

Evaluation Brief

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



Central African Republic: An evaluation of WFP's Portfolio (2012 – Mid 2017)

Context

CAR is a landlocked country, with a population of approximately 4.6 million people, of which OCHA estimated approximately 50% were in need of humanitarian assistance in 2017. It currently ranks 188 out of 188 countries in the 2016 UNDP Human Development Index. The humanitarian crisis is both one of the worst in the world (proportional to population) and one of the least well-known and least well-funded. In 2012, UNICEF estimated that stunting was 40.7 percent.

WFP Country Strategy and Portfolio in Central African Republic

A UN and WFP Level 3 Emergency was declared in December 2013 and lasted until May 2015. Since then, CAR has been a WFP Level 2 Regional Emergency. Over the evaluation period, WFP implemented a portfolio of 18 operations of which: a Country Program and a Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation (2012-2013), several Emergency Operations (2014-2017) and nine Special Operations including UN cluster coordination and provision of UN Humanitarian Air Services. Over the period, WFP assisted an average of 0.9 million beneficiaries per year, with a peak of 1.6 million in 2014 – the equivalent of 1/3 of the total population. The total required funding was slightly over USD 869 million, against which WFP received USD 555.3 million (64 percent).

Objectives and Scope of the Evaluation

The evaluation covered the period 2012 – mid-2017. Focusing on the portfolio as a whole, the evaluation assessed: i) WFP's alignment and strategic positioning; ii) the factors and quality of strategic decision-making; and iii) the portfolio performance and results.

Key Findings

Alignment and Strategic Positioning

WFP CAR did not have a formal strategy during the evaluation period. The approach was "reactive", focused for most of the evaluation period on responding to emergency needs. This approach was relevant and appropriate given wide-spread violence, mass displacements, insecurity, poor infrastructure and access, limited partner capacity and chronic underfunding.

WFP's operations were aligned with the UNDAF Framework and key national policies. Stakeholders widely perceived WFP's comparative advantages as its unique capacities in transport, distribution, and food security information. The evaluation commended the efforts of the country office to pilot voucher transfers in urban areas (2015) and to strengthen recovery-oriented activities (food-assistance-for-assets with FAO and Purchase-for-Progress (P4P)), though funding trends for those activities did not appear encouraging. The Interim Country Strategic Plan (2018-2020) constituted an important step towards recalibrating the balance between emergency response and supporting early recovery in a still volatile context.

Factors and quality of Strategic Decision-Making

Sustained high volumes of need in a volatile and unpredictable context, combined with increasingly severe funding shortfalls and security and access constraints drove the decision to prioritize life-saving needs and reach the maximum number of people, reducing the size, frequency and duration of distributions.

To the extent feasible in CAR, key decisions were supported by data and analysis, but with limited scope and reliability AS THE context seriously impeded systematic data collection, even on needs and coverage. Monitoring was fragmented.

On the positive side, consistently good relations with authorities and partners enhanced cooperation as a key component of decisions and performance, even in difficult circumstances.

Portfolio Performance and Results Effectiveness

Despite the challenges, WFP's overall output was high, especially for General Food Distribution, reaching over one third of the total population at the peak of the emergency in 2014 and between 80% and 120% of planned beneficiaries during each year of the evaluation period. The scale of activities was highly dependent on security levels, local capacities (health systems, education, governance bodies, police, etc.) and funding. Outcome measurement was undermined by data limitations.

General Food Assistance (in kind and through vouchers) represented the main form of assistance. Over the CPE period, 144,052 metric tons of food-aid were distributed to beneficiaries. Vouchers, gradually introduced from 2015, appeared to offer an effective alternative when market and security conditions allowed. But cost-effectiveness assessment was limited.

School meals contributed to some return to normality and to reconciliation and social cohesion. In 2012 and 2017, nearly 20 – 25 percent of schools pupils were receiving WFP school meals, but targeting was driven by accessibility and the quality of education hindered by many factors.

Nutrition: Interventions focused on treatment of Moderate Acute Malnutrition and the Prevention of Acute Malnutrition, and were developed in line with changing needs over time. However, interventions did not tackle the much more widespread chronic malnutrition.

Food Assistance for Assets and P4P: outputs were still limited and negatively affected by continuing violence. There were only 50,457 FFA participants in 2016; and only 1,100 metric tons of food were purchased under P4P in the first half of 2017.

Humanitarian Principles, Protection and Accountability to Affected Populations While WFP was perceived by multiple actors as neutral, there was insufficient data to assess the application of humanitarian principles and accountability to affected populations.

Partnerships – Partnerships with FAO (seed protection, surveys), UNHCR (refugees) and UNICEF ("back to school") were particularly

strong. WFP also had strong partnerships with the government.

Gender: Standard Project Reports stated that approximately 50% or more of total beneficiaries were women. But neither WFP nor its partners performed in-depth gender analysis, making it impossible to assess the portfolio's contribution to Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment.

