

Ethiopia: An evaluation of WFP's portfolio (2012-2017)

CONTEXT

Ethiopia's population exceeds 100 million and despite rapid economic growth, millions of people remain poor and vulnerable to shocks. Major droughts occurred in 2015/16 and 2016/17. There are large numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons. The Government leads the humanitarian response.

WFP COUNTRY STRATEGY AND PORTFOLIO

Ethiopia is historically one of the largest WFP operations and it was a Level 2 Regional Emergency for most of the evaluation period.

WFP programmes for supporting Ethiopian nationals included humanitarian assistance and safety net support, targeted support for nutrition, school feeding and various pilot activities supporting livelihoods. WFP also led the provision of food assistance for refugees, including supplementary feeding and school feeding programmes. Additional operations supported humanitarian logistics and capacity building.

WFP assisted an average of 6.5 million beneficiaries per year, with a peak of 9.2 million in 2016. The total required funding was USD 3.9 billion, against which WFP received USD 2.2 billion.

OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION

The evaluation covered the period 2012 –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's strategic positioning was found to be appropriate and WFP's operations were generally integrated with national systems and aligned with the UNDAF Framework.

However, WFP's strategy was largely reactive and external stakeholders perceived a decline in strategic clarity over time. Stakeholders identified WFP's

comparative advantages as its capacity to respond to emergency needs, and its contribution to the national logistics response.

Factors and quality of Strategic Decision-Making

WFP's role in meeting needs is largely determined by the preferences of the Government and donors. As the roles of Government and international non-governmental organizations increased throughout the period evaluated, the share and geographical scope of WFP food assistance changed with an increasing focus on the more challenging Somali and Afar regions.

Chronic weaknesses in monitoring, reporting and evaluation constrained learning and fundraising. A lack of management continuity and vacancies of some key senior positions also affected decision making.

Portfolio Performance and Results

Despite funding levels of 57 percent, the proportion of actual to planned beneficiaries was relatively high, averaging 80 percent. This was achieved by a mix of increased efficiency (reduction in procurement and transport costs) and reduced level of assistance.

General Food Assistance for Ethiopian Nationals.

The programme was broadly effective. However, the integration of WFP's work in Ethiopia with wider programmes led by the government and supported by a range of partners means it is difficult to attribute outcomes specifically to WFP. The most significant achievement was the successful humanitarian emergency response to large-scale droughts from 2015/16 onwards.

General Food Assistance to Refugees. WFP was generally effective. The main challenge has been the increasing scarcity of resources, leading to ration cuts and to the prioritization of relief activities over other activities .

Cash Based Transfers. WFP made increasing use of cash-based transfers, but overall, use was lower than evidence justified.

School meals. A recent impact evaluation concluded that the programme was effective. However, the number of beneficiaries has been steadily declining.

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

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Nutrition. Targeted supplementary feeding was effective at treating moderate acute malnutrition. Nonetheless, there was insufficient attention to refugee nutrition activities and WFP did not receive funding for stunting prevention.

Purchase for Progress. Local procurement through P4P doubled, but the programme was discontinued in June 2016 due to resource constraints. Nonetheless, P4P lives-on through the WFP Smallholder Market Support and Coordination Group and the government's School Feeding Programmes, which have heavily drawn from the WFP P4P experience.

Food Assistance for Assets. Beneficiaries significantly decreased as a result of reductions in funding and the reduced geographical scope of WFP's role in the government's Productive Safety Nets Programme (PSNP).

Infrastructure projects. Projects such as the Djibouti logistics hub and the Geeldoh bridge in the Somali region, were intended to reduce transport costs and lead-times, but these benefits have not yet fully materialized.

Humanitarian Principles, Protection and Accountability to Affected Populations. Humanitarian access was good except for some IDP contexts and some inconsistencies in the treatment of refugees based on their nationality were identified. Neutrality did not emerge as a key issue, however, the nature of WFP's working relationship with Government requires vigilance, particularly as regards the Somali regional government.

Partnerships. WFP had particularly strong working relationships with UNOCHA, UNHCR and UNICEF throughout the period, and strengthened its relationship with the World Bank. Government was WFP's main implementing partner. WFP also partnered with NGOs particularly for nutrition programmes.

Gender. Despite systematic efforts to strengthen WFP's gender approach, gender staff ratios still need to be improved and the Country Gender Action Plan has yet to be fully implemented.

Capacity development. WFP's support to the National Disaster Risk Management Commission and the national logistics system was a significant contribution to sustainability.

Efficiency

Ethiopia's ability to cope with major crises was greatly assisted by efficiency gains in WFP's supply chain, obtained for example through the use of the Global Commodity Management Facility and the use of the Berbera corridor. WFP also deserves credit for efficiency gains associated with biometric identification of refugees. The increase in cash-based transfers also boosted efficiency.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall Assessment

During 2012–2017, WFP in Ethiopia played a substantial role in responding to emergencies, through support to national systems

and logistics as well as its own deliveries. It continued to lead on food assistance to refugees, although funding constraints made it increasingly difficult to provide adequate rations.

However, WFP also saw its overall role in humanitarian response change, and became increasingly focused on the more challenging Somali and Afar regions. The country office suffered, practically and reputationally, from lack of leadership continuity and a perceived lack of strategic focus.

In the coming period, with the staffing review nearing completion, significant improvements to M&E initiated and the Country Strategic Plan process under way, WFP in Ethiopia has an unmissable opportunity to address past shortcomings and to define and strengthen its future role.

Recommendations

- 1. Country Office staffing.** Ensure that the discontinuities in senior staffing that were experienced during the 2012–2017 period do not recur and prioritize recruitment for core senior posts.
- 2. Country Strategic Plan.** Ensure that the preparation process is outward-looking so that the CSP is credible with the Government and donors, who must share WFP's perspective on WFP's role.
- 3. Resilience.** Use work on resilience as a conceptual framework for linking humanitarian and development objectives, addressing resilience of national institutions as well as that of households and individuals.
- 4. Monitoring and Evaluation.** Ensure adequate staffing and leadership in the country office. Rethink priorities in order to better reflect the fact that WFP is predominantly a contributor to joint programmes. Ensure that each activity has an M&E plan.
- 5. Nutrition.** Conduct a situation analysis and develop a nutrition plan for the next CSP period, working with the Government and other actors in order to identify where WFP has the most added value; prioritize recruitment of the staff required to deliver this plan.
- 6. Refugee response.** Work with partners to ensure adequate funding for humanitarian needs while also supporting evolution towards more sustainable approaches. Join other United Nations agencies on insisting that humanitarian principles are observed.
- 7. Gender.** Continue to address gender issues in an integrated way, building on the country gender action plan. Actions should include proactive measures for boosting recruitment of women national staff and more attention should be directed to context-specific gender issues throughout the portfolio.
- 8. Protection and accountability to affected population.** It should continue to be a priority, and WFP should work on strengthening national systems wherever doing so is consistent with the needs of beneficiaries.