



World Food Programme

SAVING
LIVES
CHANGING
LIVES

COUNTRY CASE STUDY

Caribbean Multi-Country Office

(Caribbean MCO)

Flexible Systems-Effective Responses?

Regional Evaluation of WFP's contribution to Shock-Responsive Social Protection in Latin America and the Caribbean (2015-2022)

INTRODUCTION

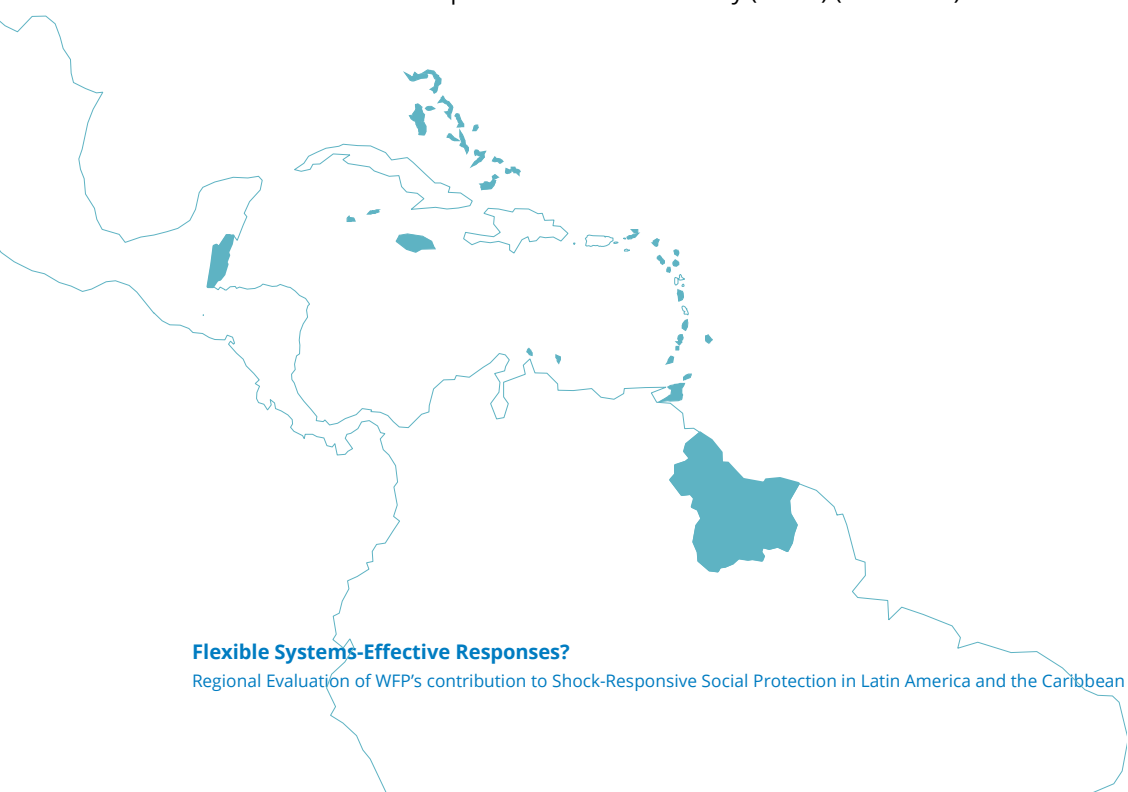
The present case study was conducted as a part of the "Regional Evaluation of WFP's Contribution to Shock-Responsive Social Protection in Latin America and the Caribbean from 2015 to 2022." The evaluation team conducted semi-structured virtual interviews with Caribbean Multi-Country Office (MCO) staff and partners (21 women, 11 men). Additionally, a comprehensive documentary review was carried out. As a part of the regional evaluation a survey was conducted, with responses from 31 WFP Caribbean MCO personnel and partners. In addition, an **evaluation field visit to Barbados**, where the Caribbean MCO office is located, **and Dominica took place from April 19th to 27th, 2023. Dominica was selected as it was the first Caribbean country where Caribbean MCO developed a Shock-Responsive Social Protection (SRSP) agenda after the catastrophic impact of Hurricane Maria in 2017**, a major shock that continues to affect the island to this day, and one of the Caribbean Islands with a **population which identifies as an indigenous people - the Kalinago**. Dominica was visited and **meetings were held with WFP stakeholders**, government partners as well as **focus group discussions (FGD) with beneficiaries and representatives of the Kalinago Village Council**. Beneficiary FGDs were comprised of a group of six women and a group five of men. Both groups had received one or more social cash transfers through Hurricane Maria response, COVID-19 Emergency cash transfers and the recent Eastern Trough event.

