



SAVING
LIVES
CHANGING
LIVES

Evaluation of Lao PDR WFP Country Strategic Plan 2017-2021

CONTEXT

Lao PDR is a lower middle-income country with a growing economy and increasing socio-economic disparities across geographical regions, ethnic groups, and education levels.

People living in remote regions are more vulnerable to food insecurity. Undernutrition remains a preoccupation and livelihoods are vulnerable to climate change.

The government has localized and integrated the Sustainable Development Goals into its national planning framework.

SUBJECT AND FOCUS OF THE EVALUATION

The Lao PDR CSP articulates the shift from food assistance to policy engagement and the gradual handover of food and nutrition security programmes to the Government with four strategic outcomes focusing on school children in rural remote areas, stunting levels, resilience to climate shocks and national and local institutional strengthening.

The total budget for the CSP was USD 88 million, of which 90 percent was funded by 2020.

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 WFP CSP in Lao PDR. It covers WFP activities implemented from 2017 to October 2020.

It was conducted between July 2020 and April 2021 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 factors that explain WFP performance.

The main users for this evaluation are the WFP Lao PDR

Country Office, the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, WFP headquarters technical divisions, the Government of Lao PDR, and other WFP Lao PDR stakeholders.

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 evaluation finds that CSP is relevant to the national priorities by appropriately aligning with key national policies and strategies.

While WFP demonstrated an impressive reach in the government priority districts, logistical challenges remained for some of the most remote communities.

WFP successfully adapted its strategic position to respond to emergency situations such as floods and COVID-19.

The CSP's strong alignment with the UN Partnership Framework contributed to working relationships with the Rome-based agencies.

Extent and quality of WFP's specific contribution to CSP strategic outcomes in Lao PDR

Under Strategic Outcome 1, there is evidence of the positive effects of school feeding on children's school attendance and, in some cases, ability to study. WFP made significant contributions to improving the policy and budget landscape for a national school meals programme, paving the way for the handover of the school meal programme.

Increasing community ownership, an essential component to ensure sustainability, showed mixed results. There are on-going challenges including clarity over the process at local level for sustainability after hand-over.

Under Strategic Outcome 2, the Agriculture for Nutrition project with International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) has had positive results at the community level. WFP

Full and summary reports of the evaluation and the management response are available at <http://www.wfp.org/independent-evaluation>

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

has also established a successful number of farmer nutrition schools, reaching a high proportion of women participants.

The successful delivery of individual nutrition activities has laid an important foundation, whilst current results do not show a coherent scaled picture to discern WFP's contribution to the national efforts tackling malnutrition.

For Strategic Outcome 3, some successful food for assets creation activities, such as creation of rice banks, were observed, while there has been less activity than intended due to funding shortfall and the need to reprioritize some of the funding to emergency flood response assistance.

Under Strategic Outcome 4, WFP has taken opportunities for capacity strengthening. However, there is no articulated overarching approach to strengthening institutional capacity with a longer term vision.

The CSP took an active approach to safely reaching beneficiaries as well as to consider environmental concerns.

Despite the period when the Gender Action Plan implementation slowed down, gender was generally well mainstreamed into the CSP's implementation.

Recognizing on-going challenges to the handover process such as lack of clarity, governmental funding limitations and capacity shortages at the local level, WFP is now providing some post-handover technical support for school feeding programmes.

Despite the absence of an emergency related outcome and focus area in the CSP, WFP was able to develop some innovative links between emergency and development works such as a campaign to promote use of cash to support dietary diversity and nutrition.

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

The delivery of activities has generally been timely.

While WFP reached about 74 percent of the schools in targeted provinces it is not well sighted on the level of vulnerability and remoteness of the schools not reached.

Even though data was not sufficient for comprehensive assessment, the analysis of those available indicates that the cost-efficiency of activities has improved over the CSP.

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

Use of evidence: WFP extensively used a variety of existing analyses to develop the CSP and commissioned a strategic review of food and nutrition security.

Resource mobilisation: Although the Needs Based Plan was well-funded, the available resources masks both the under-funding of some activities, as well as delays and inflexibility of funding.

Partnerships: The CSP has enabled stronger partnerships with the government of Lao PDR at all levels.

CSP flexibility: The shift to the CSP has provided WFP with increased ability and flexibility to adapt within its set of activities.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall Assessment

Overall, the CSP is aligned with the direction of the government, and has remained a relevant approach to supporting the government to meet the food and nutrition needs of the country.

The CSP provided the space for WFP to adapt its operations to support the government's response to flooding and COVID-19.

Development partners appreciate WFP for its traditional strengths and extensive reach, while it is encouraged to engage in further strategic partnership to effectively deliver development work.

There has been a significant movement to address the root causes through school meals though some challenges remain for its sustainable handover.

Strengthening WFP's contribution to the broader nutrition efforts requires to articulate the areas in which it is making progress and having influence through strategic partnerships with other international actors.

Considering the COVID-19 pandemic and climate-related challenges, it is important to have a comprehensive approach to mainstream resilience across different strategic outcomes.

The CSP design with engagement on the generic challenge of strengthening national and local governance institutions to ensure improved service delivery especially in hard-to-reach areas was appropriate, though results are limited so far.

Gender has been widely mainstreamed and incorporated in the implementation of the CSP.

The CSP would have benefited from a stronger analysis and comprehensive approaches across the strategic outcomes to support a more strategic engagement.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. Deepen utilization of evidence to support the shaping and implementation of a realistic scope and focus for the new CSP.

Recommendation 2. Strategic engagement of partners for stronger integration of partnerships within programming.

Recommendation 3. Development of a country office approach to resilience strengthening and emergency preparedness and response

Recommendation 4. Strengthen the WFP staff capacity for country capacity strengthening.

Recommendation 5. Reinforcement of WFP's approach to the school meal programme hand-over strategy.