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Country Programme Mauritania (2012-2017)

Standard Project Report 2017

World Food Programme in Mauritania, Islamic Republic of (MR)



World Food Programme

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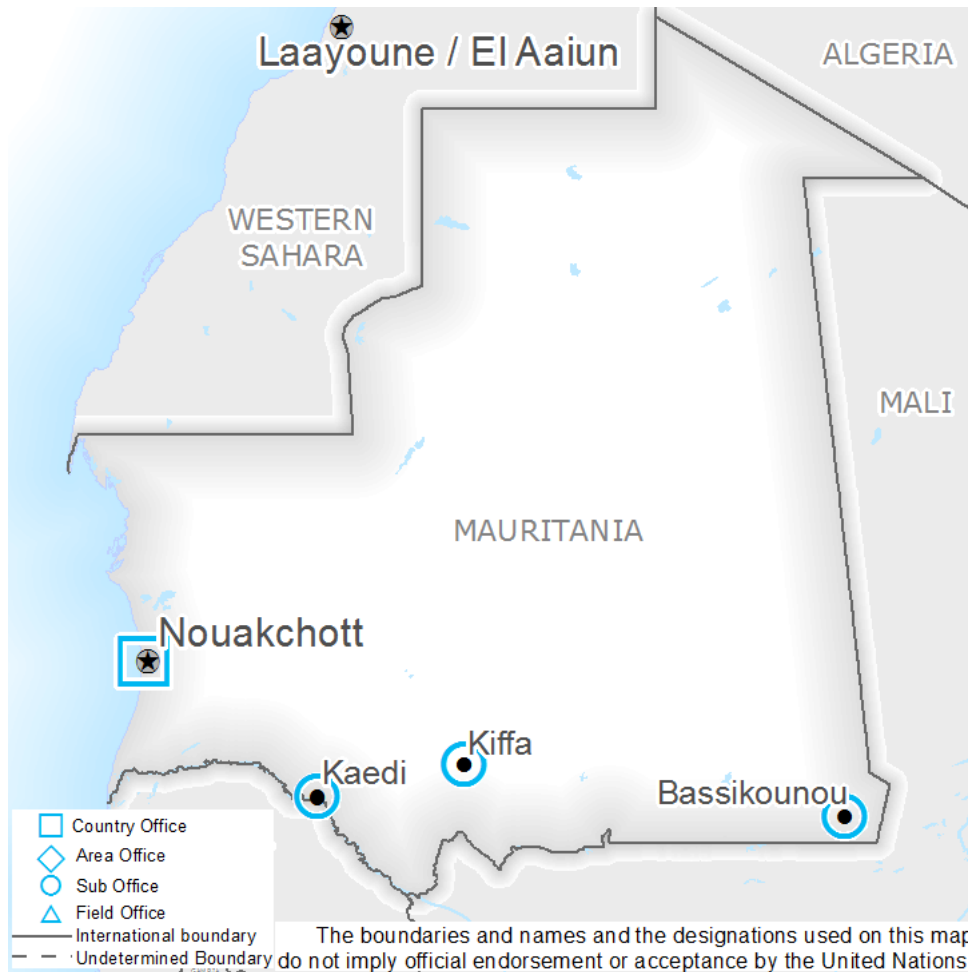
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Country Context and WFP Objectives



Achievements at Country Level

In 2017, WFP's direct assistance and capacity strengthening efforts were part of resilience building package of assistance that contributed to tackling the underlying causes of vulnerability. Actions aimed to mitigate the impact of shocks that cyclically affect people's food security and nutritional status, and erode their livelihoods.

With the resources available, WFP reached 141,500 people amongst the most vulnerable in 2017 in the six targeted regions in Mauritania, including 52,000 Malian refugees living in Mbera camp. WFP and other humanitarian partners' ability to reach beneficiaries was supported by the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) with regular flights to six destinations. Food-insecure Mauritanian households received support through general distributions using cash or in-kind, integrated with malnutrition prevention assistance for pregnant and lactating women and children, and dried fruits (dates) during the peak lean season. Malnourished children received curative assistance with minerals and vitamins-enriched supplementary foods, coupled with screening and referral for the treatment of moderate acute malnutrition during the lean season. WFP supported moderately food-insecure households (mainly women-led and with a particular focus on the youth) through food assistance-for-assets (FFA) creation activities. Some 25,700 schoolchildren in 141 schools in Hodh Ech-Charghi received a morning porridge and a hot lunch to encourage their attendance at school (both under the Country Programme and the PRRO). WFP also provided the integrated package of assistance to improve food security and nutrition in Mbera refugee camp and in Bassikounou, area bordering the refugee camp. The impact of these interventions is maximised whenever implementation is done in a complementary and multi-year approach within the same localities, seeking synergies between WFP and partners at all stages of the project cycle.

WFP's country capacity strengthening efforts focused on linking development and humanitarian approaches in Mauritania.

WFP actively engaged with its partners and the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) to start elaborating a multi-sector and multi-year strategy through which gradually shift 'care and maintenance' towards assistance that empowers refugees' self-reliance and host communities' resilience. This approach goes beyond traditional institutional frameworks, concretely operationalizing the humanitarian-development "nexus" promoting food security and livelihoods as factors of peace, stability and prevention of migrations.

WFP worked with national institutions and its main counterpart – the *Commissariat à la Sécurité Alimentaire (CSA)* – to support the establishment of a national Adaptive Social Protection system, steered towards building resilience at both national and local levels, through technical assistance, policy engagement and advocacy work. To this effect, WFP established a positive dynamic amongst the food security and nutrition sector groups, by co-leading the new "Early Warning System and Response Plan" working group focusing on the set up of a national food and nutrition crisis response plan. Related to the above efforts was WFP's close collaboration with the CSA to update the existing Africa Risk Capacity contingency plans and customise the insurance policy to enhance the suitability of the index insurance to the local context.

In the next years, guided by the Transitional-Interim Country Strategic Plan 2018, and Country Strategic Plan 2019–2022, WFP's added value will focus on supporting national hunger solutions, maximising impact and value for money.

Country Context and Response of the Government

The Islamic Republic of Mauritania is a lower middle-income country, with a population of 3.9 million living over a vast but mostly arid 1,030,700 km² territory [1]. The majority of the population lives in the southern (Sahelian) and western (coastal) parts of the country, with the remaining (Saharan) areas characterised by low population densities. Mauritania continues to host one the largest number of Malian refugees after Niger, with 52,000 refugees registered at the end of 2017 [2].

