

# Evaluation Brief

*Decentralized evaluation for evidence-based decision making*

## Midterm Evaluation of nutrition activities in the Gambia (2016-2019)

### SUBJECT OF THE EVALUATION

This midterm evaluation of World Food Programme (WFP) nutrition activities in The Gambia covers the period January 2016 to December 2019. It includes all the nutrition activities implemented under three programmatic frameworks: The Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation (PRRO) 200557 from 2016 to 31 March 2018, the Transitional-Interim Country Strategic Plan (T-ICSP) 2018, and the first year of implementation of the Country Strategic Plan (CSP) 2019-2021.

The evaluation was commissioned by WFP in The Gambia and started in January 2020 and the fieldwork was completed on September 2020.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE EVALUATION

The main objectives of the evaluation are accountability and learning, including a focus on assessing gender equity considerations and empowerment of women.

### METHODOLOGY

The evaluation methodology comprised a participatory gender sensitive mixed method approach. The methodology was adapted to address limitations due to Covid-19 pandemic by adopting a hybrid approach to data collection: virtual consultations and field visits. Eighteen evaluative questions were elaborated under the following criteria: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability.

### KEY FINDINGS

#### Relevance

Nutrition activities were in line with the needs of the most vulnerable groups identified by surveys and assessments, focusing in areas of the country with high undernutrition rates and on the critical lean season.

Nutrition activities were well aligned with The Gambia policy framework. The only area where WFP has not yet explicitly engaged is in the area of addressing overweight/obesity.

Stakeholders consider WFP to be a strong and pivotal partner in supporting the national policy agenda for nutrition. Activities are all well aligned and largely implemented in partnership with other actors and the government. However, there is scope to further examine opportunities for improved synergies and economy of effort with other initiatives, especially in Social and Behavioural Change Communication (SBCC) and screening for acute malnutrition.

There has been no gender analysis to inform the design of the nutrition activities. Activities have reached boys and girls equally, as evidenced by reporting, but a strong focus on women for SBCC and engagement in activities has overlooked the importance of men's roles in advancing women's empowerment.

#### Effectiveness

Moderate Acute Malnutrition (MAM) treatment recovery rate target has been met overall; but narrowly missed for boys in 2019, according to WFP reporting.

Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) rates have reduced over the past 6-7 years, and in 2019, the GAM prevalence nearly reached programme targets. The synergetic approach to programming has played a significant role in this achievement.

WFP's effective coordination and collaboration with government, UN and other partners was praised by stakeholders and has contributed to improvements in the nutritional status of the population.

WFP does not have a clear capacity strengthening strategy in place for nutrition, so while partners have been effectively trained on specific activity implementation, limited attention has been paid to longer-term capacity and systems development. The scope to improve nutrition and the effectiveness of school programs.

#### Efficiency

The evaluation team could not make conclusive statements on the cost efficiency of the nutrition activities with the financial data

.available In both 2016 and 2017, the Blanket Supplementary Feeding (BSF) was implemented late, missing the hunger gap of July/August. The therapeutic Supplementary Feeding (TSF) only started in October 2017. Activities were largely delivered in a timely manner after that, with one significant pipeline break in 2019. Technological advances, such as use of tablets for data collection and reporting and WhatsApp communication groups, improved programme efficiencies. There were some areas in which improved synergy between programmes with other stakeholders would likely have improved efficiency of the specific nutrition activities. Improvements in supply chain management systems would have improved efficiency, particularly for TSF.

### Sustainability

The implementation-related training activities have been carried out largely in consideration of ensuring partners can implement WFP's nutrition activities well. An approach to capacity development with a systems-strengthening vision would have greater potential to leave behind sustainable improvements.

There is no overall strategy for WFP's capacity strengthening efforts for nutrition that articulates goals and objectives and links together the national level support with the implementation-level activities.

The GAM rates at national level and in all of WFP's targeted regions have seen a positive downward trajectory over the past 6-7 years, to which WFP activities have very likely contributed. However, the impact of COVID-19 has changed the outlook, with modelling projecting a doubling of the burden of GAM in The Gambia by the end of 2020 if no action is taken to prevent and treat malnutrition.

Significant cultural and structural barriers remain to women's empowerment in remote areas and these continue to adversely affect nutritional status of women and children.

WFP's capacity development efforts at the national level, have a significant likelihood of generating longer-term benefits beyond the timeframe of active WFP support.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Overall Assessment

In response to the criteria of relevance, the evaluation team concluded that the nutrition activities were highly relevant to the Gambian national context. The only area where WFP has not yet explicitly engaged in supporting The Gambia policy framework is in the area of addressing overweight/obesity. WFP is also yet to consider whether and how it can respond to emerging nutrition challenges in urban environments. One critical shortcoming is the absence of a gender analysis to inform the design of the nutrition activities.

As for effectiveness, the evaluation team concluded that the TSF was effective in treating MAM. The capacity strengthening activities were effective. However, opportunities were missed to improve delivery of the programme and strengthen the Ministry of Health (MOH) system in the longer-term. There is also more work

required to adequately meet WFP's corporate gender and equity standards and accountability commitments to affected populations.

In terms of efficiency, the evaluation found that, after a late start, activities were largely delivered in a timely manner from late 2017, barring one pipeline break in 2019. Greater attention to supporting work planning and management approaches by implementing partner staff could have eased workloads and improved efficiency of operation. Some significant shortfalls in supply chain management systems further reduced programme efficiency. There were notably areas in which improved synergy between programmes and joined up planning and/or implementation would likely have improved efficiency of the nutrition activities.

In line with sustainability, the evaluation team concluded that the impact of COVID-19 has changed the outlook on the long-term benefits of the nutrition activities and efforts to prevent and treat malnutrition continue to be needed. An opportunity was missed to approach capacity development strategically with a systems' strengthening vision to leave behind sustainable improvement.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this evaluation, the recommendations of the evaluation team are outlined below.

**R1:** WFP CO should conduct a gender analysis study examining power dynamics between men and women in The Gambia.

**R2:** WFP nutrition team should develop a strategic approach to nutrition capacity strengthening in collaboration with the government.

**R3:** WFP nutrition team should ensure the momentum of processes advanced by WFP's efforts at national level is not lost.

**R4:** WFP CO nutrition team should further develop strategies to increase resilience of vulnerable households.

**R5:** WFP nutrition team should align TSF more closely with Integrate Management of Acute Malnutrition(IMAM) and programming for Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) management in the immediate/short-term.

**R6:** WFP logistics team should urgently address the issue of transporter accountability mechanisms for TSF and BSF.

**R7:** WFP nutrition team, with UNICEF, should strengthen the biannual nutrition surveillance and to expand it to non-Primary Health Care (PHC) communities.

**R8:** WFP nutrition team to develop and enhance the SBCC approach for improved effectiveness and sustainability.

**R9:** School feeding and nutrition teams should improve the provision and quality of nutrition education in schools.

**R10:** WFP teams should review the M&E plan and establish a system to more comprehensively and regularly monitor nutrition outcomes.