

Evaluation Brief

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



Cameroon: An evaluation of WFP's Portfolio (2012 - mid 2017)

Context

With a population of 23 million people, Cameroon is a lower-middle-income country with a relatively stable but recently slowing average annual economic growth rate of 5.5%. The country's economy is guided by the Government's strategy for growth and employment (2010–2020). Since 2014, there has been instability in the northern and eastern regions of the country¹ as a result of the crisis in the Central African Republic (CAR) and the Boko Haram insurgency spreading into the Lake Chad Basin. Currently, there are more than 325,000 refugees from the CAR and Nigeria and 230,000 internally displaced persons in Cameroon, where 35% of the population is food-insecure, chronic and acute malnutrition rates are high and literacy rates are very low in some regions – 40% in the Far North Region.² The instability has brought new challenges with regard to protection and humanitarian access. Socio-cultural gender norms are major hurdles for the achievement of equal rights and opportunities between men and women.

WFP Country Strategy and Portfolio in Cameroon

WFP's support for Cameroon started in the 1970s. From 2012 to mid-2017, WFP's portfolio in Cameroon was multi-faceted, with 11 relief, recovery and development-oriented activities and special operations in the Far North, North, East and Adamaoua regions, which have the highest levels of poverty, food insecurity and humanitarian needs. While assisting 2.5 million people; the total required funding was over USD 403 million. But, just USD 231 million – or 57% was received. There was no country strategy document covering the evaluation period. In June 2017, a new Country Strategic Plan (CSP) for 2018–2020 was approved by WFP Executive Board.

Objectives and Scope of the Evaluation

The CPE covered the period 2012–mid 2017. Focusing on the portfolio as a whole, the evaluation assessed: i) the alignment and strategic positioning of WFP's portfolio in Cameroon; ii) the factors influencing and quality of strategic decision-making; and iii) the portfolio performance and results. It was timed to inform the programming and operationalization of WFP's new Cameroon CSP, and to contribute to enhanced collaboration and synergies among the Rome-based agencies.

Key Findings

Alignment and Strategic Positioning

With conditions in Cameroon relatively stable in 2012 and 2013, WFP was strategically and appropriately placed to support development-oriented initiatives addressing food security in the country's northern regions. In 2014, WFP appropriately shifted to respond to emergency needs of large numbers of refugees from Nigeria and CAR, and vulnerable host communities, through the activation of a WFP corporate Level 3 emergency response. However, the reorientation of the portfolio towards

emergency operations left unmet needs for longer-term responses to persistent food insecurity in resilience activities, notably community cereal banks which were national priority and school feeding, which are particularly important for women and girls.³ Since 2015, the portfolio gradually shifted to more recovery-oriented activities and from treatment to prevention in its nutrition strategy and introduced cash-based transfers (CBTs) as a new modality. WFP's portfolio was highly relevant to the population's needs.

WFP's constructive role in coordination platforms for humanitarian and development such as UNDAF and the strategic response plan for 2014–2016, which involved 17 United Nations agencies – contributed greatly to the coherence of the portfolio's design⁴. Stakeholders recognized WFP's comparative advantages in food assistance, emergency nutrition support, logistics and outreach. To address gender inequalities, the portfolio design increasingly prioritized the needs of women and girls. In practice there was limited context-specific gender analysis.

Factors influencing and quality of Strategic Decision-Making

Decision making was influenced by the situation in the northern and eastern regions; WFP's role in humanitarian and development platforms; and resource availability. Because collaboration by the Rome-based agencies was limited, opportunities for following an integrated approach were missed. The country office systematically used food and nutrition security information, multiple-indicator cluster surveys and information from the protection working group to inform the design of portfolio operations⁵ and strategic decision making, including in the design of the new CSP. Activation of the Level 3 emergency response and the launch of specific emergency responses were informed effectively by risk monitoring. The annual risk register outlined mitigation activities for various potential risks,⁶ but these activities were general and their effectiveness could not be ascertained.

Portfolio Performance and Results Effectiveness

The geographic and sectoral targeting appropriately aligned WFP's portfolio with the national vision of development contributing to poverty eradication and with national food security and nutrition strategies. Yet, discontinuation of WFP support to community cereal banks shifted the program to other beneficiary groups. The country office paid increasing attention gender and adhered to WFP's Humanitarian Protection Policy and humanitarian principles.

WFP's assistance effectively responded to life-saving and recovery needs of 2.5 million beneficiaries or 80% of planned target, ranging from 396,000 in 2013 to 736,000 in 2015. Differences in actual versus planned numbers were explained by funding shortfalls, supply chain challenges and errors in estimated needs.

¹ Far North, North, Adamaoua and East regions.

² <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/country/cmr>.

³ <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/evaluation-de-la-s-curit-alimentaire-dans-les-r-gions-de-l-est-adamaoua-nord-et-extr>.

⁴ UNDAF Cameroon

⁵ Operation documents for portfolio, from 2012 to mid-2017.

⁶ Cameroon country office risk register reports: 2012 to mid-2017.

