



World Food Programme

SAVING LIVES
CHANGING LIVES

Evaluation of WFP's Policy on Country Strategic Plans

CONTEXT

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by UN member States in 2015, provides a framework for action and a long-term planning horizon for governments and their partners. Parallel to that, the 2015 World Humanitarian Summit committed to increasing the cooperation between humanitarian and development actors, to multi-year funding, and to greater participation by – and accountability to – affected populations.

At the country level, the ongoing United Nations development system reform emphasizes the need for greater coherence, stressing the importance of partnership and accountability and introducing changes in planning and reporting requirements.

The WFP policy on the Country Strategic Plans was issued in 2016 in response to these commitments, as part part of the Integrated Road Map, which also included the strategic plan for 2017–2021, the financial framework review and the corporate results framework for 2017–2021. In November 2021 a new Strategic Plan was approved by WFP Executive Board, covering the period 2022 to 2025.

The evaluation of the CSP Policy was conducted in 2022, covering from 2016 to October 2022. During this period, WFP operated in increasingly complex and protracted crises, including the current global food crisis, exacerbated by conflicts and by the worsening effects of climate change, resulting in a dramatic increase in the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance.

SUBJECT AND FOCUS OF THE EVALUATION

The CSP policy seeks to improve the quality and coherence of WFP's assistance and marks a substantial shift in the organization's approach to programme planning, oversight and approval by establishing an integrated strategic and programmatic instrument that covers the entire portfolio of WFP's work within a country for a period of up to five years. CSPs are based on the promise of contributing to national development objectives and humanitarian needs and are centred on WFP's value proposition in a particular setting in relation to its partners.

The evaluation focused on three key dimensions of analysis around which the expected results of the Policy can be articulated, namely: i) Strategic repositioning; ii) Programme quality and results and iii) Management, governance and

accountability. In doing so, it also tried to capture unintended outcomes, positive and negative.

As of 2022, every WFP country operation is part of a CSP, an interim CSP or a limited emergency operation and it is projected that by 2025 87 percent of CSPs will be in alignment with UNSDCF cycles.

OBJECTIVES AND USERS OF THE EVALUATION

The evaluation serves the dual objectives of accountability and learning. It is intended to inform WFP senior management, Board members and stakeholders in programmatic and supporting divisions at headquarters, regional bureaux and country offices. The Programme – Humanitarian and Development Division at headquarters is the owner of the policy. External stakeholders, including United Nations country teams, national governments, donors and partners, may benefit from the evaluation.

KEY EVALUATION FINDINGS

How good is the policy?

The CSP policy was relevant and timely in the light of global developments and commitments articulated in the 2030 Agenda, The World Humanitarian Summit and the United Nations development system reform process. The scale of organizational change was significant and unprecedented, with implications for processes, staffing and resourcing. The CSP five-year country planning horizon has been recognised as useful, but the policy was found to be insufficiently clear with regard to the role of WFP in peace building and to its comparative advantage.

What are the results of the policy?

Strategic repositioning. The CSP Policy contributed to WFP's alignment with national policies and priorities, as well as with UN frameworks. The consultative approach to CSP design offered opportunities for WFP to engage with a range of partners and facilitated the identification of new strategic priorities. High-level engagement with Governments, however, was difficult to maintain during implementation, and insufficient attention was paid to ensuring effective and sustainable transition to national ownership.

The CSP approach created a space for WFP to position itself in both the “saving lives” and “changing lives” agendas but this proved to be challenging at times. WFP’s comparative advantage is not always clearly articulated and more clarity is required on the linkages between humanitarian and development frameworks.

Programme Quality and Results. The CSP Policy contributed to organizational effectiveness by better linking humanitarian and development activities, including a resilience approach in protracted situations, expanded interventions in social protection and climate change adaptation, and greater focus on national capacity strengthening. However, the role of WFP in peace building remains unclear.

The CSP can be an adaptable planning mechanism, but its emphasis on activities as the most visible planning and budgeting component, coupled with donors’ earmarking can negatively impact on flexibility and timeliness in dynamic contexts.

Management, Governance and Accountability. The CSP approach reduced the volume of separate project documents and enhanced the Executive Board oversight and strategic guidance. Redundant layers of review for planning and budgeting documents, however, limited the expected efficiency gains in process management. As a comparison, management and authorization processes of UNICEF and UNHCR are significantly more decentralized.

Country offices collect a wealth of data for reporting purposes, but much less attention is paid to generate analysis that can timely feed into management decisions. The value of CSP evaluations is recognized, but there are concerns about coverage requirements and timeliness. The combination of monitoring, reporting and evaluation requirements has led to challenges in sequencing, and absorptive capacity.

Staff profile and turnover, as well as limited predictable funding affected WFP effectiveness in development programming.

Unintended outcomes. The evaluation found three main unintended outcomes:

1. The Zero Hunger strategic reviews contributed to furthering national policy agendas and priorities.
2. The line of sight requirements and its corresponding management structure, introduced some fragmentation in CSP design and silos effects in implementation.
3. The emergency response and supply chain related work have become less visible in the CSP narrative

What accounts for the results observed?

Success factors

Senior management engagement and WFP staff at all levels pushed the CSP policy agenda. Country office leadership required a combination of vision, significant time, creativity and willingness to take risks. Dedicated resources for innovation allowed countries to make real progress in new areas introduced by the Policy. Growing demand for WFP services and national Government’s ownership were critical for effectiveness and sustainability.

Risk factors

Staff absorption capacity was severely tested by the volume of procedural changes and guidance introduced by the policy. The realities of funding continue to limit flexibility in programming

and the degree to which WFP country offices have the required expertise. Compliance driven internal reporting have limited the utility of monitoring data. Changes in global circumstances during CSP policy implementation have been more radical and far-reaching than could be anticipated

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall Assessment

The evaluation notes that the CSP policy implied a far-reaching scale of change. The period covered saw WFP making significant progress in adjusting its strategic outlook, relationship to other actors and internal systems, all while keeping pace with dramatically growing humanitarian needs. Nevertheless, the changes that the policy set in motion will take more time to fully mature, and key adjustments are needed to ensure that the policy’s ambitions are met.

Overall, greatest progress is being made in alignment and harmonization with national priorities and the UN System; in positioning WFP at the humanitarian–development nexus; and in selected dimensions of flexibility and adaptation. Progress in reducing transaction costs and securing more predictable and flexible funding has been much more elusive, and challenges remain to ensure adequate staffing and for efficient and effective results-based management.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Continued policy implementation should embrace a more strategic and leaner approach to the CSP framework, while future revisions need to take account of further consolidated learning

Recommendation 2: Strengthen the support and resources dedicated to country strategic planning and the early stages of CSP implementation.

Recommendation 3: Further simplify and streamline procedures and processes for the review, revision and approval of the CSP package [OK?]with a view to enhancing efficiency and flexibility and reducing transaction costs.

Recommendation 4: Strengthen and streamline accountability and learning for results-based management.

Recommendation 5: Develop a clear shared understanding and vision of WFP’s work at the humanitarian–development–peace nexus

Recommendation 6: Continue and further upscale the process of strategic workforce planning and further prioritize work on skills development in line with the WFP people policy and evolving needs