

Evaluation Brief

WFP Office of Evaluation: Measuring Results, Sharing Lessons



Strategic evaluation of the pilot country strategic plans

This strategic evaluation assesses WFP's progress so far in the formulation and initial implementation of Country Strategic Plans (CSPs), in the framework of the Integrated Road Map (IRM) which includes the Policy on CSPs, the Strategic Plan (2017-2021), the Financial Framework Review and the Corporate Results Framework (CRF).

The IRM changes WFP's strategy, programme structure, financial management and reporting, transforming its ability to help countries achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. The CSP framework represents a commitment to strategically driven performance management, addressing both humanitarian and development aspects of WFP's mandate. As core instruments in the implementation of the WFP Strategic Plan 2017–2021, CSPs prioritize SDG 2 and SDG 17 while contributing to other SDGs in accordance with national circumstances and priorities.

Subject and Focus of the Evaluation

The evaluation focuses on six questions: progress towards the intended organisational change set out in the CSP Policy and directly related documents in the framework of the IRM; the extent to which WFP Headquarters and Regional Bureaus worked appropriately to develop the CSP framework and provided adequate support to Country Offices (COs) in the formulation and implementation of the 2017 CSPs; country-level factors exerting positive or negative influence; whether WFP adequately captured and used lessons from the formulation and implementation of the CSPs; opportunities and risks encountered; and the likelihood that WFP will achieve the intended organisational change through the CSP.

Objectives and Users of the Evaluation

The evaluation serves the dual objectives of accountability and learning and therefore: (a) assesses and reports on the quality and results of WFP's implementation of the new strategic direction related to country strategic planning (accountability); (b) determines the reasons why the changes resulting from implementation of the new approach to country strategic planning occurred or not, to draw lessons that should help in further implementation of the new strategic direction (learning). It is expected that the results of the evaluation will be used to strengthen the understanding and quality of CSPs and contribute to revision of relevant policies and guidance as necessary.

Key Evaluation Findings

Alignment with national policies and priorities.

Introduction of the CSP, linked to the National Zero Hunger

Strategic Review (NZHSR) exercise, has generally strengthened the alignment of WFP's work with national policies and priorities. Ongoing commitment will be required to sustain that alignment.

Harmonisation with United Nations entities and processes.

Alignment of CSP cycles with those of United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs) has only been partially achieved. United Nations and WFP informants generally see strong potential for greater harmonization beyond alignment of cycles, in the context of the current United Nations Reform initiatives that are expected to strengthen the UNDAF model significantly.

Maintaining and enhancing emergency response capacity.

Available data from the initial emergency responses under CSPs suggest that the CSP framework has extended the average approval time for new funding of emergency responses. Procedural improvements have been introduced to accelerate CSP revisions where these are required, but administrative hurdles did not delay the response to the crisis in Bangladesh.

Links between humanitarian and development work.

The holistic structure of CSPs demonstrates the WFP's programmatic commitment to combine humanitarian and development interventions in mutually reinforcing ways. Yet CSPs do not automatically transform the work WFP does, the funding it receives, or the conditions attached to that funding. CSPs continue to face the existing challenge of developing capacity in new areas or approaches and attracting funding to these areas.

Predictability and flexibility of resource allocation.

WFP hopes that funding will become less restrictively earmarked to activities and more available for use at CSPs' Strategic Outcome level or across the whole CSP. To date, there has been little progress towards these objectives, which depend on donor policy and decision-making and are bound to take time. Confirmed commitments for multi-year funding for 2018 to date represent only 22 percent of the total commitments.

Visibility and communication.

Through the CSPs, governments, development partners and other stakeholders have greater understanding of WFP's overall programme. Combined with the broad engagement undertaken through the NZHSR process, this has led to greater visibility of WFP at the country level. But so far, there is less evidence that, as a result, governments are "increasingly involving WFP in policy and programme dialogue across the humanitarian-development spectrum", an objective of the CSP Policy.