General Food Assistance (GFA) reached 104% of beneficiaries planned targets or 1.2 million. This was partly dictated by the prioritization of life-saving interventions and funding shortfalls which reduced quantities and duration of food assistance and yet concurrently increased beneficiary coverage. The introduction of **CBTs** was appropriate; and voucher modality was more nutritionally cost-effective than in-kind.

Nutrition: Supplementary feeding attained 86% of planned targets (2.2 million beneficiaries). From 2012 to 2015, recovery rates of MAM children under 5 showed little to no improvement compared to above 90% since 2016 due mainly to the shift in nutrition approach toward prevention which promoted nutrition-sensitive preventive delivery platforms.

School Feeding (SF) Supporting 276 schools, activities reached 25% of planned 360,000 beneficiaries because of the suspension of activities in 2015, lack of counterpart resources, and capacity shortfalls. Still, there was a decrease in dropout rate from 4% to 2.5% of enrolled children in these schools.

Food Assistance for Assets (FFA) reached 55% of planned target of 398,000 beneficiaries. However, the quality, usefulness, and durability of assets were not well documented.

Gender - Measures to facilitate women’s participation in activity implementation by appointing women as monitors and ensuring equal numbers of men and women in distribution committees were positive steps in the promotion of gender equality. Evidence of their effect on gender equality, nevertheless, was weak.

Capacity development – WFP technical assistance contributed to the National Food Security Programme, monitoring and early warning systems although capacity gaps still remain.

Efficiency

Throughout the evaluation period, WFP’s supply chain and the timeliness of food assistance deliveries were negatively affected by funding shortfalls and delays which led to reductions in rations and temporary suspensions of food distributions, as was the case in 2015 for assistance to refugees in the eastern region.⁷ Positively, since 2015, UNHAS was timely in facilitating humanitarian responses in the region given the weak road infrastructure, unreliable connections with private airlines, and poor medical services in Far North. CBTs also improved efficiency as did the use of mobile vulnerability analysis and mapping for data collection in areas with restricted humanitarian access. With the aim of promoting efficiency, a regional approach was followed for EMOPs in response to the crisis in the Lake Chad Basin and CAR. While information flows from WFP were impressive, there was very limited communication appropriately tailored to the needs of different users regarding WFP’s CSP and areas of potential intervention.

Sustainability

Despite the provision of direct support for local capacity strengthening, the shift towards emergency response constrained effective handover to national partners. The nutrition activities of PRRO 200552 were transferred to the succeeding EMOP, while FFA activities were discontinued, with inadequate follow-up affecting the likelihood of FFA results being sustainable.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Overall Assessment

Supported by its long-term presence in Cameroon and its recognized leadership in food assistance WFP, through a flexible approach, facilitated the appropriate shift from development-oriented to humanitarian assistance. The reorientation of the portfolio in 2013–2014 was appropriate; but it left large unmet needs for the continuation of livelihood activities.

WFP intended to establish both strategic and operational collaboration with UN partners, but there was little practical action on joint programming and implementation, which limited the use of opportunities for synergies in achieving food security objectives. Effective partnerships with UNHCR and UNICEF allowed better complementarity and synergies in WFP’s use of status registration and in the treatment of severely malnourished children. Additionally, WFP/FAO cooperation on food security information and assessments was effective. However, Rome-based agency collaboration was limited to cooperation in strategic planning, coordination and food security monitoring.

Overall, the country portfolio was effective in addressing life-saving humanitarian needs, reflecting WFP’s strategic positioning and good cooperation with partners at the central and local levels. On the other hand, the portfolio was less effective in achieving early recovery, education, and resilience-related outcomes. The innovative approaches introduced, such as the use of CBTs and the shift in nutrition activities from treatment to prevention, showed initial positive results and were appropriate for scale-up. Monitoring indicators for gender-sensitive approaches did not sufficiently cover the promotion of gender transformative roles at the local level. While WFP was efficient in sharing information, communications were inadequate in enhancing understanding of WFP’s strategy, target areas and approaches. WFP established strong links with national NGOs as implementing partners and cooperation with central and regional government institutions. But there was no systematic strategy to guide WFP’s contribution to capacity strengthening in respect of food security.

Recommendation 1. Consolidate the shift in focus of nutrition activities towards an integrated prevention approach while maintaining the flexibility to allow scale-up of treatment when nutrition monitoring indicates increasing moderate and severe acute malnutrition.

Recommendation 2. Expand the programming capacity of the country office in the use and scale-up of CBT modalities.

Recommendation 3. Take the initiative to institutionalize partnerships for joint programming where benefits in terms of synergies and complementarity can be identified.

Recommendation 4. Continue to focus on the northern and eastern regions while gradually moving towards the re-establishment of early recovery activities.

Recommendation 5. Develop an evidence-based operational strategy for integrating gender considerations into programming, in line with WFP’s gender policy and action plan.

Recommendation 6. Design and systematize an effective communication framework.

Recommendation 7. Develop a strategy for supporting the development of national and local capacities in food security monitoring, early warning and response

⁷ SPRs of portfolio operations 2012–2016.

Reference:

Full and summary reports of the evaluation and the Management Response are available at www.wfp.org/evaluation. For more information please contact the Office of Evaluation WFP.evaluation@WFP.org or dawit.habtemariam@wfp.org