



World Food Programme

SAVING LIVES
CHANGING LIVES

Evaluation of the Sudan Country Strategic Plan 2019 - 2023

CONTEXT

The Sudan is the third largest country in Africa, with a population of approximately 44 million in 2020, that is predominantly rural and young. Chronic child malnutrition is estimated at 34 percent, and the share of the population living in extreme poverty is estimated at 54.8 percent.

The Country Strategic Plan (CSP) was implemented during a tumultuous period, including political upheaval, a growing influx of refugees from Tigray and disruption caused by COVID-19.

SUBJECT AND FOCUS OF THE EVALUATION

The CSP was designed around four strategic outcomes and nine activities focusing on food assistance to people affected by shocks, school meals programmes, nutrition, asset creation, service provision and capacity strengthening. However, several budget revisions between 2019 and 2021 expanded the CSP to five strategic outcomes and twelve activities.

The original needs-based plan of USD 2.27 billion aimed to reach 6,251,700 beneficiaries, it was revised three times (as of September 2021), resulting in an increase of the budget to USD 2.7 billion and no changes in planned beneficiaries. The CSP was 50.3 percent funded as of August 2021.

OBJECTIVES AND USERS OF THE EVALUATION

The evaluation was commissioned by WFP independent Office of Evaluation to provide evaluative evidence for accountability and learning to inform the design of the next CSP in Sudan. It covers WFP activities implemented between 2017 and 2021 to assess continuity from the previous -programme cycle, the extent to which the CSP introduced strategic shifts and the implications of such shifts for performance and results. The main users for this evaluation are the WFP Sudan Country Office, the Regional Bureau for Eastern Africa, WFP headquarters technical divisions, the Government of Sudan, and other stakeholders in the country.

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 grounded in national priorities and successfully aligned with relevant national policies and with the Sustainable Development Goals.

WFP demonstrated strong overall performance in mitigating food insecurity in the country; however, the centralized approaches to delivery methods did not always adequately respond to local needs.

The CSP was gender sensitive and disability was acknowledged, however, the mainstreaming of gender and disability in implementation did not go beyond the disaggregation of data and gender-balanced coverage of beneficiaries.

WFP responded strongly to the challenge of increasing needs in the context of COVID-19 and reinforced its position as a leader in humanitarian response. However, its ability to reposition its "changing lives" work was limited by donor funding frameworks, its own programming structures and the need to focus on humanitarian assistance.

Extent and quality of WFP's specific contribution to CSP outcomes in the Sudan

Unconditional resource transfers to enhance food access and nutrition during and after crisis: Output targets were largely achieved and sometimes exceeded. In some cases, differences between planned and actual beneficiaries are explained by challenges related to the operating environment that brought assistance to a halt. At the outcome level, food consumption scores, coping indices, nutrition scores and dietary diversity generally improved for the sampled beneficiaries, although indicators fluctuated across years, largely due to variables beyond WFP control that can heavily influence food and nutrition security.

Malnutrition interventions and school feeding for sustainable nutrition improvements: in the WFP-supported community nutrition centres, outcome indicator targets for malnutrition treatment were met. School feeding activities had a positive effect

on school retention levels and examination results improved. However, nutrition activities in schools were not implemented due to lack of funding.

Productive safety net and post-harvest losses programmes to enhance resilience: activities were generally implemented as planned. However, relevance, ownership and effectiveness of these activities were constrained by limited resources and insufficient consultation with beneficiaries.

UN Humanitarian Air Service, logistics/supply chain services and wheat procurement: WFP has a strong comparative advantage in supply chain management and logistics, and its services were essential to supporting the safe delivery of humanitarian assistance. Currency devaluation posed a significant challenge to national procurement, and WFP procurement services helped balancing local currency expenditure with foreign exchange, resulting in expanded bread supply to the population.

