Abridged Final Report

Evaluation of Humanitarian Action

Prepared for: GOAL - Syria Programme

Implemented by: International Advisory, Products and Systems (iAPS)

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GOAL

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Contents

Executive Summary

This external evaluation was commissioned by GOAL in order to assess the performance of its USAID-funded projects responding to the humanitarian crisis in Syria. The evaluation, implemented by International Advisory Products and Services (iAPS) covers grants from OFDA for humanitarian assistance including non-food items, shelter and WASH support and two grants from Food for Peace providing general food rations and in-kind support to bakeries in the Idleb and northern Hama governorates of northern Syria.

The evaluation involved an extensive review of GOAL's own programming and monitoring and evaluation records and analysis, interviews with 31 key informants representing a range of stakeholders and a number of project visits and semi-structured interviews with GOAL project beneficiaries and representatives of local authorities inside Syria itself.

Utilising the OECD's standard evaluation criteria the evaluation examines the key operating modalities adopted by GOAL, including direct implementation and the use of local partnerships and the increasing use of voucher-based distributions to support existing markets wherever they are functioning. The report provides an overview of both progress and an assessment of changes that GOAL has introduced to the projects in response to its own analysis and learning as incorporated into the latest modifications to project agreements. The report concluded with a series of findings and recommendations that are intended to provide an objective, external view on the projects and offer programmatic and organisational suggestions for further consideration and development.

This is an abridged version of the full report designed to be of interest to the wider humanitarian community in Syria, focusing on programme context, challenges and GOAL's specific responses. More detail, including the agency-specific recommendations from the evaluation can be found in the full report.

Background and chronology of the humanitarian crisis in Syria

The beginning of the crisis in Syria is usually traced back to demonstrations in March 2011 in the southern city of Deraa and the capital Damascus calling for the release of political prisoners during which a number of demonstrators were shot dead by security forces. By early June disturbances and violence had spread to other parts of the country with the Syrian government alleging that 120 security personnel had been killed in the north-western town of Jisr al-Shughour in Idleb governorate. In October 2011 Syrian opposition groups meeting in Turkey announced the formation of the Syrian National Council (SNC) with the stated objective of overthrowing the Syrian government led by President Basher al-Assad.

As the year progressed internationally sponsored moves to try to resolve the crisis proved unsuccessful, with the Arab League voting to suspend Syria and imposing sanctions as a result of the government's failure to implement an Arab-sponsored peace plan. In December 2011 the opposition activists reported a massacre of around 70 army defectors by the Syrian army around Jabal al-Zawiya in Idleb governorate. Moving into 2012 the situation became characterised by increasing military gains by the opposition and the development of a number of Syrian army sieges around key cities, most notably Homs, Aleppo and parts of Damascus. A combined UN-Arab League backed peace plan designed to end all violence, provide humanitarian relief and secure a peaceful transition of power came to nothing as UN-deployed monitors were forced to suspend their operations in mid-June in the face of escalating violence. In late September the main opposition's Free Syrian Army (FSA) moved its command headquarters from southern Turkey into opposition-controlled areas of northern Syria and in October they seized control of Maarat al-Naman, a strategic town in Idleb on the highway linking Damascus and Aleppo. By late December 2012 opposition forces had succeeded in taking the town of Harem in Idleb on the Turkish border and significant parts of rural western Hama governorate.

The first quarter of 2013 saw further gains for the main opposition and other more fundamental Islamist groups, particularly the al-Nusra Front in Idleb and Raqqa governorates. However, this probably marked a high point for the opposition as government forces were then bolstered by the intervention of Hezbollah fighters from Lebanon and predictions of the imminent fall of the Assad regime proved premature. Serious clashes and territorial gains and losses on both sides were to continue throughout the summer months when a new dynamic arose in the form of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) which began a battle for territory by attacking the FSA and even other Islamist groups. By late November ISIS had captured territory stretching as far as the village of Atme in the northwest of Idleb.

One particularly troubling aspect of the Syrian civil war has been serious human rights abuses including: the proven use of chemical weapons (such as Sarin and chlorine gas), cluster munitions, the indiscriminate use of improvised 'barrel bombs' and other violations of international humanitarian law, particularly associated with the prolonged sieges of a number of cities. The use of chemical weapons in March-April and August 2013 lead the United States to threaten air attacks on Syria leading to international pressure from Syria's ally Russia for the Syrian government (without acknowledging its responsibility for the use of such weapons) to agree a program for the destruction of its chemical weapon stockpiles in September of the same year.

At the beginning of 2014 a coalition of armed opposition grouping, including the FSA, Army of the Mujahideen and the Islamic Front launched an offensive against ISIS in Aleppo, Idleb and Raqqa, with al-Nusra Front joining in mid-February to successfully push ISIS out of Idleb by early March. While these events were unfolding inside Syria, a further attempt to re-start a peace process was launched in the form of the UN-sponsored Geneva II Conference on Syria which met over two rounds, between 22-31 January and 10-15 February, with no tangible results. Opposition in-fighting in the north allowed government forces to make some further gains elsewhere in the country, while in late April the FSA launched an offensive against ISIS in Raqqa where it had retreated to consolidate its forces. Presidential elections held in government controlled areas of the country on 3 June returned Bashar al-Assad to office with a reported 88.7% of the votes cast. By July ISIS, emboldened and re-supplied by its gains in Iraq, was once again on the offensive in northern Syria.

The humanitarian response to the Syrian crisis has been greatly complicated and constrained by the political realities of a civil war in which issues of sovereignty long outweighed the humanitarian imperative within the United Nations. Although UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2139 of 22 February 2014 demanded all parties allow humanitarian assistance across conflict lines a lack of compliance resulted in the need for a further resolution (UNSCR 2165 of 14 July 2014) to authorise cross-border and cross line access for the UN and its partners for the delivery of humanitarian aid without state consent.

The true human cost of the crisis in Syria in terms of suffering and loss is incalculable. The stark numbers indicate that of a population of 21,533,000 (2010 estimate)[1] , 191,000 people have been killed (March 2011 – April 2014)[2], 2.9 million[3] forced to take refugee outside of Syria's borders and 6.45 million displaced from their homes within Syria, while a total of around 10.8 million[4] (50% of the entire population) are in need of assistance.

[1] United Nations World Population Prospects: 2012 Revision

[2] UNHCHR, AP report 22 August 2014

[3] www.ocha.org/syria

[4] Ibid

Context for GOAL's humanitarian response in Idleb and Hama

GOAL became operational in Syria in November 2012 in the context of cross-border operations from Turkey. Its presence in Turkey was formally legitimised by its successful registration as an international Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) in Turkey on 25 May 2013. The initial program targeted northern parts of Idleb governorate directly bordering Turkey and subsequently expanded into southern Idleb and parts of northern Hama governorate mainly through the introduction of partner-based implementation. The context for GOAL's engagement in Idleb and Hama can be characterised by the following factors:

High and increasing levels of need compounded by a very significant influx and continuing influx of internally displaced persons (IDPs) fleeing violence in contested areas.

Volatile and unpredictable security environment: Idleb was scene of some of the earliest atrocities of the Syrian civil war and has continued to be heavily contested by different parties due to its key strategic position along the Turkish border and wedged between the government strongholds of Lattakia to the west and the pivotal city of Aleppo to the east. Control of Idleb and the border with Turkey remains an important objective for ISIS in its desire for the creation of an Islamic State (IS). The most significant outcome of this situation is the withdrawal of GOAL international staff from November 2013 onward, other than a brief WASH and security assessment in March 2014.

Entering Buzghar in Qourqania, a town under the control of the al-Nusra Front whose slogans mark its territory and allegiance to al-Qaeda

Presence of active markets: Proximity to the Turkish border creating market-based interventions.

