



World Food Programme

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Evaluation of WFP South Sudan Interim Country Strategic Plan 2018-2022

CONTEXT

South Sudan - a low-income country - is facing catastrophic food insecurity and a critical nutritional situation owing to protracted conflict, repeated extreme environmental shocks, a weakened economy and high inflation rates. The COVID-19 lockdown also disrupted the supply chains of both commercial goods and humanitarian assistance.

SUBJECT AND FOCUS OF THE EVALUATION

The interim country strategic plan (ICSP) was developed to provide WFP with a medium-term strategy for responding to a multi-year acute crisis and was intended to serve as a bridge to a full country strategic plan (CSP). Through four strategic outcomes, the ICSP aimed to provide life-saving assistance, while also strengthening community empowerment and self-reliance as well as delivering services to the humanitarian community.

The ICSP was extended from December 2020 until December 2022 to align the start of the next CSP with the United Nations sustainable development cooperation framework. The ICSP budget totaled USD 5.04 billion in 2021, of which 51 percent was funded as of December 2021.

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 South Sudan. It covers WFP activities implemented from 2018 to 2021.

It was conducted between July 2021 and April 2022 to examine the relevance of WFP's strategic positioning in a volatile and crisis prone context, its contribution to outcomes, its efficiency and the factors explaining its performance.

The main users for this evaluation are the WFP South Sudan country office, Regional Bureau in Nairobi, headquarters divisions, and other 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 ICSP was relevant to national priorities for food security, nutrition and resilience. Given the scale of the humanitarian crisis and the protracted and frequent shocks, including COVID-19, the ICSP's greater emphasis on life-saving interventions compared to life-changing resilience building was appropriate.

The four strategic outcomes were relevant to the needs of people and remained so as WFP adapted its programmes to respond to new shocks. The design of the ICSP included appropriate consideration of the target groups for each strategic outcome, with priority given to the most vulnerable based on the principle of reaching those "furthest behind". Despite WFP's efforts to address the needs of the most vulnerable in hard-to-reach locations, targeting remained a persistent challenge owing to the scale of needs and resource shortfalls.

WFP's work was aligned with the United Nations cooperation frameworks and humanitarian response plans. Other United Nations entities recognized the advantages of working in partnership with WFP, which included WFP's extensive humanitarian reach, large geographic footprint and strong understanding of beneficiary communities.

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Extent and quality of WFP's specific contribution to ICSP strategic outcomes in South Sudan

Under strategic outcome 1, WFP was effective in saving the lives and improving the food security of populations in phases 4 and 5 in the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification. However, the level of assistance provided was not sufficient to reach food security targets. The school feeding programme made a positive contribution to school enrolment and attendance, but its impact on education outcomes was limited by structural barriers to the provision of high-quality education.

Under strategic outcome 2, WFP was effective in the treatment of moderate acute malnutrition but the coverage of preventive activities was insufficient.

Under strategic outcome 3, WFP gradually scaled up its resilience-building activities which helped to improve self-reliance, food security and nutrition and to reduce tensions and violence.

Under strategic outcome 4, the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service and common logistics services provided through the logistics cluster were seen as key enablers of the collective humanitarian response.

Gender equality and gender-transformative objectives featured prominently in the design and implementation of the ICSP. A gender-focused situational analysis highlighted good practices in gender mainstreaming, despite challenges that included a lack of resources and a gender imbalance among the staff of WFP and its cooperating partners.

WFP took steps to mitigate the protection risks related to its activities and scaled up community feedback mechanisms.

The country office developed a conflict sensitivity action plan and invested considerably in capacity strengthening for its staff. It implemented a community violence reduction jointly with other United Nations entities in Jonglei State.

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

Underfunding forced WFP to reduce the scale of its activities, particularly those under strategic outcome 3. In addition, the extensive WFP's geographical coverage, coupled with funding constraints led to the perception that WFP support was "spread too thinly". Despite external challenges, WFP demonstrated its ability to deliver emergency assistance rapidly and timely using technology.

Cost savings were achieved in multiple ways including by reducing the number of airdrops and expanding river and road transport. However, this required early confirmation of contributions.

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

WFP's adaptive and innovative approaches to tackling shocks by drawing on its strong emergency response capacity were effective drivers of performance. Good collaboration also supported results. However, WFP faced unprecedented challenges with rising needs and declining funding. Increases in donor earmarking of contributions limited WFP's flexibility and efficiency. In addition, a highly challenging environment during a very turbulent period, combined with limited government

capacity, inevitably affected WFP's performance and impeded progress in the strategic shift to long-term approaches.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall Assessment

WFP has a strong comparative advantage as an emergency responder. Stronger engagement with government is needed to enhance focus on sustainability and capacity strengthening.

The ICSP was a useful transitional framework which by nature did not include a long-term approach to addressing root causes of hunger. However there has been a shift over time towards a more forward-looking approach to sustainable resilience building. Given that available resources were insufficient to address all needs, targeting was a huge challenge and WFP assistance was perceived as being spread too thinly.

Adaptations were assessed positively. Yet, research, assessment, monitoring and evaluation systems could be better integrated into decision-making processes.

While WFP performance on unconditional food assistance and nutrition (SO1/SO2) was rated highly, overall performance of SOs fell short of targets. WFP delivered a strong performance on protection, accountability to affected population, humanitarian principles, conflict sensitivity and gender. However, it needs to continue to build on its work.

The challenging context undermines potential to deliver sustainable impact. WFP was cognizant of the strong interconnections between long-term food security, resilience and peace building. Timely delivery was hindered by factors mostly outside WFP's control. Funding shortfalls were a major issue and a key driver of WFP's serious attention to cost-efficiency measures. A deeper consideration of new funding streams is needed.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. Avoid spreading itself too thinly. In its next CSP and focus on priority areas to deliver longer term results with other actors

Recommendation 2. Maximize the longer-term and sustainable impact of WFP interventions, ensure greater coherence across the portfolio including synergies between SOs and better support transition of beneficiaries from relief to resilience-building assistance.

Recommendation 3. Take steps to deliver ambitions to increase the focus on resilience building in the next CSP.

Recommendation 4. Enhance the efficiency of beneficiary registration and verification processes and better integrate research, assessment, monitoring and evaluation data analyses with decision-making.

Recommendation 5. Continue to strengthen approaches on accountability to affected populations, conflict sensitivity and gender equality.

Recommendation 6. Strengthen WFP partnership arrangements donors, cooperating partners and Government.