



World Food Programme

SAVING LIVES
CHANGING LIVES

Evaluation of Cambodia WFP Country Strategic Plan 2019-2023

CONTEXT

Cambodia is a lower middle-income country with a population of 16.7 million. It ranks 69th in the Global Hunger Index and is highly vulnerable to climate change. Although Cambodia almost halved its poverty level from 34 percent in 2009 to 18 percent in 2019, 17.8 percent of the population remain below the national poverty line. Stunting and wasting affect children under 5, and poverty and insecurity were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and a price crisis in 2022.

SUBJECT AND FOCUS OF THE EVALUATION

The Transitional Interim Country Strategic Plan (T-ICSP) for Cambodia was developed in 2017 to align WFP's assistance with the Government's planning cycle and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework 2016-2018. It initially aimed to rationalize the scale and scope of WFP's programme, moving from direct implementation towards strengthening national capacities. The CSP (2019-2023) sought to continue this shift and build scalable programme models. It was designed around five strategic outcomes (SO) - a sixth was added in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and floods in 2020. The CSP was implemented through seven activities, focusing on root causes, crisis response and resilience building.

The total budget for the CSP was USD 87.9 million which was fully funded as of December 2022.

OBJECTIVES AND USERS OF THE EVALUATION

The evaluation was commissioned by the WFP Office of Evaluation to provide evidence for accountability and learning; and to inform the design of the next CSP in Cambodia. It covers WFP activities implemented from 2018 to September 2022

The evaluation was conducted between May 2022 and April 2023. It assessed WFP's strategic positioning and role, including progress towards the intended strategic shift; WFP's contributions to strategic outcomes; efficiency; and factors that explained WFP performance. The evaluation's main intended users are: the WFP Cambodia Country Office, the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, WFP headquarters technical divisions; and interested external stakeholders.

KEY EVALUATION FINDINGS

Extent to which WFP's strategic position, role and specific contribution is based on country priorities and people's needs, as well as WFP's strengths

The evaluation found that the T-ICSP and CSP were aligned with national priorities for food security and nutrition, education and disaster risk reduction, as well as its strategic and programmatic frameworks in these areas. Both plans were consistent with national Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) priorities and targets, particularly under Goals 2 and 17. They were aligned to UN priorities and focused on areas of WFP comparative advantage. WFP successfully responded to evolving needs, particularly by adapting to address emergency requirements during flooding and the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, by shifting to Take Home rations for school feeding activities.

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

Social protection pillar

WFP school feeding interventions promoted educational outcomes as well as higher retention and lower dropout rates for schoolchildren. However, the COVID-19 pandemic prevented the achievement of household food security targets. The strategy for transition to a government-run home-grown school feeding programme provides an example of good practice and WFP technical support to central government has been instrumental in creating the conditions for national ownership, though capacity gaps remain.

Emergency response interventions complemented the Government response to the 2020 floods and to the COVID-19 pandemic. Outcome targets were generally met despite implementation delays, due to effective food transfers and efforts to resolve technical challenges with the provision of cash based transfers.

Integrated risk management pillar

WFP helped develop resilient food systems and improve disaster risk management. Activities included support to national agencies for enhanced disaster risk reduction capacity, and strengthening local climate change adaptation, as well as helping build community assets using climate smart technology. Activities also supported the integration of climate change and food security and nutrition in

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commune-level planning processes. However, targets for improving coping capacity were not met.

WFP performed well in strengthening institutions' capacity to mitigate risks and coordinate shock preparedness and response efforts. It positioned itself as the main Government partner in building a shock-responsive social protection framework for Cambodia.

WFP also fulfilled partners' demand for supply chain services - though it did not undertake a comprehensive analysis of demand.

Food security and nutrition pillar

WFP contributions to food security and nutrition were much broader than anticipated - though corporate indicators do not fully capture the breadth and depth of its role. For example, WFP supported the Government and other national actors to formulate the second National Strategy on Food Security and Nutrition 2019-2023 and successfully promoted food security and nutrition at the highest political levels. It also provided significant research and analysis on the issue.