After decades of political instability, Mauritania has benefited from relative stability since 2012 despite a highly volatile regional security context. The country achieved slow but steady progress over the last seven years in reducing poverty (average 1.8 percent per year), child undernutrition (currently below 10 percent in children under 5) and child mortality. However, it continues to face major challenges towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDG 2, some of which are structural and others related to a high level of exposure to climate and other shocks. The country's annual gross domestic product (GDP) stands at USD 1,218 per capita in current prices [3], with an average growth rate of 4.5 percent over the 2001–2015 period, largely driven by the mining sector. It ranks 157 on the 2016 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Index and 147 on the Gender Inequality Index, and scores 25.2 on the Global Hunger Index [4]. The high level of economic inequality in Mauritania is worsening for population groups encountering systemic inequalities, such as women. The latest household surveys indicate that 31 percent of the population still lives in poverty [5].

Mauritania continues to be a food-deficit country: the country's economy largely depends on agriculture and livestock production, but imports 70 percent of its food needs due to insufficient production [6]. Mauritania is cyclically, on average every four years, exposed to episodes of rainfall deficit (negative 52 percent in the monitored weather stations compared to 2016), dry spell and uneven distribution of agricultural rains in space and time, like those characterising the 2017 rainy season, causing regular droughts, floods and locust invasions [7].

The impact of such seasonal shocks on vulnerable people's food security and nutritional situation – particularly in the southern belt of the country – is compounded by rapid soil erosion, desertification, inadequate agropastoral practices, and increased human and livestock pressure. A comparative analysis of the past six years trends, including the 2017 Integrated Context Analysis (ICA), suggests that 15 percent of the Mauritanian population is recurrently food insecure, and on average 26 percent are affected by transitory food insecurity during the lean season [8]. In 2017 only, the people in crisis or emergency food insecurity (Phase 3-5) tripled from pre-lean season (126,000 March) to post-harvest (379,000 November) according to the *Cadre Harmonisé* [9]. This number is expected to double during the 2018 lean season (June–September).

The seasonal variability of acute malnutrition is also correlated to that of food insecurity, suggesting that the challenge of accessing a sufficient and nutritious diet is among the main causes of undernutrition. The prevalence of global acute malnutrition (GAM) at the national level easily exceeds the emergency threshold during the lean season. In August 2017, GAM was estimated at 10.9 percent with a prevalence of severe acute malnutrition (SAM) at 2.3 percent [10].

As part of its commitment to achieve the 2030 Agenda, the Government of Mauritania has put in place different strategies, policies and programmes on food security, nutrition, social protection, gender and education. In 2016, the Government elaborated a medium-term strategy for the next six years called *Stratégie de Croissance Accélérée et de Prospérité Partagée* (SCAPP) 2016–2022. The strategy is aligned with the Government's long-term development vision, "The Mauritania we want in 2030" that focuses on promoting: i) a society rich in its diversity; ii) a prosperous and robust economy; iii) enhanced human capital; iv) enhanced governance; and v) preservation of the environment for sustainable development.

With regard to addressing the above-mentioned gaps, the Government of Mauritania plans to:

- Reduce the prevalence of food insecurity to 5 percent and the GAM rate to 2 percent by 2030, through the promotion of healthy nutrition practices and increasing access to basic foods for the poorest people. The country is committed to supporting initiatives in the area of nutrition enhancement through its membership and participation in the Renewed Effort Against Child Hunger and Undernutrition (REACH), Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) and on Cost of Hunger Study initiatives.
- Develop an integrated social protection system, supported by the 2013 National Social Protection Strategy, to ensure the inclusiveness of the country's economic growth, and equip Mauritania with the right tools and framework to face the combined challenges of structural poverty and of shock-related vulnerabilities.
- Progress on gender equality, to bridge the gaps in decision-making and control over assets at both professional and household level. This is aligned and supported by the 2015 National Gender Institutionalization Strategy.
- Reinforce the engagement of the Government and all sectors in school meals, through the implementation of the 2016 National Programme of Education Development Sector and National School Feeding policy. The Government recognises school meals as having a positive effect on retention. The national net enrolment rate for primary education is 81.1 percent (girls: 82.7 percent and boys: 79.5 percent), but with retention rates which are slightly lower for girls (59.7 percent) than boys (60.5 percent) [11]. Only 11.1 percent of women have reached at least a secondary level of education, compared to 23.5 percent of men [12].
- Preserve the environment and ensure the sustainability of the ecosystems through the 2006 National Action Plan for the Environment, the 2006 National Strategy for Sustainable Development and the 2012 Strategy for the Development of the Rural Sector.

Despite such commitments, the government-led coordination amongst all existing programmes, the resource mobilization efforts and preparedness structure to provide a timely response both at the national and local level in case of shocks are weak and fragmented in Mauritania. This makes Mauritania one of the few countries in the region that does not have an integrated institutional mechanism for preparing and responding to shocks. The national Zero Hunger Review (available early 2018) will offer the opportunity to identify key actions needed to respond to the food security and nutrition challenges identified, and remove such constraints through an integrated set of programmes, strategies and policies.

[1] *Cadre Harmonisé*, November 2017.

[2] Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Mauritania Operational Update, December 2017.

[3] World Bank, Country Overview, 2016.

[4] International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), 2017.

[5] *Profil de la Pauvreté en Mauritanie, Enquête Permanente sur les Conditions de Vie des ménages* (EPCV), 2014.

[6] *Stratégie Nationale de Croissance Accélérée et de Prospérité Partagée*, 2016.

[7] National Meteorological Bureau, *Bulletin Agrométéorologique 3ème décade*, September 2017.

[8] Food Security Monitoring Survey, August 2017.

[9] *Cadre Harmonisé*, March and November 2017.

[10] Standardized Monitoring and Assessment of Relief and Transitions (SMART), July–August 2017.

[11] National School Statistics 2014–2015, Ministry of Education.

[12] UNDP, Human Development Report, 2016.

WFP Objectives and Strategic Coordination

Through an integrated portfolio of relief, recovery and development activities in Mauritania – Country Programme 200251, Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation (PRRO) 200640, Climate Change Adaptation Fund (CCAF)

200609 and Special Operation 200803 – WFP continued to support the Government's efforts towards achieving zero hunger throughout 2017. During 2017, WFP formulated a Transitional-Interim Country Strategic Plan (T-ICSP) for 2018 and supported the elaboration of the national Zero Hunger Strategic Review (ZHSR). The T-ICSP will allow WFP to manage its intervention portfolio in 2018 while formulating a Country Strategic Plan (CSP) for 2019–2022 based on the results of the ZHSR. WFP's four-year strategic plan will constitute an ideal package of humanitarian and development activities in the areas of food security and nutrition – with a gender focus – while strengthening national capacities and ownership of social investments in line with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2 and 17.