Challenging environment for coordination: Cross-border operations entailing a number of complicating factors, including official access, logistics, legitimacy and acceptance on both sides of the border and in particular in Syria the divide between government and opposition controlled territory.

Scope of the evaluation

The scope of this evaluation is guided by its terms of reference (ToR) which establishes its purpose:

To assess the implementation of GOAL's USAID funded projects by building on the baseline, monitoring data and lessons learnt through the project cycle

With a focus on the following requirements:

- An assessment of program appropriateness and effectiveness,
- A review of GOAL's operational systems and structure and their appropriateness to program context and delivery, and
- Formulate specific immediate and longer-term recommendations to improve implementation impact and help support strategic thinking.

The following projects form the basis for the programmatic aspects of the evaluation:

Donor:	USAID, Office of Foreign Disasters' Assistance (OFDA)
Project title:	Emergency support to conflict-affected internally displaced and host communities in Idleb and Hama Governorates, Syria
Start date:	25 January 2013
End date:	30 April 2015 (including modifications)
Value:	US$ 22,800,000 (cumulative including modifications)

Donor:	USAID, Office of Food for Peace (FFP)
Project title:	Emergency food support to conflict-affected people in Idleb and Hama Governorates, Syria
Start date:	14 March 2013
End date:	31 December 2014 (including modifications)
Value:	US$ 38,112,011 (cumulative including modifications)

Donor:	USAID, Office of Food for Peace (FFP)
Project title:	Emergency support to improve bread supply, quality and access for conflict affected people in Idleb and Hama Governorates, Syria
Start date:	1 September 2013
End date:	31 March 2015 (including modifications)
Value:	US$ 8,907,904 (cumulative including modifications)

Methodology

The evaluation relies on a number of layers of assessment. The first is a review of the documentation of the projects provided by GOAL, to include the project proposals and reports, a number of commissioned reports and various analytical reports (including partner capability assessments, organisational capacity assessments of Relief Committees, a nutrition assessment and logistics and human resources reviews) and independent Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) reports, including Post-Distribution Monitoring (PDM) and Local Council/Relief Committee Satisfaction Surveys.

The second layer is a number of Key Informant Interviews with a range of stakeholders, including GOAL international staff and GOAL national staff working inside Syria. External stakeholders have also been consulted in the form of a number of the Co-Leads of the most relevant sectoral Working Groups, key figures in a number of peer organisations (other international NGOs implementing in the same geographical areas or working in adjacent areas in the same sectors) and a small number of donor representatives. In total 31 Key Informant Interviews were conducted, comprising 16 GOAL employees and 15 external persons. These key informants were accessible to the international evaluator in Turkey, either in person or via telephone or Skype. The range of key informants allows for the triangulation on information between multiple sources, both internal and external.

The third layer is the use of field meetings and interviews with GOAL beneficiaries and members of Local Councils and Relief Committees conducted inside Syria. Originally it was proposed to hold formal Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), but difficulties in gathering the necessary groups at short notice resulted in the decision to conduct a larger number of informal interviews and meetings across a number of locations in GOAL's main target area. In total 94 persons (beneficiaries and local authority representatives) were interviewed across 14 locations in three districts.

In addition to the interviews the field evaluation team member was able to attend a GOAL Family Food Ration (FFR) distribution that took place in Beit Armanaz on 27 August and a follow-up distribution in Kunaitra on the 28th as well as seeing some GOAL beneficiary verification taking place.

Family Food Ration (FFR) packages being delivered for distribution at Beit Armanaz, 27 August 2014

The criteria against which the projects and GOAL structure are evaluated are those recommended by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development – Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) listed below:

- Relevance/appropriateness
- Effectiveness
- Coverage
- Efficiency
- Connectedness and sustainability
- Coordination

In assessing the validity of this evaluation report it is important to acknowledge the main constraint that it is in many ways a 'remote evaluation of a remotely managed program' at least in respect of international engagement with the amount of primary data collection being more limited than would ideally have been wished.

Relevance/appropriateness

The relevance of GOAL's USAID-supported programming is assessed against the geographical and sectoral decisions taken, together with the choices of key modalities adopted for program interventions, particularly the mixture of direct and partner-based delivery and the increasing use of redeemable vouchers in contrast to direct in-kind distributions.

Geographically the program targets large parts of Idleb governorate and northern districts of Hama governorate. Sectoral interventions include the distribution of Food, Shelter and Non-Food Items (NFIs), support to bakeries to increase the availability of bread and in the last OFDA modification the introduction of a water supply, sanitation and hygiene promotion (WASH) component.

In trying to assess choices made regarding geographical targeting at the governorate, district or even sub-district level there is a lack of reliable demographic and needs assessment data on which to rely. The most comprehensive needs assessment currently available for Syria is the rapid multi-sectoral Syria Integrated Needs Assessment (SINA) of December 2013. A more specific Idleb assessment is the Syria Needs Assessment Project (SNAP) Idleb Governorate Profile (June 2014) which is based on a synthesis of a number of assessments, including the SINA, the Assistance Coordination Unit (ACU) Dynamic Monitoring Report (Dynamo, covering the period 1 January – 28 February 2014) and GOAL's own sample-based Needs Assessment in 9 Sub-Districts of Idleb and Emergency Market Mapping Analysis (EMMA) in Northern Idleb (both January 2014).

Taking these data constraints into account GOAL's selection of Idleb and northern parts of Hama is judged appropriate on the basis of humanitarian access and high levels of need, including very significant influxes of IDPs. The following characteristics of Idleb with respect to the Syrian conflict and its humanitarian consequences support this choice:

Strategic significance of Idleb: The governorate includes the key Turkish border crossing of Bab al-Hawa as well as two main highways connecting Lattakia to Aleppo and north to the capital Damascus.

Humanitarian access and presence of displacement: The presence of the Bab al-Hawa crossing and long border with Turkey, combined with continuing fighting in Aleppo, Hama and Homs means that the area continues to attract large numbers of IDPs. At the end of 2013 the governorate was already host to 717,000 IDPs and has the highest concentration of IDP camps (85 camps organised in nine clusters)[6]. GOAL itself is not involved in the response to the IDP camps as these are covered by multi-sector responses by other international NGOs, such as the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and Save the Children International, with whom GOAL exercises strong coordination.

Sectorally, the targeted area is witness to large scale needs corresponding to the program sectors included in GOAL's USAID interventions. Despite its proximity to the border Idleb is estimated to have more than 80% of its population living below the poverty line with 70% of households struggling to meet their basic needs in terms of food and non-food items, compared with 55% countrywide[7].

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[6] Idleb Governorate Profile, SNAP, June 2014

[7] Ibid

Within the sub-districts surveyed, SINA found over 800,000 people across Idleb were in need of food aid at the end of 2013, of which approximately 70,300 were in acute or severe need and the remainder in moderate need. Within the sub-districts assessed in Hama, an estimated 25,200 people were acute need of food assistance with a further 162,300 in moderate need at the time of the SINA[8]. With reference to food insecurity and food assistance coverage, the SINA found higher levels of support then present in Idleb compared with Hama which would have included assistance then being provided by GOAL. Since that time there has been no general improvement in the general food situation with new arrivals of IDPs occurring and the existing population having suffered further impoverishment. Food continues to be cited as the priority need by beneficiaries sampled during GOAL's PDM of current activities.

The situation regarding the needs for NFIs, and how those needs may or may not be changing over time, are more difficult to judge. In general the case for widespread distributions of NFIs was initially justified on the grounds of conflict damage to property (buildings and household furniture and belongings) and resulting displacement. As the crisis has progressed and become more protracted the case for general distributions has become more questionable. More recent assessments and GOAL's own PDM have placed general NFIs as a lower priority than food and winter fuel for example. GOAL is seeking to respond to this by increasing amount of support being provided for winter fuel and shelter (repairs and now rent subsidies that are more easily targeted to support IDPs) but is still proposing large numbers of winterization (blankets mainly) and non-seasonal (bedding, hygiene items and kitchenware) distributions in its latest modification. While continuing displacement may justify some of this continued emphasis in the OFDA project there is a need to look at how far targeting of such assistance can be improved. One area under consideration by the Shelter/NFI Working Group (of which GOAL is a leading member) is to move from more general and increasingly elaborate distributions to a simpler package to be maintained as a contingency stock to be used in response to new emergency needs as they arise.