Social protection system capacity strengthening to support chronically vulnerable populations: WFP played a key role in the implementation of the Sudan Family Support Programme and demonstrated agility in a context of shifting expectations, changing government interlocutors and challenging operational dynamics. However, its engagement resulted in substituting more than strengthening national institutional capacities.

Humanitarian development peace nexus: There are good examples of WFP taking a conflict-sensitive approach through its offices in two rebel-held areas. However, the evaluation found that effectiveness across the triple nexus was hindered by limited programme integration and internal coordination and limited synergies with other national and international humanitarian and development actors.

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

Overall, emergency assistance was timely. In a few cases, however, administrative delays constrained timeliness of non-humanitarian activities, which negatively influenced relevance and effectiveness. The geographic targeting of resident populations was generally aligned with the levels of vulnerability identified. WFP performed well in minimizing pre- and post-delivery losses, and costs per beneficiary for food transfers tended to be equal to or lower than global averages. However, costs per beneficiary for CBTs were found to be higher than the global average. The predominance of short-term contracting and funding cycles was also found to be an obstacle to cost efficiency.

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

Adequacy, flexibility and predictability of funding: WFP was relatively successful in securing adequate funding, particularly for emergency response. However, funding flexibility and predictability remain a challenge.

Approach to partnerships with UN and civil society: Stronger partnership was an important component of the strategic shift envisaged in the CSP; however WFP partnerships within the UN system could be expanded and the division of responsibilities made clearer, to build on each actor's comparative advantage. With regards to civil society organizations, WFP continued to view them mainly as implementers of activities and did not recognize their input to inform its strategic focus and operational approach.

Perceptions on WFP mandate: Despite general support for a move towards a more balanced humanitarian–development portfolio some key stakeholders expressed a preference for WFP to focus on its role as lead for humanitarian assistance in the Sudan. This limited WFP's ability to embrace the strategic shift and associated new ways of working, which are central to the CSP.

CSP design architecture: The way activities were organized under the five strategic outcomes reflected WFP efforts to mitigate the effects of donor earmarking. However, it made it difficult to build coherent programming around social protection. More broadly, this approach posed challenges for results-based management and reporting.

Country Office Structure, HR and monitoring systems: There is a gap between the strategic shift envisaged in the CSP and the organizational structures and arrangements in place to implement it. The CO should ensure that expertise required to manage long-term development-oriented programming is in place. The evaluation also revealed a need to strengthen the use of monitoring data to inform decision-making and to ensure that decisions are based on accurate and up-to-date information.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall Assessment

The evaluation concluded that the CSP was appropriately aspirational and its implementation provided an opportunity to learn what might be required to achieve the envisaged strategic shift and embed new ways of working. The country office responded timely and effectively to increasing food insecurity in the country, confirming its leadership role in delivering humanitarian assistance. It adapted well to the volatile country context and its response to COVID-19 was highly appreciated. Its common services were also valued as a means of ensuring efficient and effective emergency response. However, partly because of the need to scale up its humanitarian response, WFP was not entirely successful in making the strategic shift central to the CSP and should consider how best to take on its envisioned role of enabler.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. Ensure that the conceptual umbrella of the next CSP matches fully integrated programming on the ground, which will require closer collaboration with development partners, joint programming and drawing on expertise in fields such as conflict sensitivity, peacebuilding and political economy.

Recommendation 2. Advocate with donors to secure funding for at least three years to enhance the predictability of funding and ensure the continuity of processes over the medium to long term.

Recommendation 3. Capacity strengthening should play a prominent role in the new CSP, reinforced by appropriate staffing and budget and the development of monitoring and evaluation indicators that measure longitudinal progress.

Recommendation 4. Promote a country gender analysis and strategy with realistic gender-based objectives reflected in the results frameworks. This should be accompanied by professional development support and clear, practical guidelines for the country office on how to build gender-transformative activities.

Recommendation 5. Urgently review the accountability mechanisms for recipient populations, including complaints procedures and feedback opportunities (for AAP), with a view to adopting a plan for improvement.