Capacity development – Little evidence was available regarding the effect of capacity strengthening activities, which in most cases focused on short-term training with limited longer-term initiatives.

Efficiency

Logistics costs and security issues are a main driver of efficiency in CAR. Logistics services were highly commended, but efficiency gains could be made by reducing delays along the main transport corridor into CAR and better management of the WFP truck fleet. Efficiency and effectiveness could also be improved by addressing high staff turnover and low capacities, especially in the sub-offices.

Sustainability

The situation in CAR has worsened again since 2016 and the country is highly dependent on funding from the international community to provide assistance and basic services to the population. Poor access to basic social services and food security situation are not likely to change until peace is restored and state presence substantially reinforced.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Overall Assessment

CAR is a complex, multi-year, unpredictable emergency with low international visibility, posing an extremely challenging operating context. The "reactive" approach - mainly focused on responding to emergency needs through food distributions and school feeding - was relevant and appropriate. The Interim Country Strategic Plan (2017) constituted an important step towards re-calibrating the balance between emergency response and supporting early national recovery for greater effectiveness in a still volatile context.

The context seriously impeded systematic data collection. To the extent feasible in CAR, key decisions were supported by data and analysis, but with limited scope and reliability.

Despite the challenges, WFP's overall output was high, especially for general food distributions. The scale of activities was highly dependent on security levels, local capacities (health systems, education, governance bodies, police, etc.) and funding. However, outcomes were difficult to measure, given data limitations. Vouchers, gradually introduced from 2015, appeared to offer an effective alternative when market and security conditions allowed. Emergency school meals were perceived as contributing to a sense of normality and social cohesion, but coverage was limited and the quality of education hindered by many factors. Other activities (nutrition, food for assets and P4P) were valued but implemented on too small a scale to have meaningful effects.

The lack of analysis on gender dynamics was a missed opportunity, given the high levels of gender-based violence.

Changes in Logistics and Human Resource Management could improve efficiency and effectiveness further.

Recommendation 1. Supporting the conditions for Peace. Support partners directly involved in the re-establishment of peace (e.g. UNICEF, UNDP or MINUSCA Civil Affairs, etc) , particularly through FFA and/or the vouchers modality,. Contribute to mapping

national institutional capacities to improve the focus and the effectiveness of its capacity-strengthening activities, leveraging on the experience and knowledge of headquarters and the regional bureau. Ensure systematic involvement of line Ministries and national actors in the design and monitoring of its projects. Enhance synergies with relevant civil society and other actors, for example in education. Ensure that its partners are aware and regularly reminded of the importance of humanitarian principles which underpin all humanitarian assistance. WFP should, whenever possible, work together with IFAD and FAO to institutionalize partnerships for both programming and fundraising, particularly in the areas of agriculture resilience and gender equality.

Recommendation 2. Funding. Examine the donor landscape, assessing the range of donors and donor appetite to fund recovery activities in WFP operations in CAR. WFP should also review its articulation of linkages between the triple nexus and its FFA and P4P programmes to ensure that existing and potential donors make informed funding decisions.

Recommendation 3. Food security information and monitoring. Optimize WFP's strategic role in food security, by enhancing the use of existing tools and taking the lead in assisting Government to develop a national Food Security Information Strategy, and ensuring Government ownership on a Sentinel network. Continue to strengthen monitoring systems, centrally and in the sub-offices; prepare a formal strategic monitoring plan, with clear coverage targets, systematically taking into account the different levels of security and access limitations, and translating them into different frequencies and modalities of monitoring (e.g. use of third-party monitoring and extended use of remote monitoring through telephones and tablets). This strategy should also track and monitor Accountability to Affected Populations effectively.

Recommendation 4. Gender. Develop an evidence-based operational strategy to integrate gender in programming, in particular: ensure that programming is based on specific gender analysis; improve and monitor the protection of women, girls, and other vulnerable groups; prioritize women's access to productive assets, financial services, and control over property; strengthen partnership with Government, international agencies and women-led entities

Recommendation 5. Nutrition Enhance coherence between WFP and UNICEF MAM and SAM targeting respectively, to ensure maximum synergies between the two programmes; identify an appropriate strategy to work with the Ministry of Health; consider a developmental approach for chronic malnutrition, when feasible.

Recommendation 6. Vouchers Expand programming capacity and scale up the voucher modality by carrying out: more systematic market studies, more comparative analyses on the different modalities of the interventions and better analysis of the factors affecting people's choices and preferences.

Recommendation 7. Human Resources. Commission and publish a staffing review, based on the staff needed to deliver against the new Country Strategic Plan and widen efforts to improve living conditions, security and other incentives in the sub-offices, to help attract good quality staff in the field offices closer to beneficiaries.

Recommendation 8. Logistics. Work to improve the management of the corridor Douala-Bangui which is under the responsibility of the Cameroon Country Office, with the Regional Bureau playing a technical advisory role; advocate with authorities, through senior management, for hassle-free transit; adequately fund truck maintenance facilities; and optimize WFP-fleet utilization.