WFP, the United Nations (UN) system and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) upheld the Government's engagement towards achieving the 2030 Agenda through the development of the 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan. It represents a first integrated approach between humanitarian and development programmes in Mauritania, and the base on which the new 2018–2022 United Nations Partnership Framework for Sustainable Development (UNPFSD) will be built on. The new UNPFSD foresees to embody the humanitarian-development nexus in alignment with the New Way of Working, and will sharpen the focus of UN assistance on dynamic development strategies that take into account the seasonal shocks and are able to buffer the impact, and protracted humanitarian interventions that are linked to government-led early warning, response planning and safety net mechanisms.

Guided by this approach, WFP interventions in Mauritania are built around three interconnected streams of work: resilience, crisis response and capacity development. WFP provides multi-year assistance in collaboration with government and humanitarian partners, in areas that are shock-prone and chronically food insecure, with the aim of strengthening the capabilities of vulnerable populations to withstand and respond to climate shocks.

Through its PRRO 200640, WFP assists vulnerable populations through activities aimed at guaranteeing girls, boys, women and men's access to nutritious food throughout the year: i) conditional food assistance-for-assets (FFA) creation implemented through in-kind or cash-based transfer (CBT) prior to/after the lean season; ii) unconditional monthly general distributions using in-kind or cash during the peak of the lean season; and iii) nutrition support for the prevention and treatment of moderate acute malnutrition (MAM) in children aged 6-23 months and 6-59 months, and pregnant and lactating women. Gender is integrated throughout development, implementation and monitoring of the activities, to ensure “gender-transformative programmes and policies”. WFP assists people in the six most vulnerable regions of Mauritania – Assaba, Gorgol, Guidimakha, Tagant, Hodh el Gharbi and Hodh Ech-Charghi. In the same regions, WFP provides school meals in targeted primary schools through Country Programme 200251. Such interventions aim to complement the national social safety net programme (*Tekavoul*) with a “shock-responsive” component, which requires the use of common tools for beneficiary targeting and transfer modalities, particularly the Social Register. Since 2016, WFP and the World Bank have worked together to lay the foundations for operationalizing a strategic vision that relies on an adaptive social protection system.

Under the PRRO 200640, WFP also assists Malian refugees affected by the Malian conflict in Mbera camp located in the Hodh Ech-Charghi region through: i) unconditional transfers of combined in-kind and cash; ii) nutrition support for the prevention and treatment of MAM in children and pregnant and lactating women; and iii) school meals activities. In 2017, WFP, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and partners undertook a profiling exercise based on the socio-economic status of refugees, and started developing a multi-sector strategy for Malian refugees and host communities living in the area around Mbera camp to foster their self-reliance and resilience respectively.

The humanitarian community would not be able to assist vulnerable people in remote and insecure areas without the air transport assistance that the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) provides under WFP coordinated Special Operation 200803. With no viable long-distance travel alternatives to date to reach the remote and insecure parts of Mauritania where beneficiaries are located, UNHAS represents the backbone of humanitarian interventions in Mauritania.

Through the CCAF 200609, WFP supports key ministries – including the Ministry of Economy and Finance, *Commissariat à la Sécurité Alimentaire* (CSA), and Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock – in integrating climate change issues into national and local planning, and technical standards for asset building.

WFP's country capacity strengthening support aims to establish a national response scheme for food security and nutrition, which is currently not available in Mauritania. As a prerequisite for improving the effectiveness and readiness of the humanitarian response and ensure development solutions, WFP is working with its partners to strengthen national capacities in terms of: i) early warning, ii) emergency preparedness and response, iii) finance-risk management mechanisms, including Africa Risk Capacity, iv) implementation planning (targeting, supply chain, coordination, monitoring and evaluation), and v) social protection. Such support is essential to enable the Mauritanian institutions to play their role in the preparation, implementation and monitoring of the response.

To this effect, WFP has established a positive dynamic with a range of partners and UN agencies throughout 2017. While there are no clusters present in Mauritania, WFP co-leads: i) the food security and nutrition sector groups with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the United Nations Children's Fund

(UNICEF); ii) the Cash Alliance group with *Action contre la Faim* (ACF); and iii) the *Systemes d'Alerte Precoce-Plans de Reponse* (SAP-PR) working group with ACF, and with close coordination with the World Bank and UNICEF. In 2017, the positive work dynamic with humanitarian/development partners and the Government offered WFP great leverage to drive a series of initiatives such as: the making of a national shock-responsive safety net system with the World Bank; the development of a multi-year and multi-sector strategy for refugees' self-reliance and host communities' resilience with UNHCR and UN Country Team group; and the elaboration of a joint food security and nutrition response plan to the looming 2018 food crisis with members of the food security and nutrition sector groups.

Country Resources and Results

Resources for Results

Between 2014 and 2015, donor contributions to WFP for resilience and crisis response activities under the PRRO, EMOP and special operations, were relatively stable and averaged USD 28 million per year. However, funding dropped after the end of the regional emergency response in 2015, and in 2016 to just above USD 15 million on average per year. On the contrary, school meals were significantly underfunded every year for the entire period of the country programme since 2012, and as a result, activities were consequently downscaled during 2016 and 2017.

In 2017, WFP operations benefited from more resources as compared to 2016, covering 56 percent of its country portfolio budget of USD 38 million. Approximately USD 6 million, meant to be programmed for the second semester of 2016, were reallocated for 2017 operations in agreement with partners, bringing the level of resources effectively used for 2017 activities to USD 21 million. The country office seized the new positioning of the Integrated Road Map and started implementing the Country Portfolio Evaluation recommendations, to secure a good level of funding despite other regional and international priorities.

