

# Evaluation Brief

WFP Office of Evaluation: *Measuring Results, Sharing Lessons*



## South Sudan: An evaluation of WFP's Portfolio (2011-2016)

### Context

Having gained its independence in 2011, South Sudan is a low-income and land-locked country that is extremely dependent on external aid; 51% of the population lived below the poverty line.<sup>1</sup> Agriculture accounts for about 15% of GDP and 78% of the workforce.<sup>2</sup> Since February 2014, South Sudan has been declared a Level 3 Emergency. About 4.8 million people – 40% of the population – remain at emergency or crisis levels of food insecurity. In early 2017, the national food deficit was 500,000 metric tonnes – with falling production attributed to rising insecurity<sup>3</sup>. Malnutrition is a long-term and major public health problem with national stunting rate of 31%<sup>4</sup>. Gender disparities are stark, as measured by socio-economic indicators<sup>5</sup>.

### WFP Country Strategy and Portfolio in South Sudan

WFP South Sudan developed a country strategy (CS 2014-2017) comprising four pillars to: i) meet the emergency food needs of vulnerable groups; ii) build community resilience and strengthen livelihoods; iii) enhance market access and food value chains; and iv) enhance access to basic services in support of good nutrition and learning. The CS also included a cross-cutting approach to strengthen government institutional capacities. WFP implemented a portfolio of 3 emergency operations (EMOPs), 1 protracted relief and recovery operation (PRRO), 14 special operations for logistics support and 2 immediate-response EMOPs. While assisting 2.9 million people per year; the total required funding was over USD 3.8 billion, just USD 2.6 billion – or 65% was received.

### Objectives and Scope of the Evaluation

The CPE covered the period 2011–2016. Focusing on the portfolio as a whole, the evaluation assessed: i) the alignment and strategic positioning of WFP CS and portfolio in South Sudan; ii) the factors influencing and quality of strategic decision-making; and iii) the portfolio performance and results.

### Key Findings

#### Alignment and Strategic Positioning

The CS and portfolio were relevant to the needs of the population and aligned with WFP corporate policy objectives. The portfolio was realigned in the post-independence phase to support state-building objectives. WFP transitioned appropriately and switched back in 2014 to responding to large scale emergency. The adaptation of nutrition into the portfolio and the introduction of mobile rapid-response mechanisms (RRM) were relevant in improving outreach to conflict-affected areas. However, WFP's strategy and portfolio did not fully adjust to a multi-year acute crisis.

WFP's strategy was found to be broadly coherent with the relevant, though limited body of national technical policies, to the satisfaction of WFP's main counterparts. WFP actively collaborated in the development of the UNDAF<sup>6</sup> and

Humanitarian Response Plans, used as vehicles for communication purposes while not stimulating joint programming or resource mobilization. The CS identified and capitalized on areas of comparative advantage, WFP's unrivalled ability to reach scale in conjunction with its partners. It identified and capitalized on strong synergies with partners. However, most internal synergies between operations and activities remained unrealized. Guided by national and WFP policies, the country office developed a gender strategy (2015–2020).

#### Factors influencing and quality of Strategic Decision-Making

The country office led or supported a range of food and nutrition studies to facilitate strategy development and decision-making, including the inter-agency Food Security and Nutrition Monitoring System (FSNMS) and IPC. WFP contributed to building national capacities for monitoring and analysis in a range of counterpart ministries, although this work slowed dramatically after 2014. A strong analysis of gender and protection issues was integrated into strategic decision-making in order to minimize the risk of exposing women beneficiaries to gender-based violence; and a protection strategy was established.

However, the understanding of the underlying drivers of undernutrition in South Sudan was still weak. Monitoring data had limited influence on strategic decision-making, partly because insecurity constrained WFP's ability to collect reliable and consistent data. The CO identified critical risks to performance and proposed a comprehensive set of mitigation measures in line with organizational procedures although monitoring against the mitigation plan was lacking.

The complex array of strategic decision making was influenced by WFP's own mandate, strategy and policies; an analysis of humanitarian and development needs, national capacities and priorities; WFP's own comparative advantages; the declaration of Level 3 Emergency in February 2014; and staffing shortfalls.

#### Portfolio Performance and Results

##### Effectiveness

Targeting and prioritization of food assistance were based on IPC and FSNMS analyses, and the severity of food insecurity in line with a wide range food needs. WFP managed to maintain respect for its humanitarian and protection principles even though access restrictions were frequently imposed by the Government and opposition forces.

Measured against the CS, performance was generally effective. WFP assisted 91% of targeted beneficiaries.

**General Food Assistance (GFA)** including cash-based transfers (**CBT**) accounted for more than 64% of beneficiaries. GFA had an average attainment rate of 117% due partly to the use of mobile RRM. However, the percentage of targeted quantities

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/south-sudan> 2009

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/southsudan/overview>

<sup>3</sup> Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO)/WFP Crop and Food Security Assessment

<sup>4</sup> Republic of South Sudan, The South Sudan Household Health Survey 2010

<sup>5</sup> South Sudan Comprehensive Country Gender Assessment, April 2012

<sup>6</sup> 2016-2017 Interim Cooperation Framework

of food delivered fell from nearly 80% in 2012 to under 45% in 2016. Food distributions were unpredictable because of problems in maintaining a reliable food pipeline and full food baskets were not consistently delivered. The use of **CBT** was challenging given widespread insecurity, weak markets, few financial service providers and hyperinflation. Consequently, CBTs ranged between 70% and 20% of their targets respectively. It remained a minor part of the caseload: only 152,671 received CBTs in 2016. GFA, accompanied by scaled up blanket feeding, is partially credited with preventing severe food insecurity.