WASH is becoming an increasing problem with an estimated 550,000 people in need[9] as a result of the destruction of water infrastructure and an increasingly impoverished population heavily reliant on expensive and contamination risk-prone water tankering. The emerging problems of water and sanitation related public health concerns endorses GOAL's decision to expand this aspect of its programming and to introduce it under the modification to its OFDA grant.

One area of programming that proved contentious initially was that of subsidising commercial bakeries through the provision of wheat flour and later yeast and plastic bags. There was some discussion early on within USAID Food for Peace (FFP) whether this kind of non-traditional intervention, particular based on regional procurement rather than in-kind donation was justified on the basis of cost-effectiveness, nutritional value and targeting compared with the more traditional food basket distribution which was also taking place. However, a number of near unique circumstances occurred to see the proposal accepted. These included strong cash resources being available and a belief that bread contributes to a number of aspects of social and cultural life in much of the middle-east and Syria in particular. The very Arabic word for bread 'aish' means life and bread can make up more than 50% of the average calorific content of diet of the poor in Syria[10]. There is a Syrian saying that 'when we eat bread we eat it with bread' and anecdotal information suggested that keeping bakeries open can help stabilise a community and deter displacement. Concerns that the use of targeting free bread vouchers might also represent a double-subsidy when combined with fixed price bread have since been addressed by the termination of this aspect of the project in favour of bread being an item that recipients of unrestricted food vouchers will be free to purchase. The bakeries project also faced a number of teething problems when trying to maintain a fixed price for bread, underlying the complexities of trying to intervene in the market of a basic good. The intervention in the bread market will be discussed further under the section of the report dealing with the question of effectiveness.

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[8] Syria Integrated Needs Assessment (SINA), December 2013

[9] Ibid

[10] Quoted by a respondent but not verified

GOAL's approach to the principle of 'do no harm' in designing and implementing its program interventions encompasses two main aspects: first there are efforts to enhance inclusion and protection of vulnerable groups and their special needs and secondly there are efforts to ensure that food and non-food activities are sensitive to their potential impact on markets.

There was less agreement within the program over the issue of making households with pregnant and lactating women a category for prioritisation on the grounds that this is a variable that changes over time (and often difficult to verify) and applies to the majority of households (perhaps as many as 77%)[11] and therefore has limited value in rationing scarce assistance. However it has been retained as a consideration in the specific case of food/nutrition interventions given the potential impact on mother and child health and wellbeing.

Beyond the selection of beneficiaries the distributions themselves are organised with a view to protecting the beneficiaries and reducing potential harm to them through the following measures:

- Pre-distribution speeches emphasis that assistance is free and no-one is entitled to demand money or favour as a condition of receipt.

- Gender segregated lines adopted to ensure equal access and respect for cultural sensitivities.

- An accompanying acceptable adult needing to be present when a child is receiving a voucher.

More broadly GOAL has introduced the position of Gender & Child Protection Officer to address protection mainstreaming in the organisation and prepared GOAL Syria Child Protection policy in March 2014. A Child Protection Risk Assessment Action Plan is already in the process of being implemented and a Gender Analysis and Audit is proposed which will also be used to help develop gender-sensitive livelihoods programming in the future.

The main challenge to ensuring protection is the limited scope for behaviour change in a program which is largely based around intermittent distributions. For example, the practice of children being involved in the collection and transport of relief items looks difficult to break. There was also a concern that attempting to apply a complete prohibition on children under 18 years of age being employed by the contractors involved in GOAL's shelter repair activities might have a negative impact on vulnerable households' incomes. Therefore a code of conduct was introduced, together with a more limited prohibition on children under 15 years of age being involved in house-repair projects.

Turning to the question of the potential for GOAL's distribution activities having the potential to negatively impact the functioning of markets it is important to distinguish between its direct in-kind distributions and voucher-based distributions. In the case of direct in-kind distributions GOAL has analysed the scale of its regional procurement of food stuffs through Turkey and found that the amounts are not significant enough to have a distorting demand side impact on prices. Taking the example of wheat flour, the total requirement for the modification for the FFP bakeries project is estimated to be just 0.17% of Turkish production and imports in 2013[12] and even accounting for anticipated poor rains and harvest in Turkey and Syria in 2014 this procurement is not expected to have a significant impact of prices.

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[11] Multi-sector Assessment in 9 sub-districts in Idleb, GOAL, January 2014

However, this potential poor harvest and drought should be taken into account before the proposal to look at procuring wheat inside Syria is considered, along with the assessment that Syrian agricultural production is currently three million metric tons below pre-war levels[13].

GOAL's increasing use of vouchers to achieve the delivery of food assistance is based on the central premise that it is financial access rather than food availability that is the key barrier to food security for many of the households within its target intervention areas. The same premise of functioning markets is used also to justify the use of vouchers for the delivery of NFIs. This premise has been tested out through the implementation of two Emergency Market Mapping Analyses, one covering wheat flour and vegetables (January 2014) and the second covering rice, lentils and yeast (May 2014). These studies strongly supported the use of vouchers (and even cash if possible) where markets could be safely accessed. The second report concluded: 'Food distributions have improved consumption at household level but have also contributed to lower demand on the market to some extent, which negatively impacted on local retailers' and recommended that '…a market-based approach to make sure that humanitarian programmes do not hamper the capacity of local markets to meet the needs of the population[14].'

Widespread support for the increased use of vouchers was voiced by all groups that the evaluation team spoke with, including the FSL and Shelter/NFI Working Group Coordinators, donors, Local Councils and Relief Committees and beneficiaries. For beneficiaries asked what changes they would like to see in the process of receiving humanitarian assistance the use of vouchers was the most frequently mentioned request. The obvious advantages are that it increases choice for beneficiaries, including given them access to fresh food items in particular, while also strengthening markets in support of GOAL's commitment to 'do no harm.'

While endorsing the movement into voucher-based assistance in general it is important to recognise a series of potential risks that need to be taken into account. The first is that any deterioration in the functioning of local markets will likely have a negative impact on the potential purchasing power of vouchers even though the retailers enrolled in the program are required to post prices. If prices become volatile over time the value assistance will fluctuate whereas the value of imported food and NFI is likely to be more stable due to scale and pre-contracting. GOAL is aware of this risk and has introduced a process of price monitoring of both GOAL and non-GOAL enrolled retailers to identify any possible volatility and disparities. So far information and analysis that is available is limited, particularly over time, and shows no significant deviation in terms of food prices. However data on NFIs showed an as yet unexplained difference in the prices of a number of items such as mattresses and blankets, with the items being significantly higher in the GOAL shops. Should security and market conditions deteriorate GOAL feels that its contracts with supplies in Turkey would allow it to increase its direct procurement and delivery of in-kind supplies, however this remains to be tested.

Another risk is that of leakage, with the risk that voucher recipients may sell their vouchers or shop keepers may allow recipients to purchase goods from the unapproved list of cigarettes, alcohol and dried milk powder. GOAL is addressing this in its monitoring of shopkeepers during the fixed-time shopping periods in order to detect and deter such behaviour. Despite this such leakage at some level is inevitable as indicated by anecdotal information gathered by the evaluation team's field member in the course of interviewing a number of beneficiaries.