Gender and other cross-cutting issues. The CSP Policy does not make new commitments on gender or other cross-cutting issues but says that they will be incorporated in CSPs and addressed in line with the relevant WFP policies. Beyond gender, it is not clear what WFP's priority cross-cutting issues are. Intensive work has been done to ensure that gender is appropriately addressed in CSPs. There has been no comparable effort for other cross-cutting issues.

Transaction costs. In the intentionally rapid transition to CSP structures and systems, it is not surprising that COs' transaction costs rose. But the strain on systems and staff was heavier than it needed to be, because of inconsistency and gaps in coordination. Not all the constituent elements, and the corresponding guidance, were ready when they were needed, and administrative systems and procedures have not yet stabilised. Recognising the challenges, WFP has started to simplify procedures.

Partnerships. The CSP Policy is well aligned with WFP's strong commitment to partnerships. The preparation of CSPs has generally created good opportunities for COs to engage with existing and potential partners at many levels, although the 'whole of society' approach advocated in CSP guidance has not gained much traction. The introduction of CSPs has stimulated private sector partnerships in several countries and has strengthened collaboration with the Rome-based Agencies.

Performance management, reporting and accountability. CSPs are intended to articulate the links between resources and results better, leading to greater accountability to stakeholders. There have been delays in the revision of the CRF to support these intentions. Long-standing challenges continue in the development of appropriate indicators in areas such as capacity development and policy support.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Overall Assessment. Adopting CSPs as the framework for planning, managing and delivering WFP's contributions to the achievement of zero hunger was a significant step forward for the organization. At this early stage of implementing the CSP framework, the contribution of the CSP to the intended organizational outcomes has, on balance, been positive, but has varied significantly across the ten organizational outcomes reviewed and across country contexts.

By building on a comprehensive review of national needs, the CSP has often been a catalyst for helping WFP move to from 'deliverer' to 'enabler' (and back again when necessary) and to develop better conceptual links between humanitarian and development work. However, the CSP has not yet resulted in the expected gains from the increased transparency and accountability that the framework offers, specifically a move to more flexible and predictable funding.

It is impossible to say whether a more gradual process of reform would have made a stronger contribution to the intended organizational outcomes in the longer term. But the rapid speed at which the elements of the IRM have been

implemented has heightened the challenges of coordination, staff capacity strengthening, learning and the application of lessons learned. A key positive feature of the CSP process has been the ability to better align to national priorities. But achievement of operational and administrative standardisation around core systems and procedures should be balanced with the flexibility to adapt as necessary.

The task of introducing and stabilising CSPs and their supporting systems is far from complete, and multiple adjustments lie ahead. Further years of intensive, focused commitment by the organization at all levels are thus needed to achieve what the IRM and the CSP Policy intended.

Recommendations

Management of CSP framework

1a. Mainstream IRM-specific structures while strengthening existing structures to ensure effective coordination of the IRM and effective operationalisation of the CSP approach in a transparent and inclusive manner.

1b. Strengthen the process of systematic learning from the implementation of the CSP framework and strengthen implementation process monitoring to support learning across all areas.

1c. Carry out a comprehensive review of experience with the CSP format and systems to generate recommendations for improving the CSP framework and other elements of the IRM.

CSP Process and Guidance

2a. Building upon existing efforts, ensure that the simplification process is complete by 1 January 2019.

2b. Update existing guidance related to the development and implementation of CSPs and prepare a single and comprehensive set of new guidance.

2c. By the end of the first quarter of 2019, define cross-cutting issues and provide guidance on how to address them in the context of a CSP.

UN Reform

3a. Continue strong engagement with the United Nations reform process and ensure effective participation in the practical work of developing a new generation of UNDAFs, including by introducing WFP innovations and experiences into the process.

3b. Develop strategies to ensure that all CSP cycles are aligned with UNDAF cycles as quickly as possible.

Monitoring and Reporting Performance

4a. Ensure that the comprehensive system of monitoring and reporting performance is realigned to the revised CRF.

4b. Ensure that country portfolio evaluations are placed at the centre of the performance management system.

Funding

5. Address constraints on more flexible and predictable financing.

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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