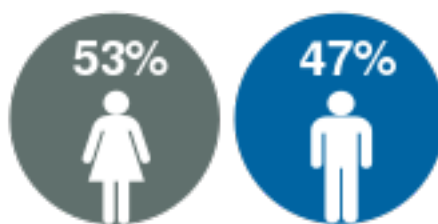
Overall funding allowed WFP to meet the most of refugees' needs, despite incurring in frequent pipeline breaks throughout the year, covering 70 percent of the requirements for refugee assistance under the PRRO. However, the local population component of the PRRO received only 44 percent of the allocated budget, reaching 59 percent of planned beneficiaries in four of the six planned regions, mainly through unconditional cash transfers and nutrition activities. With the resources available, WFP activities in 2017 were mainly directed towards livelihoods protective assistance, compared to interventions serving a productive safety-net function that were underfunded. All interventions were nutrition-sensitive and included to the extent possible a gender-transformative component. Funding allocated for cash-based transfers allowed for more programming flexibility to accommodate the urgent food needs of beneficiaries. Humanitarian air services – representing the most cost-efficient means of transport in Mauritania – continued throughout the entire year, but risked shutting down twice if end-of-year funding had not been received.

Funding in 2017 came through direct contributions from government partners, multilateral funds and the private sector. Over the past three years, some 68 percent of directed contributions to WFP Mauritania have come from exclusively eight donors. The country office recognises the urgent need to expand and diversify the funding base, considering the often unpredictable, restricted and delayed nature of the resources received. Furthermore, earmarking of funds, procurement restriction of certain commodities from local or regional markets, and tight terms of disbursement dates often limited the country office's scope to adapt to changing priorities and provide timely needs-based response.



Annual Country Beneficiaries

Beneficiaries	Male	Female	Total
Children (under 5 years)	14,005	14,654	28,659
Children (5-18 years)	30,768	31,394	62,162
Adults (18 years plus)	22,075	28,604	50,679
Total number of beneficiaries in 2017	66,848	74,652	141,500



Annual Food Distribution in Country (mt)

Project Type	Cereals	Oil	Pulses	Mix	Other	Total
Country Programme	178	32	48	68	69	394
Single Country PRRO	4,801	393	137	624	171	6,126
Total Food Distributed in 2017	4,979	425	185	691	240	6,520



Cash Based Transfer and Commodity Voucher Distribution (USD)

Project Type	Cash	Value Voucher	Commodity Voucher
Single Country PRRO	7,173,423	-	-
Total Distributed in 2017	7,173,423	-	-

Supply Chain

Mauritania has a well-equipped national airport in Nouakchott to receive large aircraft and cargo since 2016. On this occasion, the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) transferred its aircraft to the new national airport from the airbase near WFP country office.

Supply chain networks of well-established food items arrive through the port of Nouakchott, located 5 km from the city centre. The port of Nouakchott accounts for 96 percent of imported and exported commodities at the national level. The main imported products are wheat, rice, flour, sugar, oil and equipment, while exported goods include livestock, fish and minerals. On a monthly basis, the port handles an average of 333,000 mt of commodities, and is accessible to third-generation boats up to a maximum length of 200 m.

Local procurement of salt and wheat have reduced transport costs contributing to the low prices and availability [1]. Local purchases allowed WFP to be more flexible whilst contributing to the local economy. The other foods were procured internationally or from the Global Commodity Management Facility (GCMF) in Las Palmas, Gran Canaria. The GCMF is a strategic financing platform for positioning food in a region on the basis of anticipated demand from nearby countries. Its position, 1,118 km from Nouakchott, allows to reduce transit time and costs, especially in case of emergencies and enables food procurement at the right time to increase value for money. On good weather conditions, it takes only two days to ship food from Las Palmas to Nouakchott.

In 2017, WFP continued to ensure a cost-efficient and effective supply chain both for in-kind and cash-based transfer (CBT) operations through close tracking of commodity movements, and proactive and strategic coordination with transporters, financial institutions and mobile service providers. WFP started assessing the feasibility to transition to electronic CBT modalities for the coming year, in collaboration with the national mobile service providers.

To mitigate certain transport difficulties encountered in 2016 and early 2017, WFP diversified its private sector partners' base by contracting service providers with smaller trucks that could transport smaller quantities of food when needed. WFP also pre-positioned its own trucks (capacity 7 mt) in difficult hubs ready to intervene in case of transport difficulties. This led to a satisfactory performance of contracted transporters to WFP standards, and avoided pipeline breaks by pre-positioning food in advance of the rainy season. WFP supply chain unit will continue identifying the most appropriate improvements for the logistics of food assistance in Mauritania.

In line with the WFP's Supply Chain Strategy 2017–2022 and its commitment to the 2030 Agenda, WFP helped the Government and private sector service providers to improve their supply chain capacities. Following food infestations recorded in 2016 due to poor warehouse management, the supply chain unit organized a training workshop in inventory management techniques in April 2017, in collaboration with two government partners, the *Commissariat à la Sécurité Alimentaire* (CSA) and the Department of Nutrition and School Education (DNES). The workshop benefited 50 participants amongst private sector storekeepers, heads of stock divisions and regional delegates. As a result, 2017 did not record any infestations taking place in warehouses managed by WFP partners. Furthermore, to ensure that the quality and safety of food items during stockade, WFP has taken measures to equip all partner warehouses with cleaning, safety and management equipment (stock cards, scales, fire extinguishers and pallet trucks).

WFP continued its collaboration with other United Nations agencies such as the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the World Health Organization (WHO), for the storage of prophylactic sheaths as part of UNFPA's HIV/AIDS programme and transport of health kits (malaria diagnostics test) to health facilities in the country for WHO.

[1] Wheat was locally procured through a local Mauritanian enterprise without incurring in external transport costs. On its part, the enterprise purchased cereals from neighbouring countries and therefore the purchase figures reported as regional/international in the annual food purchases for the country table.



Annual Food Purchases for the Country (mt)

Commodity	Local	Regional/International	Total
Iodised Salt	36	-	36
Wheat	-	1,274	1,274
Total	36	1,274	1,309
Percentage	2.7%	97.3%	

Annual Global Commodity Management Facility Purchases Received in Country (mt)

Commodity	Total
Corn Soya Blend	188
Ready To Use Supplementary Food	146
Rice	1,772
Split Peas	143

Commodity	Total
Vegetable Oil	207
Total	2,456

Implementation of Evaluation Recommendations and Lessons Learned

The recent WFP Mauritania Country Portfolio Evaluation (CPE) 2011–2015 was conducted between June 2015 and February 2016, and presented to the 2016 Annual Session of WFP Executive Board. The CPE reviewed the positioning of top of WFP's portfolio and its performance and results, as well as the factors and quality of WFP's strategic decision-making. Results highlighted solid achievements in the assistance to Malian refugees, while the effectiveness of the assistance to food-insecure Mauritanian populations was assessed as varying across activities and over time. The evaluation revealed that weak funding heavily influenced the direction and impact of WFP's portfolio, and recommended a number of key strategic and programmatic adjustments.

