



Synthesis of Country Portfolio Evaluations in Africa (2016-2018)

CONTEXT

Sub-Saharan Africa faces complex challenges including recurring cycles of conflict, political instability and climate change-related shocks. Populations in the region are highly vulnerable to poverty, hunger and displacement.

WFP COUNTRY PORTFOLIOS

The Synthesis assessed eight WFP country portfolio evaluations in Burundi, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Ethiopia, Mali, Mauritania, Somalia and South Sudan, completed during 2016 - 2018. The country portfolios comprised 68 separate operations; had combined requirements of over USD 12.7 billion (59% met); and targeted 100 million beneficiaries.

OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE OF THE SYNTHESIS

Covering the eight CPEs, the objectives of the synthesis are to: i) draw lessons from experience; ii) assess WFP performance and results; and iii) contribute to the evidence base on WFP's assistance in fragile and conflict-settings.

FINDINGS

Alignment and Strategic Positioning

All eight WFP country portfolios were appropriately designed for country conditions at the time. WFP assistance was largely focused on rapid crisis response and scaling up, aligned with national priorities and overall coherent with UNDAFs and Humanitarian Response Plans. WFP was an active partner in their development.

WFP reoriented swiftly to address emergency conditions, launching major responses to drought in Ethiopia in 2015/16 and Somalia in 2017, and to the outbreak of nationwide civil war in the Central African Republic in 2013. In Cameroon, it transformed a small development-focused portfolio into a major emergency response following a massive influx of refugees in 2014.

Rapid descent into emergency conditions and gaps in leadership continuity compromised effective strategic planning, although the implementation of WFP's 2016 policy on country strategic plans promised future improvement.

Strategic decision making and choices

Beyond operational conditions and funding, WFP's strategic choices were influenced by: consultations with national stakeholders; use of learning and evidence; risk assessment and mitigation; and gaps in management and staff continuity.

Working in partnerships

Approaches to partnership: The emphasis on working through partnerships of the 2016 CSP policy was gradually adopted in all eight country offices. Partners praised WFP's technical and adaptive capacities, its transparency and openness and its proactive engagement with partners.

Cluster system and working groups: WFP cluster leadership or co-leadership was considered efficient and effective, although some strategic and operational coordination weaknesses were found.

United Nations and Rome-based agency coordination: Operational coordination encompassed joint needs assessments; food security surveys; data-sharing and implementation in school feeding, asset creation/resilience programming and nutrition. However, practical barriers including diverse programming cycles, resource capacities and funding streams impeded planned synergies. Challenges to Rome-based Agencies coordination included financial constraints and the limited field presence of WFP sister agencies.

Donor partnerships: Despite challenges in reconciling diverse donor priorities, WFP had generally strong country-level partnerships with donors. Relationships were reinforced through extensive consultations on strategic planning. However, in three countries communication gaps created the perception that WFP transparency was limited.

Performance and results

Beneficiary targeting was effective but with challenges of geographic targeting and monitoring.

WFP's food assistance, specialised capabilities and technical assets met highly unpredictable needs.

WFP met or almost met outcome targets for malnutrition-related indicators and for enrolment rates. Performance varied when measured against targets for dietary diversity, community asset, coping strategy index scores, and food consumption scores.

Such aggregate-level results, however, mask major contributions to averting disaster. For example, WFP's role in the humanitarian response to drought in Ethiopia helped prevent widespread catastrophe in 2015/2016, while in Somalia and South Sudan WFP food assistance was credited with helping prevent famine on several occasions from 2014 to 2017.

Where funding and conditions permitted, WFP activities spanned the humanitarian-development continuum, although the prioritization of life-saving activities sometimes compromised strategic relevance in other areas.

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

For more information please contact the Office of Evaluation: wfp.evaluation@wfp.org

Strategic use of comparative advantages

To help achieve results, WFP harnessed its comparative advantages in food and nutrition security analysis; logistics; agility and ability to operate at scale; field knowledge; innovation; and humanitarian advocacy.

Humanitarian Principles, access and the triple nexus

WFP largely adhered to humanitarian principles while effective humanitarian advocacy helped enable access in security-challenged areas. Although the “triple nexus” concept gained currency after most of the evaluations had been completed, five CPEs reflected WFP contributions to peacebuilding.