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[12]GOAL Project Proposal to USAID FFP, June 2014

[13]FSL Working Group Coordinator communications with the evaluator

[14]EMMA, Rice, Lentils and Yeast Market Systems, Northern Idleb, Syria, GOAL, May 2014

A more significant issue with respect of the use of vouchers for food is that in the course of giving beneficiaries greater choice over their decision of what to buy, GOAL will have less control over its nutritional and calorific value than it does when undertaking in-kind Family Food Ratios. This is significant since the monetary value of the food vouchers is established against the estimated cost of meeting the calorific food value standards set by the FSL Working Group. Therefore with the increasing use of food vouchers comes a need to monitor what households actually purchase and therefore likely consume. This creates an additional data collection burden, but also underlines the need to increase and improve wider nutritional surveillance.

GOAL food vouchers incorporate a number of security features including a hologram and serial number, together with a bar code to enable electronic tracking and recording.

Interestingly, while the FFP proposal argues that a voucher based modality represents a cost-effective solution through reducing logistical and transportation costs incurred when moving and storing food items at scale, GOAL's own calculations show a cost saving of less than 0.5%, with a per beneficiary cost calculation of US$ 21.60 per round for direct FFR distribution compared with US$ 21.50 for a distribution through the use of food vouchers[15].

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[15]GOAL Project Proposal to USAID FFP, June 2014

Effectiveness

The effectiveness of GOAL's USAID projects has been examined firstly in the narrow terms of progress against the project indicators and results and beneficiary and other stakeholders' satisfaction as determined through GOAL's own PDM and satisfaction surveys. This information is supplemented by the results from the interviews conducted by the evaluation's field interviews in Syria itself.

There is a strong reporting framework in place in the form of a Program Database, with a plan to transition from paper based recording to electronic data gathering devises integrated through GOAL's own Program Information Management Systems (PIMS) platform developed with PSI Mobile, a specialist mobile technology company. PIMS is currently active in recording distributions in GOAL areas of implementation and in support of a range of assessments. Full implementation of PIMS, including its use in partner-based implementation is still somewhat in the future. In addition to the use of its own database, GOAL also reports directly to USAID/OFDA (Shelter/NFIs) by weekly updates to its online Award Results Tracking (ART) System. Internal reporting and through the ART is inclusive of GOAL and partner implementation.

A review of the last available quarterly reports[16] indicate that all projects have, or are on target to achieve their beneficiary number and other output targets, although in all cases this has required a number of no-cost time extensions to take into account time lost as a result of the impact of insecurity and border closures. Despite these difficulties the program has managed to maintain a strong level of momentum as illustrated by the growth it has achieved in the course of expanded cost-modifications for all three USAID projects. Sample surveys conducted by GOAL's M&E staff after each round of distributions show high levels of satisfaction with the form and quality of assistance. A number of these perceptions were verified through the field evaluation where interviewees were asked to assess GOAL's work by ascribing a mark along a scale ranging from poor to excellent. The results from this exercise are provided in the table below:

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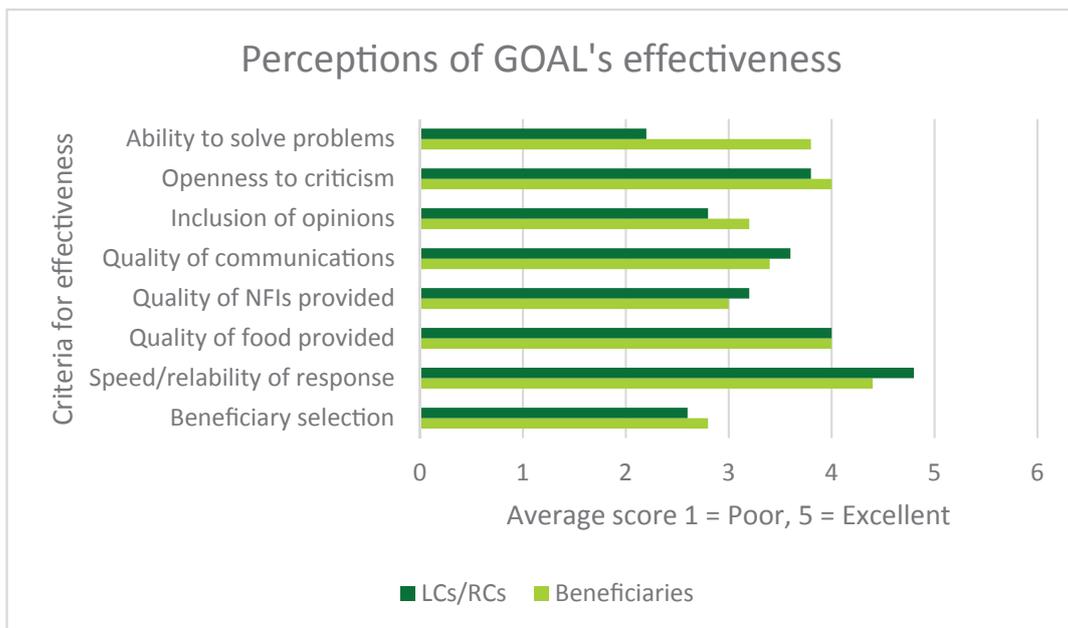
[16] Second quarter donor reports to the end of March 2014

In general the perceptions of beneficiaries and LCs/RCs were relatively consistent and positive, with GOAL being rated particularly highly in terms of its speed and reliability of response and rated well in terms of the quality of its distribution items and openness to criticism. One area where it scored less well was in terms of the beneficiary selection process. Here when examples were requested to support the judgement a number of LC/RC respondents actually felt that they lacked the power to exclude certain households who they felt were not needy. The one aspect where these was a significant difference in perceptions was in terms of GOAL's ability to resolve problems. Beneficiaries rated GOAL highly in this respect, whereas the LCs/RCs felt that GOAL tended to rely on the LCs/RCs themselves to resolve any problems arising.

Project progress and stakeholder perceptions

In addition to routine tracking and reporting of results as included in the project proposals, GOAL has now conducted a baseline assessment for all three USAID projects for which the which the stated objective is '…to get baseline numbers for outcome level indicators for each of the projects[17].' A separate baseline is being finalised to support GOAL's WASH programming, but at the time of writing a number of baseline indicator values remained to be determined.

The report is based on a household survey of a statistically significant sample and although not published until December 2013, significantly after all three USAID projects has commenced, it is stated that the data collection took place before those sampled received any assistance from GOAL.

A review of the six Objectively Verifiable Objectives (OVIs) adopted for the Food Ration distributions would suggest that they are well chosen to reflect dietary variety and food consumption over a defined time period. Given that the Food Ration is intended to be a comprehensive package then a correlation is reasonably to be expected. The OVIs for the Bakeries project are identical to those for the Food Ration project, with the exclusion of the one indicator dealing with recording the number of households who ate from three or more food groups in the previous week before the survey. It is more questionable how closely these indictors can establish a correlation with the results of the Bakeries project which are likely to have less impact on food stocks and number of meals consumed for example. GOAL recognises this limitation in its comments on the results framework included in its last quarterly report to FFP.

Since completing the initial baseline report GOAL has itself decided to add two additional indicators for both the Food Ration and Bakeries projects. These are a Household Dietary Diversity Score (HDDS) measuring the number of food groups consumed in a specific time period and a more complex Coping Strategy Index (CSI) that measures not just the presence of negative coping strategies but also their duration and severity. This development illustrates GOAL's commitment to better understanding the nature of the crisis in Syria and its impact on the population.

What is most significant in the baseline survey is that although it is intended to cover all three projects it contains no OVI or other information relating to the OFDA project. As such it is going to be difficult to say anything about the impact or outcome of the large quantity of NFI distributions when it comes to end-line reporting. This is not unusual in the case of such relief distributions and underlines the need to reconsider the targeting and use of NFIs as a crisis becomes more protracted. GOAL is part of this discussion through its active engagement with the Shelter/NFIs Working Group.