Key lessons learned and which the country office started implementing in 2017 include:

- Strengthen the design and quality of all WFP interventions serving a protective or productive safety-net function, progressively building consistency with government and partners' interventions (including the *Tekavoul* programme) as part of a coherent shock-responsive safety-net framework;
- Move away from short-term recurrent interventions towards more systematic, agile and long-term solutions with a view to progressively transfer capacities and programmes to the Government;
- Concentrate WFP resilience-building and multi-year interventions within a narrower set of geographical locations, and leverage local partnerships to achieve better impact – as a result, since 2016, geographical coverage was downscaled from eight regions to six;
- Shift from a “care and maintenance” towards a “self-reliance” approach for refugees, and seek programmatic consistency with the support provided to host communities;
- Systematically use WFP interventions as platforms to deliver nutrition-sensitive and gender transformative activities, and support improvements to the existing institutional setup for malnutrition treatment; and
- Intensify support to national food security and nutrition early warning and analysis capacities, and address the existing gaps in terms of contingency and emergency response planning.

These priorities acknowledge that development strategies in Mauritania necessarily need to take into account the high frequency of shocks and be dynamic enough to buffer their impact, while protracted humanitarian interventions should be linked to and build upon government-led early warning, response planning and safety-net mechanisms.

Story Worth Telling

Yussouf is a 19-year old Mauritanian from the southern district of Bouilly, in the region of Guidimakha bordering with Senegal. He is the oldest of five brothers and sisters, and shares his daily meals with 25 cousins, in a family made up of 60 people. Like him, many young women and men have to cope with the daily struggles of unemployment in the region.

With no alternative work, Yussouf and his sister were some of the first people to join WFP's asset creation activities in their home district. The asset creation activities organized in Bouilly were identified by the community themselves and designed to enable ownership of the processes from the start.

"When I heard that WFP was encouraging the participation of young people, it made me feel hopeful that I could learn some new skills and start working soon," said Yussouf. "Too many of us (youngsters) find it hard to make a living from agriculture and herding, and are leaving our lands to seek opportunities in Dakar, the capital of Senegal. But I want to stay close to my family."

In Bouilly, the participation of women and youth was incredible, and made it possible to define community action plans reflecting the priorities of all, and taking into account local socio-economic and agro-ecological realities (most often related to climate change and soil erosion). Communities negotiated with local landowners and authorities who granted access and productive asset management conditions for the most vulnerable groups, which are typically left out of land utilisation. The community decided to rehabilitate some 15 ha of land that had not been used in over 40 years.

WFP's food assistance-for-assets (FFA) creation activities were implemented in partnership with the international non-governmental organization (NGO) *Groupe de Recherche et de Réalisation pour le Développement Rural dans le Tiers Monde (GRDR) Migration-Citoyenneté-Développement*. Participants received direct cash entitlements to the value of USD 88 (34,000 MRO) per household. "Five people from my family participated: my sister and myself, and three cousins," says Yussouf. "We received two cash entitlements, one at the start and one at the end of the activities. With the first money received we bought rice, vegetable oil and some meat for the family," he adds. Participants were trained in dry land farming methods to improve the production of lands. This included irrigation, rainwater harvesting for crop and pasture production, rehabilitation and stabilization of degraded land.

"After clearing out the land from weeds, we built a series of so-called 'half-moons' – soil bunds reinforced with stones – to capture the sediments from rainfall or the river overflow, so the good sediments are captured in the half-moon, and we can plant sorghum, maize and peanut," explains Yussouf. Rain was scarce and erratic this year, but produced enough harvest to satisfy the immediate needs of the family, and save some for the coming months. The crop residues (peanut fodder and sorghum stalk) were used for livestock farming.

"Money finishes but the experience remains," says Yussouf. "We are now able to duplicate this experience and teach other members of our family, to optimise the yield from our small farm and restore our lands in degradation."

Project Results

Activities and Operational Partnerships

In 2017, WFP's main activities under the Country Programme centred on providing school meals, strengthening the capacity of implementing actors, and helping the Government to disseminate the national School Feeding Policy countrywide. Government priorities detailed in the 2016 School Feeding Policy – elaborated with WFP's technical support – include: (i) reduce drop-outs by improving the enrolment and retention of children enrolled in the various educational cycles; (ii) promote local production (agriculture, livestock, fishing) by introducing local products into the food baskets of school meals and promoting their consumption; (iii) promote hygiene, health and nutrition in schools by increasing the number of health facilities, continuing systematic deworming of pupils, reinstating medical visits and strengthening health and nutrition education activities in places of learning; and (iv) ultimately, develop a national “home-grown” school feeding linking small-scale farmers and fishermen to school meals programme to support rural economies and to make programme more sustainable.

WFP planned to distribute two school meals per day for 160 days in rural southeastern regions characterised by low school attendance and high food insecurity, malnutrition and poverty, with the aim to increase attendance and reduce drop-outs. School meals consisted of a daily morning porridge of Super Cereal, and a lunch comprised of cereals, beans, oil and salt. In 2017, the Country Programme targeted 73,000 students enrolled in 413 public primary schools.

Each school has a school meals management committee, made up of teachers and parents selected amongst community members, who oversee the meal preparation and manage the inventories. In the areas covered by WFP assistance, these committees contributed to the preparation of school meals by providing other foods (vegetables, meat) to complement children's diets, in addition to firewood, cooking utensils and personal hygiene products.

Following the recommendations of the Country Portfolio Evaluation in 2016 for programmatic convergence and very limited funding trends of the past years, WFP downscaled the assistance to six regions (the same six regions targeted by PRRO 200640) as compared to the eight regions targeted in 2016. Beneficiary schools were chosen according to the areas with highest malnutrition and food insecurity, combined with the lowest education indicators and government education statistics. The geographical targeting was streamlined with other activities in WFP's portfolio, such as lean season general distributions and food assistance-for-assets (FFA) creation activities. The geographical targeting of WFP school meals sites overlaps with areas of other WFP activities and partners' interventions, to increase complementarities and synergies for better achievement of goals.