Gender, protection and accountability to affected populations

Approaches to gender remained focused on ‘including women’ and few transformative changes were sought or achieved. All eight portfolios adopted proactive approaches to protection, despite an inconsistent analytical base.

Attention to accountability to affected populations was limited. Sudden cessation in activities without advance warning risked hardship to beneficiaries.

Efficiency

While all introduced cost-reduction measures, four portfolios were efficient overall and three ensured timely assistance. Drivers of efficiency included (i) biometric beneficiary registration, which reduced inclusion/exclusion errors and limited duplication; (ii) use of cash transfer modalities, which reduced costs and increased timeliness; (iii) ensuring preparedness, which facilitated timely emergency response; (iv) emergency activation, which enabled swift mobilization for large-scale emergencies; (v) supply chain management procedures, including cost-sharing agreements across country offices and pre-positioning to reduce the use of cargo planes; and (vi) infrastructural rehabilitation and development.

Sustainability

WFP adequately planned-in links from emergency activities to transition/recovery/development, including a ‘twin track’ approach in Somalia and Mali. In volatile operating contexts, opportunities for sustainability were limited. However, strategies for handover to national partners were developed in four countries but could not be implemented due to sudden reversion to emergency conditions (Cameroon); limited government capacity or engagement (Mali, Mauritania); and/or limited funding availability (Mali). Four portfolios lacked adequate exit strategies.

CPE recommendations and management responses

The CPEs included 60 recommendations in total; WFP management agreed with 54 of them and partially agreed with the remaining six. Wherever CSPs were developed during or after CPEs, WFP applied the learning and evidence generated by the evaluations to inform its strategic planning.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The CPEs highlighted how WFP’s specialized capabilities and technical assets were applied to address the effects of war, political instability and climate change on food security and nutrition. WFP’s strengths in rapid adaptation and scale-up; extensive emergency response capacity; technical abilities in food security and nutrition analysis; and committed relationships with national partners prove

valuable assets, not least in supporting famine prevention in Ethiopia and Somalia. However, strategic gaps and weaknesses – including during periods of stability – were compounded by gaps in staff and management continuity fragile contexts/protracted crises. Sound analytical basis, alongside preparedness measures, scope for flexibility and systematic risk assessment and mitigation, is clearly needed.

Contributions to peacebuilding under the triple nexus were still emergent, and further scope exists to apply a resilience lens in preventing and reducing food and nutrition insecurity.

WFP worked well in partnership, particularly with host governments, although there were some practical barriers to operational coordination with partner United Nations agencies. Reconciling diverse donor priorities across operational areas is an ongoing challenge that requires clear advocacy, rationales and communication.

Protection was well integrated into portfolios, despite limited analysis at the design stage. Attention to accountability to affected populations was inconsistent at best, exacerbating the difficulties of weak or inadequate exit strategies.

With few transformative changes sought or demonstrated, WFP’s commitment to a ‘shift in gear’ under its 2015-2020 Gender Policy and associated Gender Action Plan was not yet evident.

Under volatile conditions, WFP faced major dilemmas. When confronted by emergency needs, it prioritised saving lives over recovery and transition. This came at a cost; of continuity of activity; of commitments to relationships and communities; to changing lives limiting potentially valuable humanitarian and development gains. Such choices do not lie fully under WFP’s control, but sound planning and preparation; clear decision-making; and advocacy for multi-year funding, are essential if WFP’s work is to ensure linkages across the triple nexus and prioritise prevention and preparedness in future.

Lessons

Seven lessons have been drawn from the eight CPEs: (i) a strong analytical base supports strategic relevance; (ii) resilience presents an opportunity for integrated planning; (iii) capacity strengthening requires long-term planning and commitment; (iv) adherence to the Humanitarian Principles requires adapting to context; (v) protection and accountability to affected populations require sustained attention; (vi) gender requires a transformative approach; and (vii) investment in innovation pays dividends.

Recommendations

To support WFP’s strategic shift, the synthesis made six recommendations:

- (i) improve availability and use of guidance to support CSP design;
- (ii) strengthen the financial and partnership base for development and peacebuilding;
- (iii) address staffing and management arrangements in fragile contexts/protracted crises;
- (iv) develop regional-level operational plans for development and peacebuilding actions, applying a gender-transformative lens;
- (v) systematise localised adherence to the Humanitarian Principles; and
- (vi) improve adherence to accountability to affected populations commitments.