to the Situation Report of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs of

### Factors contributing to a successful emergency aid operation

Success achieved with the operation in Leogane can be traced back to positive interaction between specific external and internal factors:

#### External factors:

- The neighbouring country, the Dominican Republic, was not affected by the earthquake; it was economically relatively well developed and could be used as a source of procurement for the required food items.
- GTZ had a country office in the Dominican Republic which could immediately initiate and organise procurement, packing and transport.
- The presence of a GTZ-DETA project in Haiti provided an organisational basis for the emergency operation and facilitated the immediate mobilisation of staff and transport capacities. The staff were familiar with local conditions and had established contacts for organising and implementing the operation in co-ordination and co-operation with other organisations.
- There was a relatively fast and clear assignment of the intervention's geographical area.
- The presence of UN and Canadian forces ensured security during the operation.
- Reliable and well-established civil society organisations were present for co-operation.

#### Internal factors:

- Staff had experience with emergency operations and had good management skills and a talent for improvisation.
- There was good communication, co-ordination and co-operation among the team and with partners.
- Processes (logistics, distribution) were well-structured.
- There was awareness of and responsiveness to priorities, and staff were flexible and well-adjusted to adverse and unforeseen conditions.

*Food distribution with UN military support.*

21st January 2010, "The Government has asked humanitarian partners for the rapid provision of humanitarian assistance to affected regions outside of Port-au-Prince, such as Leogane, Petit Goave and Grand Goave. Humanitarian assistance including food, water, shelter and medical assistance is reaching these areas but a more detailed overview of the presence of humanitarian partners and their activities is required". Identifying and allocating the intervention area was handled by the WFP-led Food Aid Cluster. Co-ordination between GTZ and World Food Programme (WFP) was efficient, and the operation began the day after the decision had been taken to allocate the Leogane area to GTZ. Co-ordination with local food committees was also successful.

**Food rations: composition and packaging.** The distributed food rations provided 2,890 kcal of nutritional value per day, exceeding by a third the minimum requirement of 2,100 kcal a day. The rations were packaged in cardboard boxes. Although this specific type of packaging was slightly more expensive, the decision to use cardboard boxes was crucial to the success of the operation. The boxes were easier to handle, distribute and transport, and they were also effectively reused, rather than discarded, by the affected population.

**Logistics.** GTZ worked in close co-operation with the UN and Canadian security forces in order to ensure the secure transport, storage and distribution of the food rations. Co-operation with the military proved very successful in terms of preventing looting and identifying secure and appropriate



Photo: GTZ

distribution points. In addition, the military was able to reach and provide assistance to affected populations in otherwise inaccessible areas.

**Organising the distribution.** Emergency committees were established to facilitate the organisation of distributions. In co-operation with the committees, it was decided that food distributions would exclusively target women and children. Military forces were present during distributions, preventing any clashes. In addition, the targeting effectively ensured that the needs of all household members (including men) were met, and that the distributed goods were consumed rather than sold.

**Phasing out and handing over.** From its conception, it was decided that the emergency response project would be time-limited, and should ensure the provision of foodstuffs to those in need until other humanitarian organisations could take over in the area. Co-ordination with the regional Food Aid Cluster

proved positive right from the start, and the handover was planned and worked out in co-operation with WFP throughout the month-long intervention. As a result, WFP was fully prepared to take over once GTZ's four-week intervention came to an end, and the handover was smooth and effective.

## Zusammenfassung

Unmittelbar nach dem Erdbeben im Januar 2010 hat die GTZ gemeinsam mit mehreren Partnern in Haiti ein Projekt zur Nahrungsmittelnothilfe durchgeführt. Innerhalb eines Monats wurden rund 1 000 Tonnen Lebensmittel verteilt. Der Beitrag beschreibt die Erfahrungen und Faktoren, die für den Erfolg einer solchen Maßnahme entscheidend sind.

## Resumen

Inmediatamente después del sismo de enero de 2010, la GTZ llevó a cabo en Haití un proyecto de ayuda alimentaria de emergencia con diversos socios. En el espacio de un mes se distribuyeron alrededor de mil toneladas de alimentos. El aporte describe las experiencias y los factores decisivos para el éxito de este tipo de medida.