In 2017, the implementation of school meals activities was carried out exclusively in the region of Hodh Ech-Charghi, from March to June, due to insufficient financial resources received. Thus, 16,900 children in 100 schools or 23 percent of the planned beneficiaries for 2017 were able to benefit from the two daily school meals. While the development of the National School Feeding Programme was meant to be a priority for 2017, the Government did not allocate a budget for the development of the national programme apart from a contribution of USD 500,000, allowing to provide for two daily school meals in May 2017 for 60,400 children in eight regions of Mauritania, including the five regions where WFP could not intervene this year.

The Ministry of Education is WFP's main cooperating partner of the school meals programme through the Department of Nutrition and Health Education (DNES). The DNES is represented at regional and departmental level by departmental directors and inspectors of primary education. In each region, DNES has a warehouse and personnel available to oversee the food storage. Health and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) activities are also coordinated by relevant ministries, usually the ministries of health and hydraulic.

Results

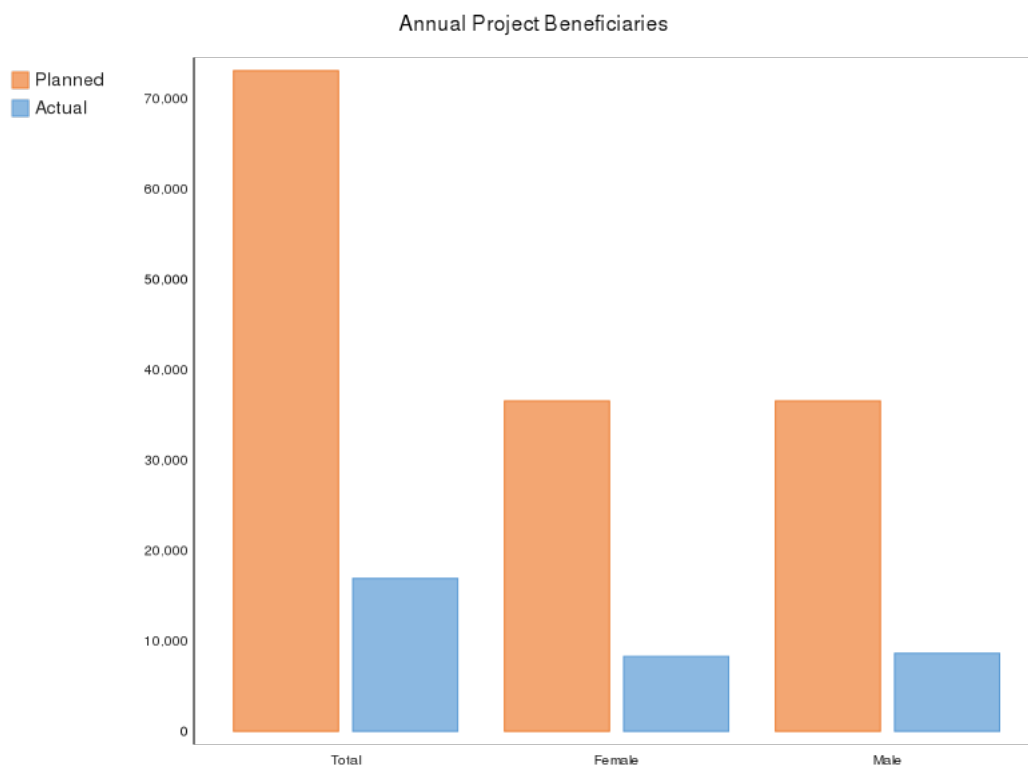
The low level of funding received for the country programme since 2015 has significantly hampered WFP's abilities to reach the project targets and objectives. WFP focused its limited resources in one of the most remote and underdeveloped regions in the country with low access to basic services, security risks and difficult environmental conditions to create synergies with the PRRO activities in the same region. Considering WFP was the main provider of school meals in Mauritania largely throughout the entire lifespan of the Country Programme, the interruption of assistance over the last years may have negatively affected schoolchildren's access to food and learning [1]. In regions with high prevalence of food insecurity and malnutrition, the lack of daily hot meals may have had immediate negative effects on school attendance and learning as well as nutritional status of the assisted schoolchildren.

WFP observed a few contextual and implementation challenges during its monitoring missions, including poorly trained teachers, poor quality of canteen management and training, and absence of essential equipment for the kitchen, and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities. To the extent possible, WFP engaged with the Department of Nutrition and Health Education (DNES), teachers and parents to improve the quality of facilities, and ensure a general knowledge on the importance of school meals for children’s healthy growth and cognitive abilities. For example, the participation of the schools’ headmasters in trainings on inventory management (including register-keeping and stock report) organized by WFP and the local education authorities, resulted in a better management of the canteens by communities and teachers alike.

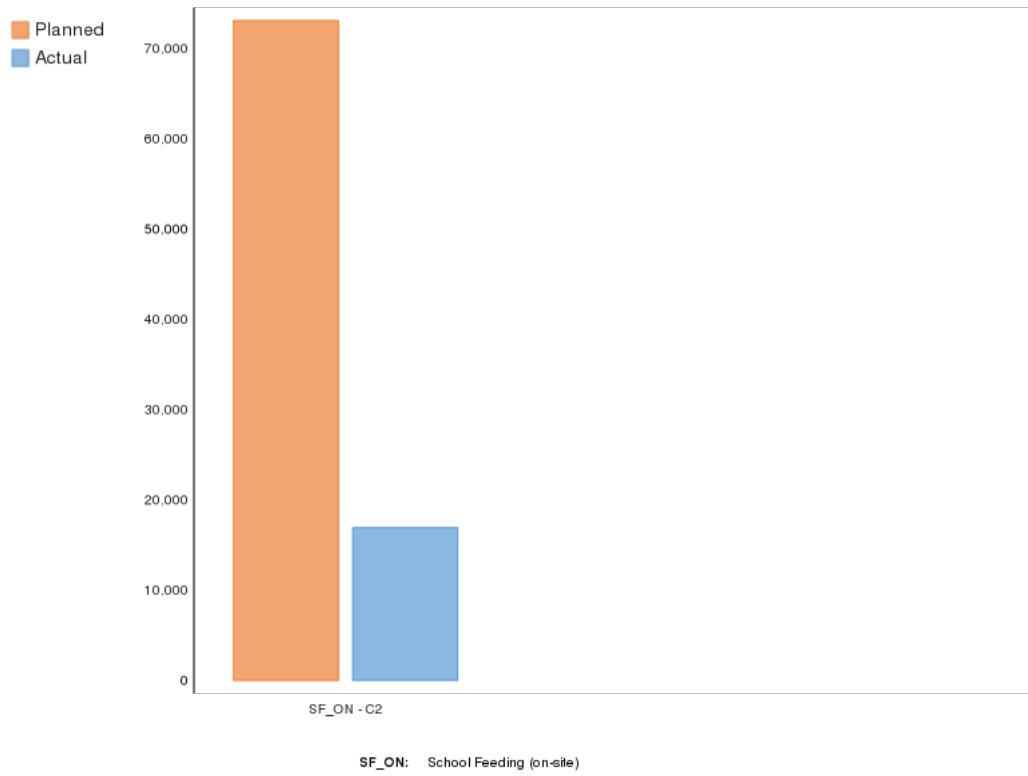
With financial support from WFP, DNES organized capacity development sessions for a total of 200 inspectors, canteen management teachers and members of parent-teacher-student associations on: i) inventory management including record-keeping; ii) nutrition and hygiene; and iii) protection and gender. The training on warehouse management was organized for storekeepers and department heads of the DNES involved in inventory management, as part of WFP’s efforts to support the Government in implementing the National School Feeding Policy and design of the National School Feeding Programme itself.