While the Caribbean MCO covers 22 countries and territories of the English and Dutch-speaking Caribbean, evidence generated by the **evaluation pertains largely to the Caribbean MCO office based in Barbados, the Dominica satellite office, as well as WFP experiences on SRSP in British Virgin Islands, Belize, Saint Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Jamaica.**

WFP CARIBBEAN MCO'S ENGAGEMENT IN SRSP

WFP Caribbean MCO began as the Office for Emergency Preparedness and Response in the Caribbean in July 2018, building on the response to Hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017, with funding provided from the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) followed by USAID's Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance (BHA). The effects of the 2017 hurricane season in the Caribbean region were widespread and catastrophic. Damage to homes, livelihoods and critical infrastructure resulted in cascading failures of the lifeline systems of energy, transportation, communications, water supply and impeded response operations. Through its response to Hurricane Irma and Maria, **WFP supported on logistics and cash transfers through social protection and saw that it could play an important role in the sub-region through strengthening the capacities** of sub-regional bodies such as the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA) on logistics and end-to-end supply chains, and through advocacy, evidence-building and system strengthening on shock-responsive social protection, based on its experience in delivering social cash transfers in Dominica through social protection in response to Hurricane Maria. WFP's Caribbean MCO became an official Multi-Country Office in 2021.

Over this period **WFP has built an operational field presence through satellite offices and teams in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Jamaica, Belize, Guyana and WFP personnel providing technical assistance to government in Saint Lucia and British Virgin Islands.** In the Barbados, Caribbean MCO office, the programme team covers eight functions with SRSP at the heart of the operation – Operational Implementation, Social Protection and Cash Transfers, Disaster Risk Management, Emergency Preparedness and Response, School Feeding, Disaster Risk Financing, Food Systems and Research, Assessment and Monitoring. The English and Dutch-speaking Caribbean countries are all highly exposed to a range of natural hazards and shocks related to climate change and the intensification of droughts, floods, hurricanes, and storms. The region is also prone to earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. As small island developing states, they also face numerous similar challenges in managing the aftermath of these shocks in terms of loss of livelihoods, crops, homes and infrastructure that affect the food and nutrition security of the most vulnerable, particularly in crises. They are highly vulnerable due to the small size of their economies, their reliance on tourism, as well as their high level of indebtedness. Caribbean MCO's engagement has been highly strategic, working both at the level of strengthening national social protection ministries and with Disaster Risk Management (DRM) authorities, as well as at the regional level with CDEMA, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), and the Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility (CCRIF) (see below).



WFP'S CONTRIBUTION TO SRSP IN THE CARIBBEAN

Contributing to SRSP through evidence generation and advocacy

When WFP first opened the office in 2018, a priority was to establish an advocacy, evidence and learning agenda on SRSP. Building on the regional Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) Oxford Policy Management (OPM)/WFP studies on shock-responsive social protection, WFP coordinated with CDEMA to develop specific research focused on CARICOM member states. Between 2018 and 2020, **WFP and OPM conducted case studies in Dominica, Guyana, Belize, Saint Lucia, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago. The selection of countries to be included was informed by consultations with governments and the World Bank and a review of where key actors** were already engaged. It also conducted a sub-regional literature review on SRSP in the Caribbean region.

"We have used and continue to use the Belize country case study published by Caribbean MCO. It has been most useful, as has the WFP satellite office in Belize since we do not have any office in Belize".
– WFP Partner

According to stakeholders and supported by the findings of the online survey, these were **foundational works which have filled a significant information gap on the small island developing states (SIDS) of the Caribbean and continue to be referred to and used both internally by WFP stakeholders and externally by SRSP partners.** Key IFI and UN partners have flagged the **important contribution that these studies have made to mapping the context of SRSP in SIDS where there was little prior documentation.** As the office has grown significantly since it opened in 2018, WFP staff and consultants also find the Country Case Studies provide essential information to chart the way forward. **Part of WFP's strategy in evidence generation has been to draw on its own expertise rather than fully outsourcing evidence-generation:** a WFP team member participated directly in each of these case studies and the writing of the synthesis report. Many of the people who participated in the country case studies on behalf of WFP are still engaged as consultants and staff by the Caribbean MCO. Countries where no country case study has been conducted expressed that it would have been helpful to have such a study to pave the way for WFP's arrival in the country to help map out strategies for responding to specific shocks with different government partners.