[17] USAID Baseline Survey Report, GOAL, December 2013

The baseline report does discuss issues of income verses expenditure and the adoption of negative coping strategies households and these may, indirectly, help justify some use of NFIs, and to address shelter costs. The suggestion that the average monthly expenditure (24,403 SYP) is more than double average monthly incomes (11,526 SYP) is a startling one if accurate, with the purchase of food accounting for 81% of the total[18].

Support to Bakeries and its impact

"Lu'mat 'aish ahamm haga fi-l-islam"
A bit of bread is the most important thing in Islam

Given the limited correlation that may exist between the input support (wheat flour, yeast and plastic bags) to the Bakeries under the FFP project and the OVIs adopted, the evaluation suggests to look again at the approach to assessing its impact. Currently the project is based on no specific beneficiary targets, other than the indirect assessment of bakery catchment areas which is effectively a pool from which direct (or actual) beneficiaries are drawn.

The Bakeries project requires its own specific M&E plan to be developed to assess how far it achieves its stated objective of increasing access to bread through subsiding production and stabilising the price over time. This would require an assessment a baseline price and output prior to the commencement of assistance, along with ongoing monitoring of price movements relative to a control group of bakeries that are not receiving GOAL assistance.

Redesign of the FFR package

A major revision to the FFP project is a redesign of the contents of the FFR package under the general food distribution. It is stated in the latest modification that this redesign is based on two main factors: a response to issues raised in beneficiary feedback through PDM and the need to develop a more robust and reliable package against potential problems in the logistical supply chain. In truth it is the second factor that has been decisive in the decisions taken to simplify the package. For example even in the limited beneficiary feedback from the evaluation's field work found requests for more variety rather than less, with women interviewed in particular requesting items such as sugar, tea, cheese and milk. However, the decision to redesign the package was not taken quickly or lightly and included the completion of an analysis of the nutritional sensitivity of GOAL's FSL programming by a specialist nutritionist[19].

On balance the evaluator judges that the decision to simplify the package through the removal of four expensive items (tahini, raisins, chick-peas and fava beans which accounted for 30% of the total cost of a package)[20] is well justified in order to increase the number of packages and coverage given the level of needs relative to the available funding. This decision also had the full support of the donor and is in line with the recommendations of the FSL Working Group.

A related simplification has been the adoption of a standard kit to replace a range of kits that were previously provided, including half kits for small households and different kits depending on whether the household was in receipt of the now discontinued free bread vouchers or not. This too is a sensible development with significant logistical advantages.

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[18] Ibid

[19] Summary Analysis of the Nutrition Sensitivity of GOAL Syria's Food Security and Livelihoods Programs, Alison Gardner, June 2014

[20] GOAL Project Proposal to USAID FFP (Bakeries), June 2014

However, there is one anomaly in the kit design relating to it kilo/calorific value. The standard kit has been designed to meet a kilo/calorific content equivalent to 1,500 k/cals for three persons. The 1,500 k/cals target is based on the FSL Working Group guidance for comprehensive general food rations of 2,100 k/cals per person, less 600 k/cals estimated to being met already by other food sources. The anomaly arises in the distribution table adopted by GOAL which provides for one kit for four persons rather than three, therefore representing a degree of under-distribution per person for household with four members.

Although this is a significant notional shortfall it is not immediately easy or simply to determine the potential nutritional impact for a number of reasons. Firstly there is some reason to suggest that the FSL Working Group's estimate of the number of k/cals being provides from other sources may be too low, therefore the amount recommended to be distributed is too high. Earlier studies by GOAL suggested it may be 900 k/cals or more. Equally, if families really are spending an average of 19,724 SYP per month on purchasing food[21] it would seem unlikely that it would only contribute 600 k/cals per person. The average k/cal requirement set also fails to take into account the lower energy requirements of children who make up a significant proportion of most households.

What this discussion makes clear is that there is a need to closely monitor the actual nutritional situation inside Syria to provide early warning of any specific deterioration and the potential need form more targeted assistance. GOAL is already aware of this need as indicted, for example, by its willingness to host the recruitment of a Nutrition Coordinator for a new Nutrition Working Group.

Partnerships and effectiveness

Partnerships with local and international NGOs had been the means by which GOAL had been able to increase the range of its program interventions into areas where the security situation does not currently allow it to directly implement itself. Partnership is also being used as the main modality for program growth, both in terms of geographic growth beginning the process of adding additional sectors of intervention under partners. The table below summarises the current experience with partners based on meetings held with the evaluator in Turkey:

GOAL partners' summary

Partner name	Type	Partnership activities	Motivation for entering partnership	GOAL support as percentage of total program activity
Big Heart	INGO	NFI (direct); Bakeries; FFR	Build scale and credibility with other potential donors	%30+
Polish Humanitarian Action (PAH)	INGO	NFI (direct); Bakeries; FFR	More secure funding and allow it to consolidate its work in existing target areas	%25
Al Noor	LNGO	NFI (direct); FFR	Capacity building, funding and other support	%75

While the overall experience with partnership appears to have been positive for both GOAL and its partners the performance has been mixed with the result that some are expanding as a result of positive results (in the case of Big Heart and PAH) whilst the other with Al Noor is contracting.

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[21] USAID Baseline Survey Report, GOAL, December 2013

The addition of a fourth partner is currently underway in the form of the Syrian Forum (formerly known as the Syrian Business Council). From the relatively brief meetings with partners it is difficult to determine the criteria for success but it is reasonable to suggest that the partnerships work best where less basic capacity building is required and where GOAL's assistance does not constitute a the majority of a partner's resources. Although GOAL does commit itself to building the capacity of its partners, and has conducted organisational assessments and some training in support of this, it is fair to say that so far capacity building has been more to ensure accountability is achieved rather than as an end in itself. With less experienced partners it may be necessary to devote much greater time and effort to the capacity building task than GOAL is comfortable with in the context of an emergency response program, but this is a question it should address in the context of developing its longer-term response strategy for Syria.

Linked to the issue of partnership is the implementation model GOAL has adopted based on colour-coded categorisation of GOLD, SILVER and BRONZE modalities. This model characterises implementation according to who carries out the implementation which is itself determined by the level of security and therefore possibility of access for GOAL own staff for both management and M&E. Under GOLD implementation it is GOAL's own staff that both deliver assistance and undertake the M&E functions. Under the GOLD modality all sectoral intervention are possible. Under the SILVER modality it is GOAL's partners that implement the projects with locally employed Community Liaison staff who are part of the GOAL Partnership Team providing oversight and support. Under BRONZE it is the Local Councils and Relief Committees that directly deliver assistance in areas without formal NGO partners and with an absence of independent monitoring evidence. One area where the GOLD/SILVER/BRONZE model has some limitations is when it is used to map territory according to who is implementing and under which modality. This difficulty is illustrated by the map included as Annex 1[22] with this report which suggests a linear transition from GOLD, to SILVER to BRONZE and actually masks the patchwork reality of which modality is used where depending on security and availability of partners.

As the role of partners has increased both in terms of scale and the types of intervention in which they are engaging (such as vouchers) it would be appropriate to review and document their role in the context of GOAL's overall strategy for its Syria humanitarian response strategy, addressing such questions as the use of partners for growth, the level of capacity building GOAL will engage in and what would happen if areas currently under partner-based implementation became more secure.

One thing that could encourage GOAL to look more closely with how partnerships may evolve further would be to breakdown the organisation's current rigid distinction between 'programs' and 'partnerships', which operate relatively independently in the overall management structure. This could increase the potential to develop closer synergies between the two approaches and to find ways of reinforcing partners' capacities and accountability without undermining the value of partnership as a means of extending program reach. An early step in this process might be to consider making the Partnership Community Liaison assistants formally part of the GOAL M&E team.