Cross cutting issues

There was limited evidence to assess WFP's contribution to long-term changes in country capacity strengthening, but WFP is developing and testing new corporate tools and indicators to improve measurement, including in Cambodia.

Gender was not sufficiently integrated at programme implementation level, though WFP has recently made increased efforts and investments in gender research and training. Protection issues were considered at a basic level only at design stage and have not been systematically addressed.

Accountability of Affected Populations activities were not conducted under an overall framework during CSP implementation but WFP has recently paid increasing attention to this area, including more frequent consultation and enhanced feedback mechanisms. Emergency response interventions adhered to humanitarian principles as relevant for Cambodia, notably humanity, impartiality and independence.

Sustainability prospects for school feeding are promising, with a well-considered transition approach. Elsewhere, sustaining gains delivered depends on government commitment and ability to implement these.

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

The evaluation found that most of WFP's activities were implemented within the intended timeframe, with delays mainly arising from COVID-19. Emergency interventions were rapidly launched in response to flooding and the COVID-19 pandemic, but technical challenges caused delays in the provision of cash-based assistance.

Geographic targeting was appropriate, focusing on children in vulnerable areas and those affected by COVID-19. Changes in the vulnerability landscape have prompted consideration of programme expansion.

CSP delivery was cost-efficient, supported by the shift from in-kind provision to cash-based transfers, though the cost-efficiency of capacity strengthening activities lacked sufficient data for assessment.

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

WFP managed to increase resource mobilization over time, but earmarking at the activity level limited its flexibility.

Monitoring and reporting mainly focused on school feeding, with no outcome-level results measurement framework in place for capacity strengthening. However, the Country Office has made substantial investments since 2021 to strengthen the evidence architecture and systematically mainstream evidence generation and use.

Strategic partnerships with Government and other national actors helped WFP sustain performance and deliver results. The CSP achieved its intended results with regard to UN coherence, including engaging with fellow Rome-based agencies, and WFP cultivated partnerships across civil society and the private sector.

Staff skills and structure were adapted in line with the organizational realignment of the Country Office; but insufficient staffing and structural challenges hindered effective CSP delivery - in particular for cross-cutting issues.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall Assessment

Overall, the evaluation finds that WFP's strategic direction was appropriate and aligned well with Cambodia's national development priorities. The CSP provided a suitable strategic framework, but its siloed structure hindered cross-fertilization across strategic outcomes.

WFP's school feeding programme has continued to gain momentum and WFP was able to demonstrate adaptive capacity during emergencies - helping solidify its role as a leading partner in shock-responsive social protection. WFP worked effectively to strengthen resilience at the commune and national levels as been progressively implementing disaster risk reduction activities.

WFP's work in food security and nutrition exceeded expectations, but there are opportunities to maximize linkages between stand-alone nutrition interventions and nutrition interaction / mainstreaming.

Shifting upstream to support government systems across the portfolio faced challenges, partially due to being driven by corporate direction rather than suitability for the country context. Meaningful corporate indicators were also lacking to fully assess the sustainability of achievements.

WFP has significantly strengthened partnerships with Government counterparts and is well-positioned for ensuring the sustainability of results, in particular the transition towards a government-owned home-grown school feeding programme.

Building on progress, there is an opportunity for WFP to adopt a more sophisticated integration of gender, inclusion, Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and accountability to affected populations in future programming.

Recommendation 1 Refine strategic focus of the next CSP in a more holistic way to strengthen the integration of activities and maximize effectiveness across the development and humanitarian spectrum; link to climate change and ground the design within WFP's comparative advantages

Recommendation 2 Build evidence-based systems and structures to inform CSP implementation and management

Recommendation 3 Develop an overall partnership strategy, highlighting opportunities for linkages and alignment across SOs and different partnerships

Recommendation 4: Build an overarching conceptual framework for support to government based on existing national capacity needs mappings and stronger partner coordination

Recommendation 5 Strengthen and mainstream gender transformative approaches, inclusion and accountability to affected population within the design and implementation of the next CSP