WFP as key convener of different actors around SRSP

Interviews with key informants (KIs) and survey data suggest that the **evidence generation process has been just as important, and more so, than the final products**. Each country case study was an **opportunity to convene national social protection and disaster risk management actors** to explore how these systems relate to one another. According to KIs, **WFP has played a vital role in building relationships between government stakeholders, particularly social protection ministries**, and more recently between social protection and ministries of finance, for example on issues of disaster risk financing, where these did not exist before. In addition to the research process and national workshops, WFP has **organized several regional learning events to facilitate South-South exchange**. These have been important for bringing together social protection and disaster risk management stakeholders to exchange on how social protection can be used to respond to shocks.¹

While few KIs commented on these past events, they did comment a recent workshop in March 2023 on Anticipatory Action. The perception of many KIs is that **WFP has significantly contributed by bringing together key national and regional actors around SRSP**, and has **emerged as a thought leader with needed expertise to provide on-going coordination** needed as more and more actors (including UNICEF, UNDP, ILO, UN Women, World Bank and regional IFIs) embrace the concept of SRSP and want to include it in their own programming.



¹ Some events include: 1. Convening a panel on shock-responsive social protection with the World Bank in May 2019; Understanding Risk event in Barbados; 2. WFP/CDEMA High Level Symposium on Shock-Responsive Social Protection in June 2019; 3. Based on a recommendation coming from the High-Level Symposium, the Caribbean office teamed up with the Dominican Republic WFP CO to have a learning event in Dominican Republic in September 2019, bringing social protection and Disaster Risk Management (DRM) government officials from about nine Caribbean countries to learn how information management systems can be used for responding to shocks (based on the SIUBEN registry in Dominican Republic and use of vulnerability indices); 4. Panel and training on SRSP as part of CDEMA Comprehensive Disaster Risk Management event in December 2019; 5. Facilitating the participation of Caribbean governments and spotlighting Caribbean experiences in regional and global learning events on shock-responsive social protection (with UNICEF – COVID-19 socialprotection.org side event in October 2020, featuring the Government of Saint Lucia).

COVID-19 accelerated national interest in SRSP

While the LAC SRSP strategy as articulated in 2019 envisaged that the country case studies would lead to national workshops to develop SRSP roadmaps, it appears that **only in Belize and Saint Lucia formal roadmaps were developed based on outreach to a range of government stakeholders and others** (for example, Red Cross) together to exchange on recommendations. According to KIs, WFP had been exchanging with Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana and Jamaica about possible workshops, when COVID-19 changed the plans. After the Saint Lucia one in February 2019, the focus moved to the operational implications of COVID-19. It was just as many of the country case studies were being published in early to mid-2020 that the COVID-19 pandemic emerged as a game-changer within the Caribbean sub-region.

COVID-19 rapidly shifted WFP into a more operational relationship with several governments who responded to WFP's offer of technical assistance first, and later of financial support for cash transfers through social protection as funds became available. In this process, roadmap development concept and the implementation of country case study recommendations was superseded by the urgency of supporting countries in their COVID-19 emergency responses. On-going programmes were adapted to the COVID-19 pandemic, and **WFP Caribbean MCO made effective use of technical assistance (enabling) followed by the opportunity to redirect and mobilize funding to support delivery of cash transfers to build complementarities with and strengthen the responsiveness of social protection systems to this new and unexpected shock through direct delivery of cash transfers through social protection systems.**

Most KIs stated that **COVID-19, similarly to sudden onset crises, have provided a significant impetus to the SRSP work by generating a sense of urgency in governments to act.** This situation presented an opportunity for WFP to integrate funding for COVID-19 relief—whether through new funds or reallocating previous grants—into resources for social cash transfer interventions. Subsequently, these interventions enabled WFP to offer technical assistance aimed at assisting governments in enhancing the responsiveness of their SP systems to shocks. This **combination of downstream work through direct investment in social cash transfers with technical assistance provided to support system strengthening presented an attractive package to national social protection ministries.**

According to the Evaluation of the Joint SDG Fund Programme (2020-22), co-led by WFP and UNICEF, *“The Partnering UN Organisations effectively adapted the Joint Programme to the COVID-19 context by supporting evidence-based decision making and using the real-time experience to learn and prepare the social protection systems to adapt to future shocks.”*² It also **allowed some funds from projects including the Joint Programme and the EnGenDER project, to be re-allocated and new donor funds go to COVID-19 cash transfers through social protection systems. WFP supported governments with COVID-19 social cash transfers** in Dominica, Barbados, British Virgin Islands, Jamaica, Guyana and Saint Lucia and these **provided significant opportunities to collaborate on SP systems strengthening efforts – in particular for targeting and registration of beneficiaries and the roll out of digital wallets and e-money services**, which were important both for their efficiency and also the reduction of human contact to stop the spread of the virus. Digitalization of payment and other systems may be **considered a positive effect** of WFP's work.

