

# Evaluation of Cameroon WFP Country Strategic Plan 2018-2020

## CONTEXT

Cameroon is a lower-middle-income country with about 25 million inhabitants. It ranks low on the Human Development Index (151 out of 188). It has experienced instability from i) the Boko Haram crisis in the Far North region, ii) the Northwest and Southwest crisis, and iii) the influx of 250,000 refugees from the Central African Republic. In 2019, 749,430 people were severely food insecure. WFP operates in these crisis areas addressing high poverty and food insecurity.

## SUBJECT AND FOCUS OF THE EVALUATION

The Cameroon Country Strategic Plan (CSP) Evaluation covers WFP activities implemented from mid- 2017 to mid- 2019, assessing the earlier Country Programme, two Emergency Operations, Humanitarian Air Service and the CSP (2018-2020). The CSP focuses on crisis response, nutrition, resilience building, partnerships, and support for the humanitarian community.

The CSP budget was \$94 million, of which 77 percent was funded.

## OBJECTIVES AND USERS OF THE EVALUATION

The evaluation was commissioned by the independent Office of Evaluation to provide evaluative evidence for accountability and learning, to inform the design of the next CSP in Cameroon.

It was conducted between August and September 2019 to assess WFP's strategic positioning and role and the extent to which WFP has made the strategic shift expected by the CSP, WFP's contributions to strategic outcomes, efficiency, and the factors that explain WFP performance.

The main users for this evaluation are the WFP Cameroon Country Office, the Regional Bureau in Dakar, WFP headquarters technical divisions, the Government of Cameroon, and other partners.

## KEY EVALUATION FINDINGS

### WFP's strategic position, role and specific contribution based on country priorities and people's needs as well as WFP's strengths

The national Zero Hunger Strategic Review conducted in 2016 facilitated the alignment of the CSP with national sustainable development goals and relevant national policies with some exceptions in prioritizing resilience of refugees. National stakeholders appreciated WFP's partnership, in particular for its advocacy on development-oriented policies, but needed more resources to address national capacity limitations in food security and nutrition.

WFP's analytical work helped identify the most pressing food and nutrition security needs and WFP provided a principled response in areas affected by conflicts and displacement. WFP harnessed its comparative advantages including its logistics capacity and network of offices well positioned geographically to address needs.

### Extent and quality of WFP's specific contribution to CSP strategic outcomes

Overall, WFP performed well in output delivery. However, the CSP strategic outcomes were ambitious and WFP could not demonstrate actual food security improvements over the first 1.5 years of CSP implementation.

**General food assistance:** In 2018 and 2019, WFP supported 1.6 million people to meet acute food needs, reaching 89% of beneficiaries through food and cash-based transfers. Households increasingly used negative coping strategies, and improvements on diversity scores were mixed.

**School Feeding:** With increased ownership by the Ministry of Education as a result of the joint strategy with WFP, WFP performed well assisting 140 schools, and distributing meals to 99,936 pupils (125% of planned), the majority being girls. Activities ended because of funding constraints.

**Food assistance for assets (FFA):** In 2017, FFA activities reached 5,763 participants including 52% of women in the North and East.

In 2018, FFA reached up to 12,900 participants through 22 field level agreements contributing to recovery.

**Nutrition response:** WFP brought blanket supplementary feeding activities closer to the most vulnerable population through a community-based approach but did not significantly strengthen decentralised capacities.

**National capacity strengthening:** Trainings were held for government stakeholders but these were often insufficiently linked to implementation practices and their outcomes were poorly monitored. WFP played a key role in advancing coordinated national food security analysis systems, covering the regions in which WFP operates. Yet, up-scaling and sustainability prospects for those systems were limited.

**Protection and accountability to affected populations:** WFP made progress in setting up complaints and feedback mechanisms. However, to make WFP's assistance safer and more dignified, concerns related to the selection of transfer modalities need more attention through continuous engagement with relevant stakeholders.

**Humanitarian principles and access:** WFP's approach to access was cautious in NW/SW crisis areas and it was at times challenging to maintain operational independence from the government and to be perceived as neutral.

**The triple nexus:** WFP developed operational strategies to address the humanitarian-development nexus, but did not mainstream conflict sensitivity and peace building in its work. It contributed to the triple nexus via the double nexus.

**Gender equality and women's empowerment:** WFP improved gender sensitivity of its interventions focussing on the collection of gender-sensitive data and training to prevent WFP activities from a negative impact on women. Progress was slow towards WFP's gender transformative objectives.

**Sustainability** of results remains uncertain in light of limited long term partnerships, reliable funding and national ownership and capacities.

#### **WFP's efficient use of resources in contributing to CSP outputs and strategic outcomes**

Coverage and geographic targeting have adapted well to the evolving situation in Cameroon but application of targeting criteria for individual beneficiaries was inconsistent. Programme efficiency was marked by slow delivery, high transaction costs and recurrent pipeline breaks, mainly due to resource constraints and the severe contextual challenges. UNHAS has proven critical to the humanitarian community and, together with WFP's Global Commodity Management Facility, it contributed to mitigate lead-time management risks. Nevertheless, the increased flexibility of resource allocation expected from the shift to the CSP approach did not materialize. The slow roll-out of WFP's beneficiary information and transfer management platform (SCOPE) and security and accessibility constraints led to

delays in food assistance delivery. WFP regularly analysed efficiency and effectiveness of alternative transfer modalities, but did not consistently analyse cost-effectiveness to inform decision making.

#### **Factors that explain WFP performance and the extent to which it has made the strategic shift expected by the CSP**

WFP was challenged to develop a multi-year funding approach while its main donors worked with a one-year funding cycle. High donor earmarking within the CSP funding structure did not allow swapping commodities. The CSP provided greater attention to partnerships.

A key challenge was that human resource capacity fell short of needs given the scale of the CSP targets. WFP exerted efforts to deal with understaffing of the monitoring and evaluation unit, yet M&E capacity was insufficient.

#### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

WFP has only partially met the ambitious expectations from the shift towards country-level strategic planning and management. The CSP brought a more coherent strategic framework and improved alignment of WFP's strategic positioning with national policies and priorities. It strengthened collaboration with other UN agencies. It has also gradually led to better integration of gender equality and protection. But, the CSP did not fully prepare WFP for the complex crises which diverted its attention and resources away from developmental activities.

Human resource limitations and high donor earmarking also limited the capacity of WFP to deliver beyond emergency response objectives and adequately monitor its achievements in other areas. As a result, WFP has not yet been able to initiate a strong shift from "saving lives" to "changing lives" nor has it made significant progress in gradually transferring food security and nutrition support systems to the government as intended by the CSP. These are considered essential to reduce vulnerability and ensure sustainability of results.

**Recommendation 1.** Strengthen the strategic approaches to nutrition, resilience and capacities.

**Recommendation 2.** Enhance strategic partnerships, funding and advocacy.

**Recommendation 3.** Invest on evidence base to support the strategic focus and the CSP implementation strategy

**Recommendation 4.** Strengthen human resources capacity to implement ongoing priorities and prepare for the next CSP.

**Recommendation 5.** Improve emergency preparedness, supply chain and programme effectiveness and efficiency.

**Recommendation 6.** Strengthen M&E, knowledge sharing and communication around results.