



World Food Programme

SAVING
LIVES
CHANGING
LIVES

Evaluation of WFP Benin Country Strategic Plan 2019 – 2023

CONTEXT

Benin's population of 12.5 million people is young (average age of 21), about half the population lives in rural areas and a significant share (38.5 percent) lives below the national poverty line. Benin ranks 82 out of 116 countries in 2021 Global Hunger Index, falling within the "serious hunger condition" category. Climate projections foresee high risks leading to serious consequences for agriculture, forestry and tourism sectors. The government aims to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals with the National Development Plan 2018-2025 as the overarching framework.

SUBJECT AND FOCUS OF THE EVALUATION

The WFP Country Strategic Plan (Jul 2019-Dec 2023) defined three strategic outcomes and three activities focused on school feeding, nutrition and capacity strengthening. A fourth strategic outcome and activity, focused on crisis response, were added through a budget revision in December 2019 in response to heavy flooding. A second budget revision in September 2020 expanded the emergency response component to assist the country in addressing the consequences of the coronavirus disease pandemic.

The original CSP foresaw a budget of USD 129.5 million, which increased to USD 138.7 million after revisions to assist 1 million beneficiaries. As of June 2022, 71 percent of the overall needs-based plan was funded with the majority of funds provided by the Government of Benin and directed to school feeding.

OBJECTIVES AND USERS OF THE EVALUATION

The evaluation was commissioned by the WFP Office of Evaluation to provide evaluative evidence for accountability and learning to inform the design of the next CSP for Benin. The evaluation covered all WFP activities implemented

between January 2018 and June 2022 under a transitional Interim Country Strategic Plan (Jan 2018-June 2019) and the CSP. It assessed WFP's strategic positioning, its effectiveness in contributing to strategic outcomes, the efficiency of CSP implementation and factors explaining WFP's performance.

The main intended users of the evaluation include the WFP Benin country office, the Regional Bureau for Western Africa, technical divisions at headquarters, target programme recipients, the Government of Benin, partners and donors.

KEY EVALUATION FINDINGS

Strategic positioning

The evaluation found the CSP to be **evidence-based** and reflective of the food security and nutrition needs of the population. The support to the national school-feeding programme was **highly relevant** but the rationale for omitting support to resilience building and emergency response in the CSP was unclear.

UN **alignment** was endeavoured through contributions to the formulation of the 2019-2023 UNSDCF and partnerships with UNICEF, UNDP, IFAD and UNFPA in the area of school feeding.

The CSP was based on a clear and comprehensive line of sight and the addition of a strategic outcome on emergency response demonstrated adaptability. However, WFP did not make adequate adjustments in response to the limited funding available for nutrition interventions or the low level of government preparedness to respond to emergencies. Capacity strengthening activities were not integrated coherently throughout the CSP, and uneven levels of funding among strategic outcomes exacerbated that lack of coherence.

Contribution to CSP outcomes in Benin

Under **Strategic Outcome 1** WFP managed a massive scale-up of the national integrated school feeding programme, thereby contributing significantly to its success. Most of the expected results were achieved, but the closure of schools due to the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 had negative impacts on retention and success rates. WFP has systematically promoted the participation of communities in the school feeding programme and communities have often found suitable solutions for the proper functioning of school canteens. Other objectives of the school feeding programme, related to boosting agricultural production and supporting the local economy, were only partially achieved and the potential use of schools as entry point for other development initiatives, such as water supply and nutrition education, has not been sufficiently exploited.

Under **Strategic outcome 2** owing to lack of funding, WFP was unable to contribute significantly to improving the nutritional status of vulnerable populations. Delayed funding and gaps in capacity strengthening needs analysis led to delayed implementation of activities under **Strategic Outcome 3**. While the assistance provided to flood-affected populations under **Strategic Outcome 4** in 2020 contributed to temporary improvements in food security, constraints including a lack of emergency response preparedness of WFP, targeting challenges, and late and limited funding meant it arrived too late to meet immediate needs.

Contribution to cross-cutting aims

While the CSP is strongly oriented towards the achievement of **gender equality and inclusiveness**, those intentions have not been fully translated into concrete action, leading to disappointing results. WFP has not managed to reduce the gender gap in school enrolment or to improve the situation of the many women who work as unpaid school cooks. **Accountability to affected populations** was ensured only through informal feedback mechanisms in school feeding activities whereas emergency response activities lacked recourse mechanisms.

Geographic targeting of WFP assistance was not fully independent of the priorities of the Government and donors. Operational independence was impacted by the government's strong influence as a primary donor for school feeding but regular meetings where WFP, NGOs and the government agreed on principles for implementation served as a mitigation mechanism.

The CSP identifies environmental factors as underlying causes of food insecurity in Benin but **environmental protection** or adaptation to climate change were not integrated into all activities.

WFP is promoting the **sustainability** of achievements under strategic outcomes 1 and 3 of the CSP by strengthening institutional capacity. However, the current school feeding model requires adaptation before a hand over can be envisaged.

WFP has operated **efficiently** in terms of logistics and timeliness of food deliveries to schools but emergency response activities suffered delays due to slow targeting procedures, logistics problems and limited emergency response capacities in country office.

Factors that explain WFP performance

The country office did not manage to overcome funding challenges for activities other than school feeding despite a resource mobilisation strategy targeting diverse funding sources. The country office scaled up staffing for school feeding but other activities suffered from gaps in technical capacity. Monitoring systems for school feeding have improved but do not yet measure transformative effects of integration with complementary activities.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

WFP successfully implemented the national integrated school feeding programme, though opportunities for strengthening government capacities were missed posing risks for sustainability. The almost exclusive orientation of the CSP towards school feeding has created an imbalance and affected WFP's ability to define its role in addressing the root causes of food and nutrition insecurity in Benin, affecting a significant and growing proportion of the population.

The lack of a strategy for addressing cross-cutting issues led to their insufficient consideration in activities, and to unsatisfactory results. For instance, WFP did not manage to reduce the gender gap in school enrollment nor to set up a formal community feedback mechanism. Due to the strong focus on the implementation and scale-up of the school feeding programme, opportunities for strengthening national capacities were missed, and the transfer of responsibilities to national entities was limited, putting the sustainability of the programme at risk.

Recommendation 1. Balance strategic direction by strengthening engagement with partners in school feeding, integrating nutrition, focussing on resilience and prioritizing shock responsive social protection.

Recommendation 2. Strengthen integration of cross-cutting issues including capacity strengthening, nutrition, gender, inclusion and monitoring.

Recommendation 3. Promote WFP's comparative advantages beyond its support to the national integrated school feeding programme

Recommendation 4. Strengthen sustainability of the achievements of the CSP.

Recommendation 5. Align human resources capacity and organizational structure of the country office with the strategic direction of the CSP.