Remote management and effectiveness

The remote management of the GOAL program is actually a layered one: under the GOLD modality it is only international management that is remotely provided from Antakya, Turkey; under SILVER implementation is devolved to formal NGO partners with remote national and international staff oversight and support; with BRONZE implementation effectively there is no GOAL oversight, with LCs/RCs implementing and providing their own electronic and paper evidence of actions.

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[22] Annex 1: GOAL Area of Responsibility by Donor, map

Remote management is obviously not the preferred modality for implementation, however it is justified given the needs versus risks involved in responding to the humanitarian crisis in Syria. What must be kept in mind is that the use of remote management actually transfers a measure of risk from one group (international staff who have a higher risk profile in the current Syrian context) to others, be they national staff, partners or local authorities. GOAL appears conscious of this and exercises its duty of care to national staff through the development and implementation of a robust safely and security policy which is detailed in annexes to its proposals to USAID. What is less clear is how far GOAL provides similar support to its partners. Whilst partners know their own areas of operation better than GOAL there is the possibility, for example, to provide them with the tools to conduct their own formal risk assessments and formalise their safely and security policies and procedures.

One way of measuring GOAL's commitment to migrating the potential accountability risks associated with remote management is to examine the composition of its staffing as a proxy indicator. An analysis of staffing based on August 2014 numbers indicated that from a total of 322, 62 (19%) of management and support staff based were based in Turkey, including all international staffing, coordination, finance, logistics, compliance and reporting. A further analysis of staffing by function indicated a significant commitment to the key functions that support accountability in the program, including M&E (9% of the total) and Compliance & Reporting (6%). Accountability staffing are also present within other categories including most notably Logistics which handles the program's massive procurement. The Support function includes Finance, IT, HR, Transport and Safety & Security staffing which also play a role in program accountability.

The staffing of the M&E function in particular has seen strong growth since the independent M&E team was first established with an initial four staff around September 2013. Since then the number has risen in stages to 28 and, with further increases possible in the future. This commitment to and investment in such a significant M&E function is fully endorsed by the evaluation and the strength of GOAL's M&E function is something which its peers specifically commented on.

The remote management of programming is greatly supported by the extensive use of Skype, made possible by a wide band-with and cost effective internet service from Turkey. This keeps program and M&E staff in regular remote contract with staffing inside Syria. However, this remote contact is supplemented by regular face to face contact with senior Syria-based national staff in Turkey, with key staff visiting every week. This appears to be a more frequent level of contact than that achieved by GOAL's peers. Other specific remote measures include video recording of each round of food and NFI distributions. However, again the point needs to be borne in mind that this is only achieved in GOAL direct distributions and less is achieved in the case of partner deliveries.

GOAL has also invested in trying to ensure a collaborate relationship between its program and M&E staff inside Syria including cross deployments of staff between the two functions so that they better understand each other's roles and that M&E is not just about accountability but supporting programs in a collaborative effort to improve the quality of program delivery. In this respect the evaluator saw a strong and open relationship during the course of his time working in the GOAL Antakya office.

Despite this collaborative effort and the investment in addressing the challenge of remote management there is an understandable frustration with the lack of access for international staff to project areas and beneficiaries. For example, despite the huge quantity of data generated both by programs and M&E there is a lingering concern regarding how to ensure a consistent quality in the primary data being gathered.

One suggestion to address some of this concern would be to introduce a small sample quality control check by M&E staff of the crucial beneficiary selection process that is currently undertaken exclusively by programs' staff and determines access to support.

Coverage

As already indicated there are a number of challenging factors in the Syria environment affecting all agencies' ability to determine the degree of coverage of needs they are able to achieve. These include a lack of recent reliable demographic data, incomplete and dated needs assessments and limited access to certain areas due to insecurity. One respondent even went as far as to suggest that a lack of access actually gives agencies an escape clause in terms of answering the question of how far assistance is really addressing priority needs. In the context of these complications it is impossible for this evaluation to answer the central question posed under this evaluation criteria, which is 'what is GOAL's coverage as compared to the need in the area.' Despite this the report will offer some suggestions on the question of coverage.

The FSL Working Group Coordinator estimated that in GOAL's main area of responsibility, Idleb, only around 50% of known localities are covered by some form of general food ration distribution, with GOAL being the largest player in this response. Although this may seem relatively poor, it compares favourably with the situation in neighbouring Aleppo where the total number of localities covered is just 13%[23]. Of course this is a fairly crude way of assessing coverage since it does not take into account the relative number people in each location and more importantly the number within that location that are in need.

The second question regarding coverage needs to address whether distributions are being made to the right people (i.e. those with the greatest need), the danger being that in the absence of information and access assistance may be over concentrated in certain areas without reference to need across the whole geographical target area. For GOAL the answer needs to come in terms of documenting the choice of which communities/localities it is responding and justifying those in which it does not work within the same geographical area. This assessment could be supplemented by more detailed mapping of districts and even sub-districts to highlight possible gaps and how they are justified. Such mapping may be possible using GIS linked to the evolving use of the PIMS.

Beneficiary selection and coverage – eligibility and vulnerability

Once a locality has been selected to receive assistance GOAL implements a beneficiary selection process based on set of eligibility criteria to determine who potentially qualifies for assistance (essentially a poverty assessment), combined with a set of vulnerability criteria used to determine how to ration the limited assistance among the larger number of eligible households. This beneficiary selection process is important to the issue of coverage since it forms the gateway by which households are selected for inclusion in GOAL selective programming (Food, NFIs, Winter Fuel and Shelter assistance).

The way in which GOAL selects beneficiaries (and thereby determines who will be covered by the projects) has recently been revised in response to feedback from staff, beneficiaries and LCs/RCs.

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[23]FSL Working Group Coordinator communications with the evaluator
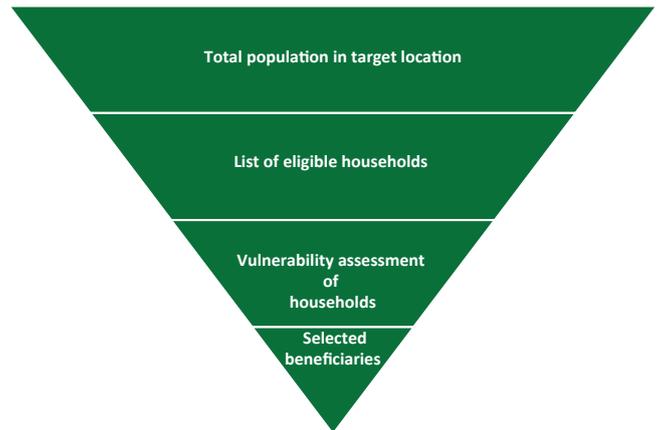
The main changes are summarised in the table below:

Eligibility criteria	
Previous criteria	**Revised criteria**
Beneficiaries by type: Fixed 80:20 (IDPs to Host Community) ratio reflecting donor agreements	No longer applied as a fixed ratio
Poverty criteria: • Income below US200$/month (equivalent to 31,280 SYP) • No productive assets • No regular assistance for other sources	**Poverty criteria:** • Income below 15,000 SYP/month • No productive assets yielding more than 15,000 SYP/month • No regular assistance from other sources
Vulnerability criteria	
General criteria	
• Female Headed Household • Child-headed Household • Injured/Disabled Headed Household • Family size: more than 3 children and family size greater than 7	• IDP Household • Female Headed Household • Child-headed Household • Family member with physical or mental disability • Family size: at least 4 children under 15 years • Family with member with chronic illness
Additional criteria (subject to GOAL discretion/approval)	
• Elderly-headed Household • Family with member with chronic illness • Family with pregnant and/or lactating women	• %10 of beneficiary places for 'Special Cases' nominated by LC/RC, verified and approved by GOAL • Family with pregnant and/or lactating women (food projects only)

One particular issue for the program is how will it maintain its commitment to the donor to 80% of its beneficiaries (and 70% in the case of its FFR and FV projects) being IDPs when being an IDP becomes just one of a number of co-equal selection criteria.

