



World Food Programme

SAVING LIVES
CHANGING LIVES

Evaluation of Central African Republic WFP Interim Country Strategic Plan 2018-2022

CONTEXT

The Central African Republic is a sparsely populated country with a population of 4.9 million. It is one of the poorest countries in the world, with 71 percent of the population living below the international poverty line. Chronic malnutrition for children under 5 is 42 percent, and acute malnutrition is estimated at 5.8 percent.

The country has suffered cycles of political and security crises for several decades and since the 2013 *coup d'état* the situation remains unstable.

SUBJECT AND FOCUS OF THE EVALUATION

The ICSP was designed around five strategic outcomes and eleven activities focusing on food assistance to people affected by shocks, school meals programmes, nutrition, asset creation and support to smallholder farmers, service provision and capacity strengthening. However, several budget revisions between 2018 and 2022 expanded the ICSP to fifteen activities and extended its initial duration of three years to five years.

The original needs-based plan of USD 288 million aimed to reach 1.29 million beneficiaries in three years. It was revised six times (as of October 2021), resulting in an increase of the budget to USD 965 million for a period of five years and an increase in planned beneficiaries to 1.5 million. The ICSP was 48.6 percent funded as of August 2021.

OBJECTIVES AND USERS OF THE EVALUATION

The evaluation was commissioned by the WFP independent Office of Evaluation to provide evaluative evidence for accountability and learning to inform the design of the next CSP in the Central African Republic. It covers WFP activities implemented between 2018 and mid-2021 including WFP's strategic positioning, its effectiveness in contributing to strategic outcomes, the efficiency of ICSP implementation and factors explaining WFP's performance.

The main users for this evaluation are the WFP Central African Republic Country Office, the Regional Bureau for Western Africa,

WFP headquarters technical divisions, the Government of the Central African Republic, 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 WFP played a key role in the implementation of the UNDAF and humanitarian response plans and the ICSP was coherent with the Sustainable Development Goals, but WFP's work was driven by its own sectoral strategies and international commitments rather than national sectoral policy frameworks, which presented varying degrees of maturity and adoption. Limited collaboration with other UN agencies working on basic services and livelihoods was also observed.

WFP's coverage of people's needs was broad, however, the security situation and logistics constraints limited regular access to remote populations, including beneficiaries of school feeding and nutrition interventions.

WFP's logistics capacity and coverage allowed for response at scale to address multiple emergencies, and WFP COVID-19 response illustrated WFP's ability to adapt to evolving challenges.

Extent and quality of WFP's specific contribution to ICSP outcomes in the Central African Republic

With regard to **unconditional transfers**, WFP consistently exceeded beneficiary targets, albeit with some lack of continuity or ration reductions. Most outcome indicator targets were achieved. While the emergency school feeding targets in terms of retention and enrolment in school were met, WFP assistance suffered from supply interruptions, leading to reduced rations and fewer school days covered.

Moderate acute malnutrition prevention and treatment activities faced shortages in the supply of nutrition inputs,

January 2023

affecting results. Moreover, few activities for strengthening the capacities of health services to support nutrition activities were carried out. While **school feeding's** targets in terms of enrolment and retention were overall met, retention rates for girls were significantly lower than those for boys.

Noteworthy results of **livelihood support** activities included an increase in the number of beneficiaries reached, beneficiaries' satisfaction and a reduction in post-harvest losses. Insecurity affected implementation of food-assistance-for-assets and progress in local purchases was limited.

The ICSP's increased focus on **institutional capacity strengthening** was underbudgeted and only partially implemented, with little significant progress.

WFP's **common services** strongly supported the coverage of the interventions of the international humanitarian community in remote regions and provided communication and logistics support.

The ICSP activities supported **gender** equity and balance among beneficiaries. Gender mainstreaming and the consideration of **protection** issues in WFP interventions have improved, but protection risk analysis and cooperating partner capacities should be enhanced. The potential for **sustainability** remains limited, partly owing to insufficient institutional strengthening. The **humanitarian-development-peace nexus** remained poorly documented and operationalized in the country.

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

WFP activities involving direct food distributions suffered delays due to administrative constraints and the belated availability of funding and commodities. The shift to CBTs considerably reduced the risk of delays and pipeline breaks.

The effectiveness of targeting was subject to numerous uncertainties related to inclusion and exclusion errors and coherence.

WFP made constant efforts to improve the efficiency of its activities by seeking alternative approaches that would avoid logistics constraints and reduce related costs. The expansion of WFP's presence in the country improved the monitoring of interventions.

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

Evidence base: When defining the nature and coverage of its interventions, WFP relied on various country analyses, which supported and integrated annual country-level assessments.

Funding: The ICSP period has seen an increase in the funding rates but funding remained highly concentrated, with little progress in donor diversification, and on an annual basis, limiting the possibilities for multi-annual planning and medium-term approaches.

Partnerships: Partnerships with international non-governmental organizations played a dominant role. There was a lack of focus on strengthening the capacity of local cooperating partners. Collaboration with public institutions and United Nations entities could be enhanced.

Flexibility and adaptation to crises: The ICSP revisions allowed operational flexibility, while food loans between activities provided agility in stock and supply chain management.

Other limiting factors: Insecurity, poor road infrastructure and negative natural conditions affected the regularity of WFP's access to vulnerable populations and the overall implementation of

resilience activities. The absence of a banking network affected opportunities for digitization. The implementation of interventions was strongly affected by staff turnover, notably in the sub-offices.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, the evaluation observed that initial optimistic assumptions about the context, security level, emerging crises and partnerships did not materialize sufficiently to support the intervention logic, and the role of the ICSP as a strategic steering tool was limited.

In conclusion:

- WFP emergency actions were expanded without the expected degree of transition to early recovery assistance, with insufficient emphasis on supporting transformative effects.
- Longer-term approaches have been affected by low levels of funding, and stronger partnerships with other resilience actors should be further explored.
- While investments were made in cash transfers and digitalization, opportunities exist for WFP interventions to better consider the contextual specificities of the country.
- The operationalisation of the ICSP remained largely dependent on access, highlighting the need to integrate stabilisation and conflict analyses.
- Geographical prioritization remained a challenge, as well as precise individual targeting.
- Modest progress was observed in the integration and promotion of gender, protection, and equity across WFP activities.
- Despite rigidities in the ICSP framework, WFP was able to adapt to respond to the COVID-19 crisis and facilitated resource lending between activities.
- Capacity strengthening could have benefitted from stronger planning and linkages with operational issues.
- Room exists to explore new partnerships with other actors and joint approaches.
- WFP has strengthened its monitoring system, but more could be done to improve its quality and the use of evidence.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. Reduce the number – but not the scope – of activities in the next strategic plan and strengthen advocacy of a more flexible strategic framework, allowing context-specific adjustments and transition-focused approaches.

Recommendation 2. Reposition upstream crisis response interventions to focus on prevention and the development of resilience mechanisms with more precise targeting that enhances impact and sustainability.

Recommendation 3. Support a revision of internal processes aimed at addressing the challenges faced by the current and future country strategic plans.

Recommendation 4. Sustain the ripple effect related to geographical and programmatic coverage by strengthening joint actions and partnerships in the various sectors of intervention.

Recommendation 5. Strengthen the integration of gender and protection into programming.

Recommendation 6. Within the framework of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach, support the links to conflict stabilization dynamics