**Nutrition** accounted for 22% of total beneficiaries. Children & pregnant and lactating women received supplementary feeding. Scaling up targeted supplementary feeding in 2014 was slow requiring collaboration with additional partners. Synergising with Unicef, blanket supplementary feeding coverage proved more straightforward. Nutrition outcomes – as measured by the recovery rate – were good.

**School Feeding (SF)** programme reached an average of 300,000 children per year – estimated at 20% of all primary schoolchildren. Of these, 44% were girls<sup>8</sup>. Nearly 900 classrooms were rehabilitated, but there was no evidence of related improvements in school sanitation, school gardens or installation of fuel-efficient stoves. Despite fluctuations in enrolment and retention associated with changing insecurity, **SF** showed positive results with regard to retention rates and gender parity through a girl’s incentive scheme. However, its overall effectiveness depended on complementary interventions and a strong inter-agency strategic framework, which was lacking.

**Purchase for Progress (P4P)** activities supported 136 farmer groups and purchased 462 MT of food from 13 of these groups. This was less than 10% of total food procured locally by WFP and less than 1% of WFP’s food requirements in South Sudan. Although 12 storage warehouses were built, less than 10% of this capacity was used by farmer groups. P4P outcomes were modest and of uncertain sustainability. Progress in enhancing market access and value chains was limited.

**Food Assistance for Assets** – Highly valued by beneficiaries, FFA reached 80,000 beneficiaries per year – ranging from 49% to 129% of targets. Funding constraints, pipeline breaks and insecurity caused delays and underachievement. Where there was competition for resources, life-saving interventions were prioritized. Quality of tertiary roads was limited.

**Feeder Road Construction** – One quarter of the planned 800 km of feeder roads were constructed. Lengthy selection processes, security constraints, a lack of WFP engineering staff and poorly adapted procurement procedures contributed to delays. Although high quality of the completed roads was reported, there was little positive outcome on agriculture.

**Capacity development** – Commendable progress was made in contributing to national policy development and technical capacities through partnerships with a range of ministries. But success was undermined by the deteriorating context since 2014.

### Efficiency

Logistics was the dominant cost factor. It accounted for 55% of operational cost, driven by the extensive use of air transport and the weak trunk road network. To minimize costs, WFP introduced a range of innovations, including biometric registration and WFP’s SCOPE system for cash operations.

However, frequent pipeline breaks resulted in poor reliability and timeliness of food deliveries. Where CBT was introduced as part of the emergency response, it was significantly more cost efficient, predictable and timely than in-kind transfers<sup>9</sup>, and had potential benefits for local economy.

### Sustainability

Findings on the sustainability of assets created through the WFP assistance were inconclusive. Maintenance plans assumed government responsibility for upkeep; however this did not materialize in the current fiscal context. Moreover, communities’ ability to maintain FFA assets was also compromised.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

### Overall Assessment

The assessment of WFP’s performance required a clear recognition of the extremely challenging and complex operating context in South Sudan. The evaluation concluded there was high relevance, coherence with national needs and policies, and effectiveness of the portfolio’s outputs; accompanied by positive outcomes. WFP significantly helped preventing severe food insecurity from becoming widespread famine. WFP demonstrated its ability to work across emergency and development spheres. Yet, the strategy and portfolio were not adequately adapted to the challenges and opportunities of a multi-year acute crisis. Opportunities to build coherence and connectedness by capitalizing on internal synergies were identified but largely unrealized. Given an outlook of declining resources and increasing needs, further cost-saving measures were still required. Persistent delays in staffing undermined decision making and performance.

**Recommendation 1.** Develop a strategic framework and for responding to the needs of South Sudan as a multi-year, acute crisis. In parallel, advocate within the United Nations system for developing an inter-agency strategic framework and a common multi-year approach.

**Recommendation 2.** Improve humanitarian– development synergies by developing a strategy to address the underlying constraints to cash-based transfers, supporting the roll-out of nutrition guidelines and the 2015 Boma Health Initiative, in partnership with other actors, refining an inter-agency approach to resilience and strategically promoting school feeding.

**Recommendation 3.** Further increase efficiency, working with partners through upfront investments in improved transport infrastructure, developing a strategy for digitally identifying beneficiaries, introducing cost recovery into the Logistics Cluster and strengthening food pipeline management.

**Recommendation 4.** Innovate to improve programme quality through investments in food and nutrition assessments (including in urban areas), strengthening the Scaling Up Nutrition approach, updating outcome and impact indicators for food assistance for assets and special operations, and introducing multi-year field-level agreements.

**Recommendation 5.** Ensure appropriate and timely country office staffing by commissioning a staffing review in line with the new interim country strategic plan, augmenting the country office’s human resources capacity and adjusting the corporate reassignment process to ensure that all staff serve in hardship areas.

<sup>7</sup> SPR 2012-2016

<sup>8</sup> Education Cluster Assessment, South Sudan 2016

<sup>9</sup> In addition the nutrient cost effectiveness of cash to in-kind transfer value (omega value) was improving in the short period (September 2015-March 2016) for which data was available (WFP VAM, March 2016)

### Reference:

Full and summary reports of the evaluation and the Management Response are available at <http://www1.wfp.org/independent-evaluation>

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