The evaluation would suggest the following as a means to assess the level of coverage that GOAL is achieving specifically in the locations in which it has chosen to implement. As it is the LCs/RCs that undertake the initial beneficiary selection then by implication they must be selecting these households from the wider population. Therefore if GOAL also collects this number, the number of eligible (poor, needy) households can be expressed as a proportion of the total population. Then once the vulnerability criteria are applied the proportion of vulnerable households can be expressed as a proportion of the eligible households. Then once GOAL allocates its limited assistance to the vulnerable households it will be possible to express the coverage against vulnerability, eligibility and even as a percentage of the total population being targeted. An additional advantage of this exercise is that it could allow GOAL to identify and sample some of the population judged as ineligible by the LC/RC as a check on the inclusiveness of their judgements. This would help address one of GOAL's concerns that putting the initial process of beneficiary selection in the hands of the local authorities may involve potential biases in selection. The proposed coverage calculation is illustrated by the following chart:

Once a locality has been selected to receive assistance GOAL implements a beneficiary selection process based on set of eligibility criteria to determine who potentially qualifies for assistance (essentially a poverty assessment), combined with a set of vulnerability criteria used to determine how to ration the limited assistance among the larger number of eligible households. This beneficiary selection process is important to the issue of coverage since it forms the gateway by which households are selected for inclusion in GOAL selective programming (Food, NFIs, Winter Fuel and Shelter assistance).

Total population in target location

List of eligible households

Vulnerability assessment of households

Selected beneficiaries

The way in which GOAL selects beneficiaries (and thereby determines who will be covered by the projects) has recently been revised in response to feedback from staff, beneficiaries and LCs/RCs.

The potential for duplication in assistance was not something the evaluation was able to assess in any great detail due to relatively limited access to the project areas in question. However, during the course of the field visits no evidence was observed to suggest it and during interviews with stakeholders in a total of 14 locations only three reported having received similar assistance (food distributions) from other agencies and they drew a distinction between that kind of one-off assistance and the consistent/reliable assistance they had received from GOAL. Nevertheless there remains a potential for duplication at certainly times, particularly from non-OECD sources (mainly Gulf countries) which does not pass through the coordinating mechanism of the sectoral Working Groups that operate in Turkey. One donor consulted suggested that such aid could constitute as much as another 50-75% of assistance that is not subject to any form of coordination. Currently there still seems to be a gap in terms of established inter-agency coordination mechanisms inside Syria itself.

Efficiency

By far the biggest component of project expenditure is the direct procurement of food and NFIs. GOAL has put significant work into trying to ensure that this is done as cost-effectively by commencing with an international open tender which lead to the decision to adopt a regional procurement strategy of contracting through Turkey, based on Delivery Duty Paid (DDP) terms direct to GOAL's warehousing in Syria. This approach has allowed GOAL to benefit from significant economies of scale in contracting and allowed it to avoid significant administrative and logistical costs prior to supplies reaching its own distribution hubs. This method also has the advantage of making the goods free of Turkish Value Added Tax (VAT) of 22%. Most food stuffs originate inside Turkey itself and even the portion of the rice that has to be imported is not subject to import duties as it is imported unprocessed and bonded for re-export to Syria. This method of procurement ensures efficiency in the procurement process. It has already been noted that the degree of comparative cost-advantage that can be achieved through the use of Food Vouchers in comparison with direct distributions of Family Food Rations is surprisingly

small at just around 0.5% and GOAL should continue to monitor these cost differentials to ensure that both the prices charged by GOAL contracted shops and bulk suppliers of food remain competitive. In the case of NFI's early price monitoring by GOAL has shown higher prices for certain items in GOAL contracted shops compared with non-GOAL shops and this too needs to be monitored going forward to ensure value for money for beneficiaries in receipt of GOAL NFI vouchers.

One clear example of where GOAL has considered efficiency and cost effectiveness in its responses is the role such considerations played in the redesign of the FFR package discussed earlier in this report.

Connectedness and sustainability

The report's section on relevance/appropriateness has already discussed the program's geographical and sectoral choices and found them relevant and appropriate to the needs, opportunities and constraints affecting GOAL's work in Syria. The map included in Annex 3 to the report gives a basic representation of how GOAL is attempting to provide a more integrated response to people's needs in its own GOLD areas of operation, where food, NFIs, Winter Fuel, Shelter and WASH activities are frequently (though not always) implemented in the same localities. Although not part of the ToR for this evaluation it was also evident that GOAL is attempting to 'knit together' its non-USAID projects with its AID interventions to ensure a wider, connected response. In this respect the USAID projects have benefited from learning achieved through other donor funded projects, particularly the piloting of vouchers and the growing engagement in WASH. The evaluation has not considered whether GOAL's current choices leave any key sector needs unmet in their areas of operation.

GOAL's current USAID projects do not have sustainability built into their objectives as they deal with humanitarian relief activities. However, GOAL is aware of the need to ensure that their activities 'do no harm' to existing structures and increasingly are seeking to work with and in support of such structures, including the support to the bakeries, support to markets through the introduction of vouchers-based assistance and the use of local contractors in Shelter and WASH interventions.

The one exception to project interventions lacking a concrete sustainability objective is with respect to WASH interventions where there is a specified exit strategy for financial assistance based on a reducing subsidy leading to full cost recovery (and financial sustainability) within the project duration of 11 months[24]. The evaluation would argue that laudable as this objective is the timetable and possibly even the objective of full cost recovery for operations and maintenance (O&M) is over ambitious given the current financial impoverishment of substantial parts of the population and the history of public service subsidies in Syria. This objective will need to be revised in the course of project implementation.

In partner-implemented SILVER areas the situation is less clear as to how GOAL's support to partners may allow them to improve their own 'connectedness' in their responses by complementing their other activities, although PAH mentioned this as a particular motivation in its decision to partner with GOAL.

Partnership programming is in principle identified as a possible contributing factor towards increasing the sustainability of responses beyond GOAL's interventions (though the building of local capacity), but how far this is a realistic objective is unclear given the limited range of donors and funding mechanisms currently in place. How far capacity building and the organisational sustainability of partners is an objective of programming rather than simply a means of extending project reach remains to be elucidated by the program.

[24] GOAL Project Proposal to USAID OFDA, March 2014

The evaluator would argue that one key indication of the connectedness of GOAL's program approach in general is its demonstrated commitment to accountability and mainstreaming of protection, including gender and child protection and its engagement in the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP). In the case of HAP in addition to sponsoring a HAP training in Turkey, all GOAL national staff inside Syria have undergone a one day training on the principles of accountability.

Coordination

The environment for coordination on programming in Syria is particularly challenging, with almost all actors having had to adopt a remote management model (as far as international staff are concerned) since late 2013. Even prior to the withdrawal of international staffing the situation was precarious from a security perspective and complicated by the distinction between operating in government-controlled and non-government areas. This distinction had a very significant impact on the attitude adopted by the United Nations which was completely dependent on the Syrian regime for access of any kind and with the government using the primacy of sovereignty as a means to prevent the UN from substantive engagement in areas outside government control and impeding their relations with organisations engaging in cross-border operations into opposition controlled parts of Syria. An additional complicating factor for much of the time has been the attitude of the Turkish government hosting much of the cross-border activity in northern Syria, which viewed agencies with some suspicion.

This was the coordination context that faced GOAL and other international NGOs for much of the period of their program implementation in Syria and Turkey. The resulting coordination architecture was initially dominated by the voluntary coordination systems set up by the NGOs themselves, in the form of a number of Working Groups and an NGO Forum established in January 2013. The UN and UN OCHA (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) in particular, was a relatively late arrival on the scene only becoming really active in Turkey from around August 2013 onwards.