WFP also collaborated with CARICOM to roll out several rounds of the Caribbean Food Security and Livelihoods Survey to gather data on people's livelihoods, access to markets and food security, and provide snapshots of the impacts of rising food prices over time. The **periodic survey aims to inform analysis and decision-making of governments and development partners in the region**, building on the data collected which highlights the impact of COVID-19, the cost-of-living crisis and the effect of natural hazards on food security and livelihoods. The sixth round of data collection, which took place in May 2023, compares findings with previous survey rounds conducted between April 2020 and August 2022 to build evidence about the rising food prices and inflation in the aftermath of COVID-19.

² WFP, ILO, UNDP, UNICEF, UN Women (2022). Final Evaluation of Joint Programme 'Enhancing Resilience and Acceleration of the SDGs in the Eastern Caribbean' 2020 – 2022.

Focus on Gender and Inclusivity in SRSP

An evaluation workshop to reconstruct the SRSP Theory of Change indicated **that WFP in the LAC region did not initiate the work on SRSP with a clear sense of the gender and inclusion dimensions, and that key expected outcomes related to strengthening of social protection ministries and connections between DRM and Social Protection actors. However, with time, WFP, both on its own and through associating with partners, has been exploring these broader dimensions.** One example is Saint Lucia, where with the support of the Joint Programme (JP) financed by the SDG Fund, WFP was able to expand the Public Assistance Programme (PAP) to include an additional 1,000 households (horizontal expansion of social protection benefits) and provided monthly top-ups to people living with HIV already registered under a social assistance programme. UNICEF, as part of the same JP, provided support to households receiving the Child Disability Grant and Foster Care Grant (which are good examples of vertical expansion of social protection benefits). By **associating itself with partners such as UNICEF and UN Women in the joint SDG Fund project, WFP was able to achieve more in effective integration of gender, equity, and human rights in the design of the JP;** the programme document refers to three specific dimensions addressed by the JP – accelerating SDG 5; considering gender equality and women’s empowerment (GEWE) as a cross-cutting theme; and identifying interventions specifically-designed to respond to the needs of marginalized women, people living with disabilities, and other marginalized people whose needs are not adequately addressed through gender-mainstreamed elements. In the final evaluation of the project, UN Women was found to bring a different range of strategies and analyses which complement the technical skills and expertise of WFP.³



In 2019, WFP carried out an internal mapping of gender in DRM and social protection policies, since both influence gender issues in scaleups alongside other factors. This was to inform WFP’s work on SRSP and more broadly on emergency preparedness. Where more detailed analysis was available, particularly UN Women’s Gender Aware Beneficiary Analysis (GABA) in Saint Lucia, this was also included in the OPM case studies. In Dominica, WFP has worked with the Gender Affairs Bureau in the implementation of the COVID-19 response. In Guyana, the provision of cash transfers through social protection with the government

³ WFP, ILO, UNDP, UNICEF, UN Women (2022). Final Evaluation of Joint Programme ‘Enhancing Resilience and Acceleration of the SDGs in the Eastern Caribbean’ 2020 – 2022.

focused on supporting women through the Guyana Women's Leadership Institute's, Women Innovation and Investment Network (WIIN) programme. In St. Vincent and the Grenadines, WFP consulted the Gender Affairs Division during the design of the SRSP response following the 2021 volcanic eruption. The Caribbean MCO accessed Gates Foundation funding to explore gender dimensions of financial inclusion in Jamaica, Dominica and Saint Lucia which is paving the way to improved financial access and inclusion for women and other vulnerable groups. However, the **evaluation team did not find evidence that WFP is systematically and proactively supporting governments to consult with women's organizations and building partnerships with diverse organizations representing marginalized groups.** This can offer governments valuable insights into moving beyond the technical aspects of social cash transfer roll-out and focusing on the foundational work on inclusivity and addressing the needs of the most vulnerable groups. KIs suggest that WFP's SRSP work should systematically include the government Gender Bureaus in each country to help define shock-responsive policies and procedures that account for the needs of both men and women.