WFP also supported the DNES to start new dynamic activities with the schools’ head masters. Some 100 teachers and managers were rewarded for their commitment and devotion to supporting school meals activities in their schools, even where WFP could not provide direct assistance.

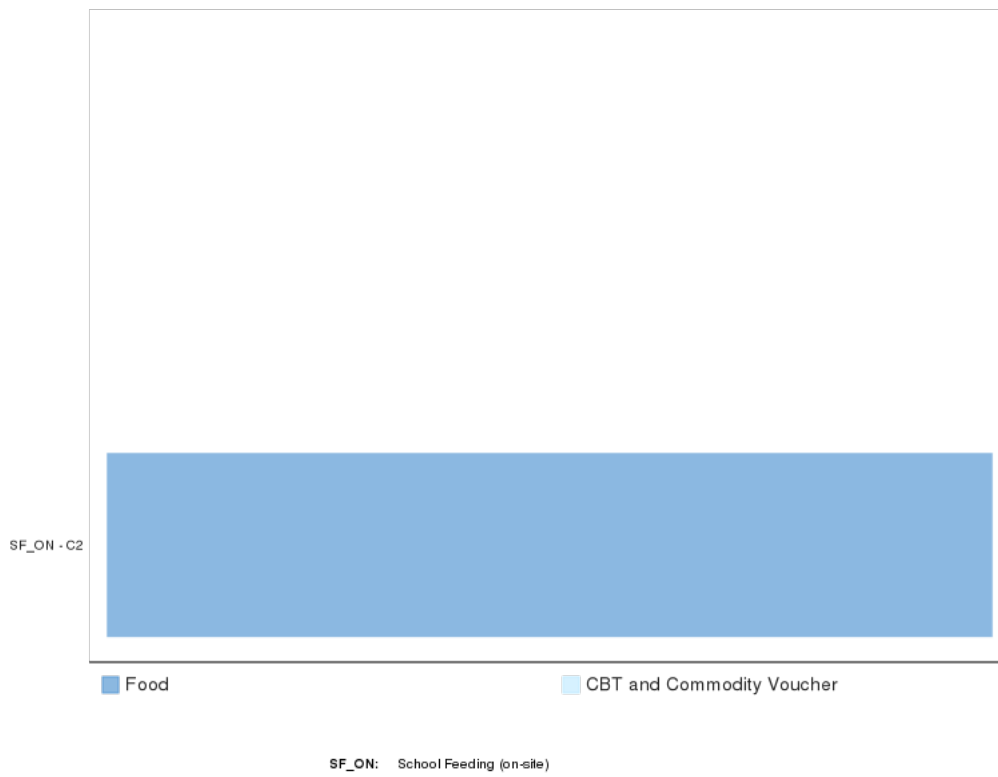
[1] Due to limited resources, WFP assisted schools changed throughout the project cycle to support schools in areas most in need. As a result, a thorough comparison and analysis of outcome indicators across different years cannot be undertaken.



Annual Project Beneficiaries by Activity



Modality of Transfer by Activity





Annual Project Food Distribution

Commodity	Planned Distribution (mt)	Actual Distribution (mt)	% Actual v. Planned
Comp.2-ImproveAccessPrimaryEducation			
Corn Soya Blend	1,011	68	6.7%
Iodised Salt	51	7	13.6%
Lentils	506	28	5.5%
Micronutrient Powder	6	-	-
Olive Oil	-	5	-
Rations	-	62	-
Rice	1,896	178	9.4%
Split Peas	-	20	-
Vegetable Oil	190	27	14.4%
Subtotal	3,659	394	10.8%
Total	3,659	394	10.8%

Performance Monitoring

WFP carried out monitoring activities in 96 percent of assisted schools in the Hodh Ech-Charghi region, and counted on data collected from the Department of Nutrition and Health Education (DNES). Information on the provision of daily meals was available for the distributions implemented by the DNES. The outcome indicators are collected and analysed by the Regional Departments of Education (DREN) of the Ministry of Education, and included in the national annual education statistics for each school year. WFP kept working with the Ministry of Education to obtain data on overall enrolment and retention trends at the national level to inform the development of the school meals programme. WFP will review the monitoring operational plan with the Ministry to define a more reliable and prompt reporting system in 2018.

In addition to the missions carried out, WFP followed up on the recommendations provided during previous missions, to monitor programme implementation, including the need to ensure better storage of food away from direct light.

Progress Towards Gender Equality

In 2017, WFP and the Ministry of Education continued to encourage the participation of women and men in parent-teacher associations and school management committees. Women participated during the feeding days and overlooked preparation of meals, hygiene of children and procurement of firewood for cooking. In areas where families could not contribute monetarily to the salary of cooks, families organized a rotational voluntary work schedule where both women and men participated in the preparation of meals.

A total of 200 women were members of the school meals management committees in the schools assisted in Hodh Ech-Charghi. Women were typically tasked with buying fish, meat and vegetables if available on the market to diversify children's dietary intake. In this context characterised by structural vulnerabilities and poverty, women's participation and their decision-making role in the committees represent an important empowerment factor, and expose women directly to the importance of educating girls and boys alike.