GOAL's performance in coordination has been exceptional as indicated by the following specific engagements:

- Recruitment and hosting of the FSL Working Group Co-Coordinator
- Hosting of the NGO Coordinator position
- GOAL CD serves as Chair of the NGO Forum Steering Committee
- Currently undertaking recruitment for a new Nutrition Working Group Coordinator
- Provision of staffing support to the Logistics Working Group
- Active participation in the S/NFI, Protection, WASH and Human Resources Working Groups and in the Cash-Based Responses Sub-Working Group.

Further informal support to coordination structures in the past included providing staffing for the Security Coordinator post under the NGO Forum and support to the Logistics Working Group. Outside of the Working Groups and NGO Forum GOAL and its senior Syria program management have been active groups, including the CD's membership of the Humanitarian Liaison Group (effectively the Humanitarian Country Team). Informally the evaluator found that GOAL is highly respected for the time and effort it devotes to issues of coordination, both sectorally and at the strategic level. GOAL's peers provided examples of strong cross-organisation learning support in the areas of the use of vouchers (where it provided its experience from a pilot project with others) and support to bakeries (where it shared experience with and learned from Mercy Corps which had more initial experience). Dedicated coordination staff make up 2% of GOAL's total Syria program staff.

Going forward it remains to be seen how far the advent of the new UNSCR 2165 authorising cross-border and cross line access for the UN and its partners without the preapproval of the Syrian government will have on the architecture for humanitarian coordination in Turkey and northern Syria.

Key Evaluation Findings

Geographic and sectoral responses and changes made (such as expansion into the WASH sector) relevant to the changing context of the crisis in Syria.

Strong presence and leadership in key coordination fora, including NGO Forum, NGO Forum Steering Committee, FSL, WASH, Protection, HR, Logistics and Shelter/NFIs Working Groups, Cash Based Responses Working Groups, Humanitarian Liaison Group.

Collaborative with peers – complementarity and cross learning, for example being open to learning from Mercy Corps on Bakeries and providing learning for its plans for use of vouchers.

Respected by peers and donors.

High level of visibility and community acceptance of GOAL within its areas of responsibility endorses its high visibility acceptance strategy. This has also contributed to helping it withstand the risks associated with the changes in military control that have occurred in its target areas.

Rapid strengthening and growth of M&E function (9% of staffing) since late 2013 representing an effective response to address the challenges of remote management, as is the regular presence of key national staff in the Antakya office.

Robust approach to accountability needs, including HAP training for all staff, specific Donor Compliance and Reporting etc. (6% of staffing). The program is very well documented and increasingly undertaking an increasing level of data analysis. GOAL is transparent with it donors when shortcomings detected, for example when a contractor provided items (chick-peas) from USAID banned country source.

Able to learn and adapt in order to maintain program continuity in the context of a changing environment, including the use of partnerships and the development of vouchers.
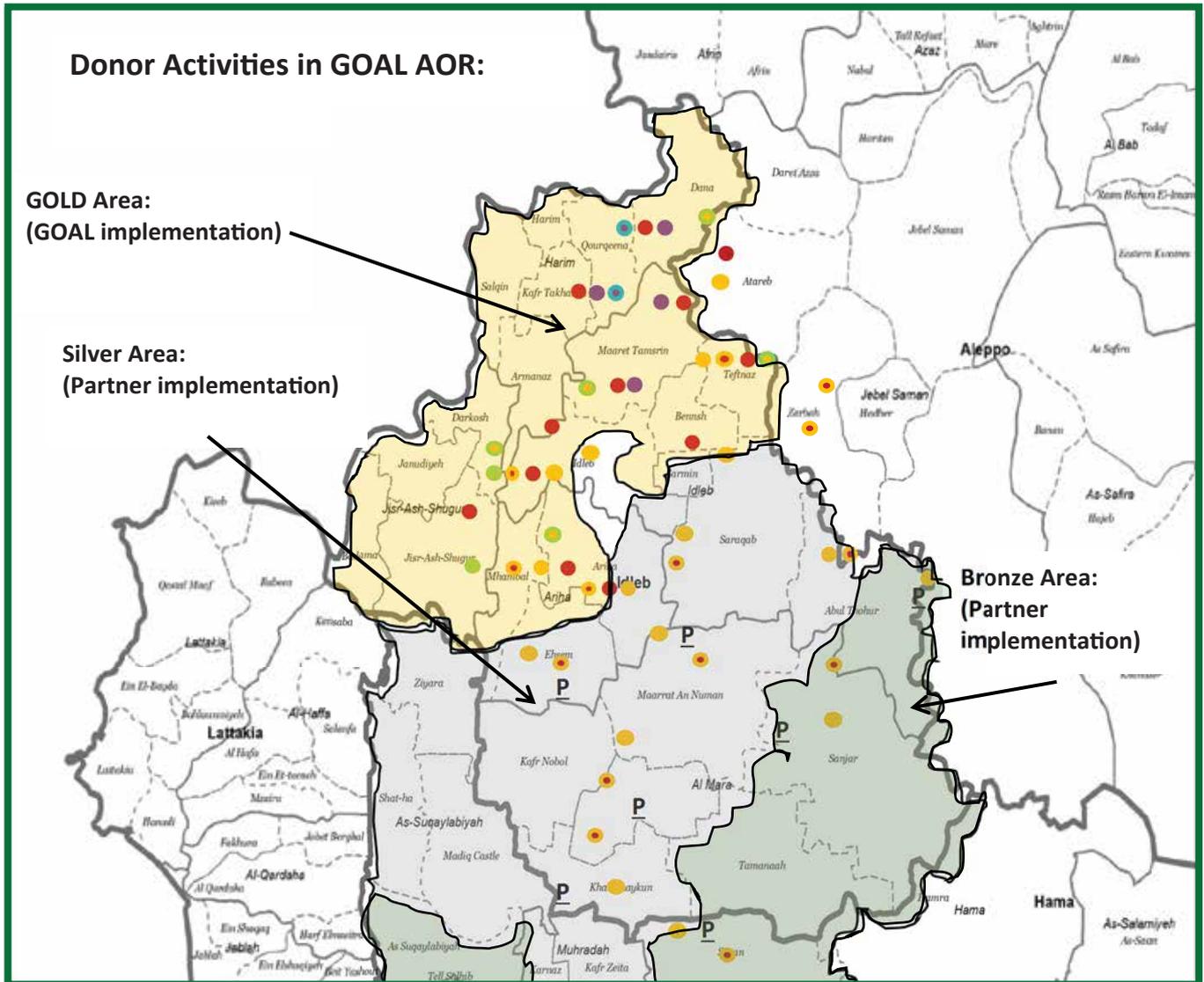
Concerns expressed over gaps in international staffing – Expressed by partners, donors and Working Groups, relating to continuity and gaps affecting key positions. Reflecting the challenges faced by many international NGOs scaling up to respond in Syria.

Endorsement of simplified FFR package (removing high cost, more perishable nutritional diversity items) in response to learning on logistical requirements and need to ensure greater cost effectiveness to increase coverage.

Widespread endorsement of the increasing use of vouchers where markets permit and acknowledgement of GOAL's leadership in this aspect.

Difficulties in establishing project coverage levels in the light of a lack of reliable demographic data. Some proxy estimates can be made using figures provided by the LC/RCs.

Donor Activities in GOAL AOR:

GOLD Area:
(GOAL implementation)

Silver Area:
(Partner implementation)

Bronze Area:
(Partner implementation)

IRISH AID Unrestricted Vouchers	●	OFDA NFI	●
FFP FFR	●	OFDA Vouchers	●
FFP Bread Voucher	●	DFID FFR	●
		DFID WASH	●