



World Food Programme

SAVING
LIVES
CHANGING
LIVES

Evaluation of Mauritania WFP Country Strategic Plan 2019 - 2023

CONTEXT

The Islamic Republic of Mauritania is a Sahelo-Saharan country with a population of 4.6 million people concentrated in the South. The country has experienced a consistent poverty decline since 2000 and ranked 157th out of 189 countries on the Human Development Index in 2020.

There is a structural trend of food and nutrition insecurity in the country. The Global Hunger Index 2020 ranks Mauritania 85th out of 107 countries. The prevalence of global acute and chronic malnutrition is estimated at 11.6 and 23.3 percent respectively.

Despite national efforts to promote the status of women, most of the country's economic and social indicators are marked by gender-based disparities, and the gender inequality index ranks Mauritania 151st out of 162 countries in 2020.

Increasing armed conflict, deteriorating security, widespread poverty and the effects of climate change are major drivers of migration in the Sahel, and Mauritania, spared from insecurity, hosts over 67,000 Malian refugees fleeing conflicts.

SUBJECT AND FOCUS OF THE EVALUATION

The CSP was originally designed around six strategic outcomes and seven 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. A budget revision in 2022 extended the CSP from December 2022 to February 2024, to ensure coherent alignment with the UNSDCF cycle.

The original needs-based plan of USD 132 million aimed to reach 445 thousands beneficiaries over four years. It was revised three times (as of July 2022), resulting in an increase of the budget to USD 201 million and an increase in planned beneficiaries to 484 thousands. The CSP was 65 percent funded as of December 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 Mauritania. 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 CSP implementation and factors explaining WFP's performance.

The main users for this evaluation are the WFP Mauritania Country Office, the Regional Bureau for Western Africa, WFP headquarters technical divisions, the Government of Mauritania, 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 contributed to the implementation of national strategies. The CSP was relevant to the needs of the most vulnerable people, particularly with regard to refugee assistance, social protection, and community resilience.

While WFP operational and logistical capacities are seen by partners as its main comparative advantages, there is room for WFP to improve its strategic positioning in the areas of institutional capacity strengthening and resilience.

Throughout the CSP, WFP was able to establish and maintain strong strategic partnerships with other UN agencies and the World Bank in the areas of social protection and resilience.

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

Food assistance to refugees: during the CSP period, the refugee population in the Mbera camp continued to be highly dependent on WFP food assistance, which contributed to a general equalization of food security and nutrition indicators among beneficiary and non-beneficiary households. However, the agroecological and socioeconomic conditions were not conducive to progress in the development of durable solutions for refugees

The **COVID-19** crisis response was not associated with a specific request for support from the Government, and was particularly

underfunded. It only allowed for the distribution of cash transfers in Brakna in 2020, reaching about 36,000 beneficiaries. Redistribution among households served to sustain pre-existing solidarity mechanisms.

Lean season support – targeting an average of 124,000 beneficiaries per year between 2019 and 2021 - has gradually shifted from food to cash, to save costs and in line with beneficiaries' preference. Positive changes were observed in terms of female dietary diversity and reliance on coping strategies.

Close to 50,000 boys and girls benefited from **school meals** each year. Educational outcomes were hard to assess due to COVID-19 restrictions and monitoring gaps. The evaluation observed that school feeding alone, without any improvement in the quality of education provision (including infrastructure, supplies and staff), was unlikely to have a significant effect on attendance and retention rates.

MAM treatment performance rates among malnourished children age 6–59 months and for pregnant and lactating women were very high over the entire CSP period. However, WFP encountered challenges in mobilising care takers and beneficiaries in urban contexts.

The **Food-assistance-for-assets (FFA)** activity saw a significant scale-up since 2018, but was hampered by COVID-19 restrictions in 2020. Among main results, production was increased, migration reduced, and social cohesion strengthened. However, state institutions could have been more significantly involved in coordinating resilience activities.

Overall, **institutional support** to the Government on Adaptive Social Protection, national food security, and shock prevention and response systems was appreciated although high government staff turnover was a challenge.

UNHAS services have been key to enabling the humanitarian community to rapidly reach affected people and communities, including in the area hosting Malian refugees. WFP also provided logistics support to the Government to cope with the COVID-19 crisis.

Cross-cutting themes: WFP interventions promoted gender equality, but more efforts towards the achievement of gender transformative outcomes are needed. Protection, environmental and social risk analyses were adequately integrated, particularly in FFA activities. Accountability and feedback mechanisms were improved, although some communication gaps persisted, affecting beneficiaries' awareness on programmes.

Overall, the CSP facilitated the implementation of a **nexus** approach, including through support to the adaptive social protection system, but the predominance of humanitarian funding was a limiting factor.

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

Activities were overall implemented in a timely manner, and the shift to cash transfers reduced the risks of delays and stock-outs. Nutrition activities suffered from inadequate funding cycles and pipeline breaks. On the sites of WFP's integrated resilience package, the layering of activities could have been explored more to increase efficiencies.

WFP's coordination with its partners in response plans has helped improve the allocation of limited resources to cover needs. The quality of targeting has improved throughout the CSP period thanks to the efforts of the food security cluster. While inclusion errors appeared limited, exclusion errors – which are the more serious – remained significant and are in need of further scrutiny.

Challenges also persist in terms of beneficiaries' acceptance of the targeting of lean season and refugee support.

Overall, the efficiency of activities was improved by reductions in distribution costs, internal organizational reviews and enhanced partnerships.

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

The development of the CSP was informed by reliable evidence sources, and WFP was a forerunner in conducting a participatory appraisal ahead of providing institutional support on early warning.

Progress was made in mobilizing multi-year funding, and internal flexibility allowed for resource lending across activities.

WFP staff in Mauritania increased over time, although the recruitment of female national experts, especially in sub-offices, remained a challenge.

Partnerships were strengthened, but further opportunities exist for improving the coordination between social safety net actors, and for increasing complementarities between resilience support and social protection.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

WFP remained a key humanitarian actor in the country, and the CSP framework facilitated its strategic positioning in social protection and resilience, although visibility at Government level is still limited.

In refugee assistance, WFP relied on the triple nexus approach developed with partners to combine humanitarian efforts with sustainable solutions, but the latter are constrained by the agro-ecological and socio-economic context.

Within the integrated resilience package, full synergy between the different activities is yet to be achieved, as well as ownership of the approach at the national level.

The consideration of cross-cutting issues has progressed, with room for further improvements on gender, environment and accountability to affected populations.

WFP has demonstrated a strong capacity for adaptation and flexibility, including during the COVID-19 crisis.

Success factors included internal reorganizations, increased funding levels, and overall quality of monitoring, although difficulties persist with measuring effects of longer-terms approaches.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. Strengthen the combined strategy of adaptive social protection and the integrated resilience package.

Recommendation 2. Strengthen the consideration of the cross-cutting issues of gender, environment and accountability to affected populations.

Recommendation 3. Review the strategy for refugees and host populations assistance based on stakeholders' comparative advantages, including local communities.

Recommendation 4. Strengthen the effects of the integrated resilience package.

Recommendation 5. Enhance national policy support for school feeding and the management of acute malnutrition.