



World Food Programme

SAVING LIVES
CHANGING LIVES

Evaluation of Tajikistan WFP Country Strategic Plan

2019 – 2024

CONTEXT

Tajikistan is a low-income, highly remittance dependent country, relatively more affected by hunger and malnutrition than other countries in the region and vulnerable to climate change. While ranking in the medium human development category, the country experienced a period of declining economic progress which led to its reclassification as low-income country in 2018. The Covid-19 pandemic further slowed down economic growth and together with reduced remittances deteriorated poverty alleviation prospects.

SUBJECT AND FOCUS OF THE EVALUATION

The 2018-2019 transitional interim country strategic plan (T-ICSP) and the 2019-2024 country strategic plan (CSP) placed emphasis on strengthening national capacity for school feeding, nutrition and disaster preparedness and response, while continuing direct implementation of school feeding, treatment of moderate acute malnutrition, asset creation and livelihood activities, and emergency response interventions.

With a needs-based plan of USD 28.46 million, the T-ICSP was intended to reach 539,550 beneficiaries. The CSP initially aimed at reaching 933,900 beneficiaries with a budget of USD 82.04 million which was increased to USD 84.92 million and 963,400 beneficiaries in September 2020 through budget revision (BR) 01. The funding level for the T-ICSP was 50 percent at the end of the cycle while as of September 2021, allocated resources for the CSP amounted to 44 percent of the total CSP budget as per budget revision BR01 and 47% of allocated resources had been spent.

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 Tajikistan. It covers WFP activities implemented between 2018 and September 2021 to assess continuity from the previous programme cycle.

The evaluation was conducted between June 2021 and April 2022. 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 Tajikistan Country Office, the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, WFP headquarters technical divisions, the Government of Tajikistan 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 T-ICSP and CSP are relevant and well aligned with Tajikistan's national development and relevant sector priorities. The country strategic plans are consistent with national sustainable development goals (SDG) priorities and targets, particularly within SDG 2 and 17. WFP ensured that interventions were responsive to the needs of the most vulnerable through relevant assessments and extensive consultations, however consultations with sub-national levels and beneficiaries were less visible. Targeting overall was adequate and needs-based. For nutrition and school feeding interventions, however, targeting was guided by earlier assessments while more recent data suggests reviewing the current geographic coverage.

Interventions are well aligned and coherent with the UNDAF and WFP has built strategic partnerships, however partnerships between UN agencies on school feeding and nutrition could be further enhanced. The implementation of flexible strategies allowed WFP to adapt to the evolving local context and ensure continued relevance of its interventions.

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

Under Strategic outcome 1, WFP provided nutritionally balanced school meals to children. The school meals programme is recognized as an important social protection mechanism and

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

served as shock-responsive safety net during the COVID-19 pandemic. Implementation of the programme was, however, affected by funding shortages and delays. The resulting reduction in ration size was partially compensated through contributions from parent-teacher associations and local government. Under Strategic Outcome 2, The treatment of moderate accurate malnutrition reached high recovery rates. The actual treatment duration turned out to be shorter than planned which resulted in substantially increased coverage despite lower than planned commodity provision throughout the review period. Under Strategic Outcome 3, effective asset creation and resilience activities were implemented as relief assistance following small scale natural disasters. Funding delays, however, prevented the planned scale up of interventions. Under strategic Outcome 4 capacity strengthening activities yielded positive policy level results for school feeding, however, in nutrition and resilience building, capacity strengthening contributions were mainly visible at individual and organisational domains and were limited to a narrow group of predominantly national level institutions. Under strategic Outcome 5 WFP provided appropriate and effective on-demand services to governmental institutions, development actors and other partners. WFP adhered to humanitarian and protection principles, gender issues received strong attention and gender equality and the empowerment of women was mainstreamed throughout implementation. There is, however, room for WFP to improve consultation with and accountability to affected populations and to further strengthen the focus on disability in its interventions. The evaluation found ample evidence of government ownership over results and programmes implemented by WFP. However, more systematic efforts to integrate sustainability measures are needed. The T-ICSP and CSP do not include explicit strategic linkages between humanitarian and development work, though these dimensions were targeted through efforts to integrate capacity strengthening interventions.

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

WFP's activities were implemented relatively cost-efficiently and actual cost per beneficiary was lower than planned. This was however, influenced by the shorter treatment duration in nutrition and reduced ration sizes in school feeding activities. Resource allocation and timeliness in implementation of activities and delivery of outputs was suboptimal across all thematic areas, mostly due to delays in funding and lengthy approval processes for new projects. WFP worked with the government on potential more cost-effective alternatives to Supercereal Plus and is piloting cash-based transfers as alternative modality for school feeding.

Factors that explain WFP performance

WFP is recognized as active member of the UN country team and

has developed a strong long-term partnership with the government. The CSP approach facilitated strategic engagement, which in turn helped WFP to flexibility adapt and respond to a dynamic operational context. However, reliance on a narrow donor base in combination with procurement conditionalities resulted in delays and reduced rations. CSP implementation was further challenged by COVID restrictions, slow pace of staff capacity alignment to WFP's enabling role, and shortcomings in the intervention design.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall Assessment

The strategic direction of the CSP towards enabling national and subnational institutions to design and deliver on their social protection, food security and nutrition priorities was highly relevant. Responsiveness of WFP to the needs of the most vulnerable population groups was broadly appropriate, however, more attention should be given to consultations with affected populations. WFP's strength and added value remain in the direct implementation of activities of which school feeding has promising sustainability prospects while the sustainability potential for nutrition and resilience building areas remains moderate. Good progress has been made in capacity strengthening for the school meals programme including in the policy domain, while in nutrition and resilience building, WFP's ability to deliver country capacity strengthening interventions beyond the individual level is only emerging. Finally, the implementation of activities was affected by funding shortages and delays, a staff skillset that did not reflect the growing capacity strengthening role of WFP, turnover of staff, and shortcomings in the intervention logic.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. Ensure deep interlinkages between humanitarian assistance and development interventions in the next CSP intervention logic and maximize delivery of more sustainable results

Recommendation 2. Develop a country capacity strengthening strategy based on a needs assessment, with a sound monitoring framework and implement it in conjunction with national structures including subnational levels

Recommendation 3. Support government fiscal planning and optimization processes for school feeding and resilience building

Recommendation 4. Develop a school feeding transition and handover plan for gradual transfer to national and subnational authorities and parent teacher associations

Recommendation 5. Continue reorganizing the office structure to optimize delivery of stronger, integrated results

Recommendation 6. Continue strengthening strategic and operational partnerships and efforts to diversify the donor base