Protection and Accountability to Affected Populations

WFP was unable to collect sufficient data for indicators determining a clear progress on protection and accountability to affected populations due to limited school meals distributions taking place in 2017. Nevertheless, during the distributions, WFP staff provided information on the entitlements, beneficiary rights and targeting criteria to the food management committees. In this regard, WFP enabled the active consultation and participation of the communities it assisted, including ensuring a gender balance in school management committees. Furthermore, WFP used community-based complaints and feedback mechanisms such as food management committees, and collected information from representatives or local leaders. No safety issues were reported when food assistance was provided. However, when a mishandling of products was observed by management committees, they communicated the issues to the local government authorities.

Figures and Indicators

Data Notes

Cover page photo © WFP/ Agron Dragaj

Children in one of the schools benefiting from WFP's school meals programme.

Overview of Project Beneficiary Information

Table 1: Overview of Project Beneficiary Information

Beneficiary Category	Planned (male)	Planned (female)	Planned (total)	Actual (male)	Actual (female)	Actual (total)	% Actual v. Planned (male)	% Actual v. Planned (female)	% Actual v. Planned (total)
Total Beneficiaries	36,545	36,545	73,090	8,625	8,283	16,908	23.6%	22.7%	23.1%
Total Beneficiaries (Comp.2-ImproveAccessPrimaryEducation)	36,545	36,545	73,090	8,625	8,283	16,908	23.6%	22.7%	23.1%
Comp.2-ImproveAccessPrimaryEducation									
By Age-group:									
Children (5-18 years)	36,545	36,545	73,090	8,625	8,283	16,908	23.6%	22.7%	23.1%
By Residence status:									
Residents	36,545	36,545	73,090	8,625	8,283	16,908	23.6%	22.7%	23.1%

Participants and Beneficiaries by Activity and Modality

Table 2: Beneficiaries by Activity and Modality

Activity	Planned (food)	Planned (CBT)	Planned (total)	Actual (food)	Actual (CBT)	Actual (total)	% Actual v. Planned (food)	% Actual v. Planned (CBT)	% Actual v. Planned (total)
Comp.2-ImproveAccessPrimaryEducation									
School Feeding (on-site)	73,090	-	73,090	16,908	-	16,908	23.1%	-	23.1%

Annex: Participants by Activity and Modality

Activity	Planned (food)	Planned (CBT)	Planned (total)	Actual (food)	Actual (CBT)	Actual (total)	% Actual v. Planned (food)	% Actual v. Planned (CBT)	% Actual v. Planned (total)
Comp.2-ImproveAccessPrimaryEducation									
School Feeding (on-site)	73,090	-	73,090	16,908	-	16,908	23.1%	-	23.1%

Participants and Beneficiaries by Activity (excluding nutrition)

Table 3: Participants and Beneficiaries by Activity (excluding nutrition)

Beneficiary Category	Planned (male)	Planned (female)	Planned (total)	Actual (male)	Actual (female)	Actual (total)	% Actual v. Planned (male)	% Actual v. Planned (female)	% Actual v. Planned (total)
Comp.2-ImproveAccessPrimaryEducation									
School Feeding (on-site)									
Children receiving school meals in primary schools	36,545	36,545	73,090	8,625	8,283	16,908	23.6%	22.7%	23.1%
Total participants	36,545	36,545	73,090	8,625	8,283	16,908	23.6%	22.7%	23.1%
Total beneficiaries	36,545	36,545	73,090	8,625	8,283	16,908	23.6%	22.7%	23.1%

Project Indicators

Outcome Indicators

Outcome	Project End Target	Base Value	Previous Follow-up	Latest Follow-up
Comp.2-ImproveAccessPrimaryEducation				
SO4 Reduce undernutrition and break the intergenerational cycle of hunger				
Increased equitable access to and utilization of education				
Retention rate in WFP-assisted primary schools				
<i>ALL CP TARGETED DISTRICTS, Project End Target: 2017.12, Base value: 2012.07, Secondary data, Previous Follow-up: 2016.12, Secondary data, Latest Follow-up: 2017.12, Secondary data</i>	=85.00	45.00	68.80	53.80
Enrolment: Average annual rate of change in number of children enrolled in WFP-assisted primary schools				
<i>ALL CP TARGETED DISTRICTS, Project End Target: 2017.12, Base value: 2013.12, WFP programme monitoring, CP Report, Previous Follow-up: 2016.12, Secondary data, Latest Follow-up: 2017.12, Secondary data</i>	=6.00	2.30	-2.00	0.00

Outcome	Project End Target	Base Value	Previous Follow-up	Latest Follow-up
Drop-out rate in WFP-assisted primary schools				
<i>ALL CP TARGETED DISTRICTS, Project End Target: 2017.12, Base value: 2012.07, WFP programme monitoring, CP reports, Previous Follow-up: 2016.12, Secondary data, Latest Follow-up: 2017.12, Joint survey</i>	<10.00	55.00	31.20	46.20
Gender ratio: ratio of girls to boys enrolled in WFP-assisted primary schools				
<i>ALL CP TARGETED DISTRICTS, Project End Target: 2017.12, Base value: 2012.07, WFP programme monitoring, CP Reports, Previous Follow-up: 2016.12, Secondary data, Latest Follow-up: 2017.12, Secondary data</i>	=1.00	0.96	0.88	1.02

Output Indicators

Output	Unit	Planned	Actual	% Actual vs. Planned
Comp.2-ImproveAccessPrimaryEducation				
SO4: School Feeding (on-site)				
Number of schools assisted by WFP	school	423	100	23.6%

Partnership Indicators

Cross-cutting Indicators	Project End Target	Latest Follow-up
Comp.2-ImproveAccessPrimaryEducation		
Amount of complementary funds provided to the project by partners (including NGOs, civil society, private sector organizations, international financial institutions and regional development banks)		
<i>MAURITANIA, School Feeding, Project End Target: 2017.12, Latest Follow-up: 2017.12</i>	>350,000.00	0.00
Number of partner organizations that provide complementary inputs and services		
<i>MAURITANIA, School Feeding, Project End Target: 2017.12, Latest Follow-up: 2017.12</i>	>1.00	1.00
Proportion of project activities implemented with the engagement of complementary partners		
<i>MAURITANIA, School Feeding, Project End Target: 2017.12, Latest Follow-up: 2017.12</i>	=100.00	100.00

Resource Inputs from Donors

Resource Inputs from Donors

Donor	Cont. Ref. No.	Commodity	Purchased in 2017 (mt)	
			In-Kind	Cash
Private Donors	WPD-C-03761-03	Iodised Salt	-	4
		Total	-	4