



World Food Programme

SAVING LIVES
CHANGING LIVES

Evaluation of Afghanistan WFP Country Strategic Plan 2018-2022

CONTEXT

A low-income country, Afghanistan is affected by a long legacy of conflict. With a population of 38.9 million, the country is also highly prone to intense and recurring natural hazards, some of them being climate change related. Both insecurity and natural disasters have led to rapid urbanization.

Food insecurity and malnutrition remain alarmingly high in a context of continuing conflict, widespread unemployment, and price hikes, all exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Afghanistan continues to be one of the top countries of origin for refugees. Gender inequalities are observed in all spheres of the society and women are hit the hardest by the combination of shocks.

SUBJECT AND FOCUS OF THE EVALUATION

The CSP (2018-2022) aimed at supporting Afghanistan in its efforts to achieve zero hunger by 2030 in a manner that contributes to a broader long-term transition to peace and development. It focused on six closely interrelated outcomes that span Sustainable Development Goals 2 and 17.

The CSP envisaged three strategic shifts: sustainable solutions in strategic areas, emphasizing emergency response, resilient livelihoods, and the treatment of malnutrition with prevention; transformational links in strategic results; and comprehensive nationally led framing of all strategic results.

By May 2021, following several budget revisions, the total budget for the CSP was USD 1.04 billion of which 67 percent was funded.

OBJECTIVES AND USERS OF THE EVALUATION

The evaluation was commissioned by the independent Office of Evaluation to provide evaluative evidence for accountability and learning and was originally timed to inform the design of the

following WFP CSP in Afghanistan. It covers WFP activities implemented from January 2018 to May 2021.

The evaluation is based on data collected in April-May 2021. The findings, conclusions and recommendations were developed before the Taliban consolidated control over Afghanistan in August 2021.

The evaluation assesses 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 Afghanistan Country Office, the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, WFP headquarters divisions, the Government of Afghanistan,¹ and other stakeholders in Afghanistan.

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 the national peace and development framework and with relevant sectoral policies. However, WFP country capacity strengthening initiatives were not informed by a detailed assessment of government capacity.

The CSP design was relevant to the needs of the most vulnerable, addressing emergency needs while also supporting resilience building.

WFP adapted well to the increasing humanitarian needs thanks to its comparative advantages. However, there was no strong evidence that WFP developed a comprehensive approach to resilience building.

WFP contributed to the objectives of the One UN plan for Afghanistan for 2018-2021 and to the humanitarian response plans.

¹ All references to "the Government" relate to the Government that was in place until early August 2021.

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

Under Strategic Outcomes (SO) 1 and 3, WFP substantially scaled up relief assistance in response to drought and COVID-19. These activities contributed to short-term improvement or prevented a further deterioration in the food security situation of targeted households. The treatment of moderate acute malnutrition (MAM) had a positive impact in terms of recovery, mortality, and non-response rates. However, funding constraints did not allow the scale up of the stunting prevention programmed as originally planned.

Under SO2, beneficiaries of asset creation activities and vocational training perceived strong and lasting positive effects at individual level. Their food consumption improved, and incomes increased. However, there was no evidence that SO2 contributed to long-term resilience at community level.

Under SO4, the availability of nutritious food increased at the local level, but the scale of the work was insufficient to induce significant change at the national level.

Through SO5, WFP contributed to the development of shock-responsive social safety nets and supported the establishment of the Afghanistan Food Security and Nutrition Agenda. However, progress towards its institutionalization was hindered by a lack of government funding and ownership.

Under SO6, WFP supply chain and telecommunication support for the humanitarian community were highly appreciated, notably in the case of the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service facilitating access to hard-to-reach areas and providing an international airbridge during the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic.

Key protection considerations were included in the CSP design, and WFP's engagement in protection and accountability to affected population increased over time. There was great recognition by partners of WFP's appropriate management of access issues.

Significant effort was made to mainstream gender into programming, although this varied across strategic outcomes. Yet the extent to which activities may have contributed to the empowerment of women was limited.

The likelihood of benefits being continued varied widely across the portfolio with the clearest examples of sustainable community engagement found in asset creation (SO2). WFP's commitment to the triple nexus was evident. However, increased insecurity, political uncertainty and donor earmarking have limited opportunities to operationalizing a nexus approach as envisioned in the CSP.

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

Activities were implemented on time, although delays occurred as a result of external (insecurity, access constraints, COVID-19, slow government processes, short-term funding) and internal factors (delays in planning, selecting new activities and establishing field-level agreements with CPs).

Although WFP did not apply corporate tools for measuring cost-efficiency, it carefully managed the costs of programmes, supply chains and staffing.

WFP adequately selected delivery modalities according to context, market feasibility and beneficiary preference.

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

The increase in violence, the drought and the pandemic exacerbated the needs and affected WFP performance.

The CSP allowed for greater flexibility in adapting to evolving circumstances and responding to emergencies. Still, WFP's ability to adapt and to integrate emergency response and resilience building was affected by donor earmarking, limited predictability of funding and the structuring of the CSP around "focus areas".

The CSP created an enabling environment for strategic partnerships. Engagement with the Government was negatively affected by the overall worsening political instability, but over time WFP made a significant investment in partnerships with United Nations entities.

A few elements were found to pave the way towards "more sustainable solutions in strategic result areas", but external contextual factors point towards an uncertain future. Regarding the expected shift towards "transformational linkages in strategic result areas", WFP staff reported a more coherent programme approach, and the evaluation noted some synergies across SOs. The expected shift towards "comprehensive national-led framing of all strategic result areas" has not fully materialized for reasons beyond WFP's control.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall Assessment

WFP broadly responded to the growing and massive needs of the most vulnerable people by drawing on its comparative advantages despite increasingly fragile governance and extreme insecurity.

Some progress was made towards zero hunger through the various strategic outcomes, and WFP's contributions to the CSP strategic outcomes were the strongest in crisis response. This is not surprising considering the deterioration in the food security situation resulting from the increase in violence, the drought and the pandemic.

In increasingly challenging circumstances, WFP's contribution to strategic outcomes depended on deeper and more long-term partnerships.

WFP was able to adapt its response to COVID-19, notwithstanding some delays and pipeline breaks that were unavoidable.

Recommendations

Considering that the recommendations were developed before the Taliban consolidated control over Afghanistan in August 2021, they are expected to be implemented in a flexible manner, depending on the evolution of the situation and taking into account prevailing restrictions on building national capacity and systems. The timeframe for addressing some of the recommendations will be revisited as needed.

Recommendation 1. Design the next country strategic plan based on robust context analyses that provide the country office flexibility to adapt its response to changing needs in fluid circumstances, maintaining the focus areas of crisis response, resilience and root causes.

Recommendation 2. Develop a nutrition strategy that takes into consideration the local context and allows for the scale up of malnutrition prevention.

Recommendation 3. Conduct in-depth gender analysis to inform a clearer articulation of WFP ambitions in relation to gender transformation and social inclusion, taking into consideration the highly constraining environment.

Recommendation 4. Enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of resilience building activities and continue to seize opportunities to expand them as conditions allow and where there is a medium-term perspective.

Recommendation 5. Strengthen collaboration and coordination with key partners.