



World Food Programme

SAVING LIVES  
CHANGING LIVES

# Evaluation of Zimbabwe WFP Country Strategic Plan 2017-2021

## CONTEXT

Zimbabwe is a landlocked, resource-rich, low-income, food-deficit country with a population of 14.9 million that is predominantly rural and young.

Zimbabwe was hit by several major disasters during the CSP period and as a result has some of the highest levels of food insecurity in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>1</sup> Gross domestic product is estimated to have contracted by 8.1 percent in 2019, and the recession continued in 2020 due to persistent climate shocks and domestic vulnerabilities worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic.

## SUBJECT AND FOCUS OF THE EVALUATION

The country strategic plan articulates WFP's increasing focus on building long-term resilience to food insecurity, with six strategic outcomes focused on crisis response, nutrition, livelihoods, resilience, social protection and supply chains.

The CSP had an original budget of USD 197.6 million<sup>2</sup> and aimed to reach 792,656 beneficiaries; however, it was revised six times, resulting in an increase of the budget to USD 607.04 million<sup>3</sup> and a corresponding increase in planned beneficiaries to 4,584,450 in 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 Zimbabwe. It covers WFP activities implemented between 2015 and 2020 to assess continuity from the previous programme cycle, the extent to which the CSP introduced strategic shifts and implications for such shifts for performance and results..

It was conducted between September 2020 and May 2021. It assessed 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 Zimbabwe Country Office, the Regional Bureau for Southern Africa, WFP headquarters technical divisions, the Government of Zimbabwe, and other WFP Zimbabwe 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 found that the CSP was aligned with national policies and was balanced with other strategic considerations, including the priorities of donors and WFP. The country strategic plan was easily adapted to increased needs associated with deteriorating food security and the emergence of the coronavirus disease 2019.

The evaluation revealed that, while overall targeting was broadly appropriate, the targeting of urban assistance beneficiaries was challenging because resources were not sufficient leading to some exclusion errors.

The introduction of the IPC system in Zimbabwe did not result in a clear consensus on the number of people requiring assistance. The lack of consensus on the degree of national food insecurity and needs had operational consequences for WFP in that the main donors did not fully align their support for WFP and earmarked their contributions for specific geographic areas of the country.

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

Under Strategic Outcome 1, which was aimed at enabling food-insecure people, including refugees, to meet their basic food and nutrition requirements during crises, there was evidence of broadly positive food security and nutrition

<sup>1</sup> World Bank Group. 2019. Joint Needs-Assessment for Zimbabwe: Identifying Challenges and Needs.

<sup>2</sup> Excluding direct and indirect support costs.

outcomes among lean season assistance beneficiaries. The food security and nutrition outcome indicators for refugees and asylum seekers fluctuated over the CSP period, in part because of rising food prices.

Under Strategic Outcome 2, WFP supported a range of nutrition interventions that contributed to improved health outcomes, but nutrition outcomes were either not achieved or not monitored.

For Strategic Outcome 3, WFP aimed to increase access to well-functioning markets for smallholders through the development of efficient local food marketing and procurement mechanisms. Targeting of farmers' organizations to link to market support displayed a degree of tension, however, between targeting of farmers with the most potential for marketing surpluses and targeting of more vulnerable farmers. There was no evidence regarding whether this market benefited small-scale food-insecure producers or large-scale farmers, or even whether the grain purchased was imported rather than produced domestically.

Strategic Outcome 4, aimed to achieve food security and resilience to shocks and stressors. The transfers received by food assistance for assets beneficiaries had a positive impact on short-term food security.

Strategic Outcome 5 included consolidation and administration of social transfers under the national social protection system. The framing of capacity strengthening support fell short of providing a comprehensive set of activities to address individual, institutional and enabling aspects of capacity strengthening.

Under strategic outcome 6 WFP successfully supported the procurement, shipping customs clearing, handling and transportation of food and non food items for a number of agencies.

Through the CSP WFP made an effort to ensure that food assistance was adapted to women's specific needs. However, a clear understanding of gender equality and women's empowerment issues within a food systems framework was missing.

The long-term goal was that emergency assistance should be provided through a government-led social protection system. However, a strategy for progressive handover to the government was lacking. Likewise there was no strategy for scaling up a number of pilot projects by the government.

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

The delivery of activities was overall timely, and the delivery of lean season activities was particularly impressive.

Cost efficiency improved in line with economies of scale and direct support cost fell as the overall size of the programme grew.

WFP covered a significant proportion of the assessed needs, ranging from 36 to 67 percent of assessed needs. However, coverage of urban areas and food assistance for assets, remained modest.

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

**Resource mobilisation:** Funding was skewed towards crisis response and was almost entirely earmarked at the activity

level leading to a loss of flexibility and inability to implement several activities.

**Partnerships:** WFP established a strong relationship with Government and benefited from a wide variety of partnerships.

**Monitoring:** Monitoring was oriented towards external reporting and accountability rather than learning.

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The planned shift to a more developmental role for WFP had to be readjusted after a series of climatic and economic shocks and the onset of COVID-19. The Country Office adapted rapidly and responded effectively to the deteriorating food security situation and the emergence of COVID-19.

The CSP constituted an important step forward from previous collections of fragmented programme documents creating conceptual links between humanitarian and development work. However, the approach did not automatically create stronger operational linkages because the assignment of activities to crisis response, resilience building and root causes categories created a set of siloes.

Although the total funding increased so did earmarking and flexibility to use funding was not improved.

Success in delivering against the ambitious goals of the CSP increasingly required WFP to collaborate and to draw on external expertise, particularly in the CSP areas of resilience and response to root causes.

Adequate monitoring and evaluation systems were not yet in place, jeopardizing the organization's reputation and compromising its ability to learn from performance.

The CSP did not enable WFP to become more effective in achieving its gender equality and women's empowerment goals.

The long term goal of supporting national ownership remains important and valid. However, there are important questions regarding how to achieve change at a realistic pace.

### **Recommendations**

**Recommendation 1.** Refine strategic focus on the core areas of WFP's comparative advantages (i.e. crisis response and resilience building) and improve and simplify the organization of strategic objectives and activities.

**Recommendation 2.** Reduce reliance on humanitarian assistance through supporting Government in delivering on its responsibility to provide social assistance and increase community resilience.

**Recommendation 3.** Invest in capacities for knowledge management and sharing

**Recommendation 4.** Deepen WFP strategic and operational partnerships.

**Recommendation 5.** Support and encourage result-based management with improved monitoring, evaluation and accountability .