In focus group discussions in Dominica, men and women expressed similar and different concerns about their experience as recipients of cash provided in response to the COVID-19 Social Cash Transfers programme and the Eastern Trough. Both groups expressed that **little attention was paid to the needs of the elderly and persons with disabilities.** It is important to balance this view by considering that **the government and WFP were taking measures related to persons with disabilities,** whereby beneficiaries who were unable to collect the assistance in person due to disabilities or unavailability during distribution period could provide written authorization to a trusted person who could collect it on their behalf. The person collecting was required to present the signed, written permission along with a picture ID of both the named beneficiary and the collector. For on-site distributions and post-distribution monitoring, WFP offered transport and arranged it for those who needed it. However, focus group discussions in Dominica highlighted that the needs of the elderly and persons with disabilities in the context of a shock go beyond getting access to cash, but include the need for additional assistance and support with their physical needs, home repairs, accessing medical services and related response services.

In this sense, the amounts provided were perceived by the recipients as inadequate to offset the needs of highly vulnerable individuals given the current climate of high inflation and rising food prices.⁴ Overall, women were more concerned with issues around child and elder care, and the demands placed on them as primary caregivers. Men were more focused on losses to their businesses and to reinstate these, given that none of them had any form of insurance. This indicates the **importance of WFP's ongoing work on expanding Disaster Risk Financing mechanisms both at the micro and at the macro level.** Discussions with Village Council members who play a key role in targeting and distributing emergency assistance highlighted that opportunities exist for WFP to be more engaged at community level to ensure that communities are equipped and trained on disaster response, by involving other types of social protection programmes beyond the PAP, such as the National Employment Programme (NEP) to ensure that NEP participants, given their roles in public works initiatives, elder care and childcare, for example, are effectively trained and equipped to respond in case of an emergency. At the same time, it is important to consider opportunities to link to other programmes and services addressing these issues or consider how such gaps could be filled if these do not exist.

In Caribbean MCO, several **key monitoring tools are utilized: Post-Distribution Monitoring (PDM) reports, the PowerBi dashboard featuring results from PDM across all countries/rounds and disaggregated data by sex and other variables,** and the **Shock-Readiness Index (SRI),** which demonstrates changes in national shock readiness of social protection systems based on a set of pre-defined indicators. It should be mentioned that Caribbean MCO developed an outcome level indicator on

⁴ Regarding transfer values, it is important to highlight that there are considerations related to the amounts provided versus the number of people reached, as well as other considerations such as the alignment with other government response programmes. Particularly during COVID-19, the Government of Dominica had a number of different programmes providing income support to different beneficiaries, of which Social Cash Transfer programme was one. While WFP has advocated for higher transfer values, in the context of limited resources this also means that fewer people would be reached.

SRSP that has generated interest from others, including ECHO and two other WFP offices. On-site monitoring reports and the Caribbean MCO output tracker are also used to link specific actions, data and follow-up by WFP. Overall, Caribbean MCO has developed a valid and useful set of monitoring tools that could be further shared with other operations. However, for **monitoring gender differences and the inclusion of specific groups, deeper analysis in post-distribution reporting would be helpful, including disaggregation of key variables by sex.**

Overall, post-distribution monitoring provides an excellent opportunity for WFP to use gender analysis to ascertain the extent to which its programmes and those of the government programmes it supports are having similar or different results for female and male beneficiaries. The evaluation team was able to review a number of post-distribution monitoring reports and saw several opportunities for improved gender analysis of data collected. In one example of post distribution monitoring for the Saint Vincent and the Grenadines Soufriere Eruption response, which compares assistance recipients in July 2021 with January 2022, while WFP analysis shows that 73% of voucher recipients were women and 27% were men, other variables in the PDM report were not sex-disaggregated. A particularly intriguing change, which could be followed up by further research, was that in July 2021, 30% of assistance recipients had no account with a financial service provider, whereas in January 2022, only 14% had no account with any financial service provider.



WFP's investment in Capacity Building through leadership and training on SRSP

A key contribution of the Caribbean MCO has also been the **development of training materials on SRSP to ensure the sustainability of WFP capacity strengthening investments**. The investment of WFP in the theoretical framework, research and data collection on SRSP led to the development of the “Shock-Responsive Social Protection in the Caribbean Handbook”⁵ published in November 2021, which, with support from the University of Wolverhampton, was transferred into an online learning module, facilitated online (owing to pandemic) training conducted with three governments and in-person training conducted with additional six governments in 2022 and mid-2023. This Handbook and associated modules are currently available in the public domain, which is considered an important contribution to the field at the global level. It has been also translated into Spanish for wider dissemination.

Based on the Caribbean MCO's thought leadership in the sub-region, **a number of partner institutions have fully embraced the concept and 'shock-responsive social protection' or 'adaptive social protection'** – terms that are used more or less interchangeably. Various institutions including the World Bank, UNICEF, ILO, FAO, UN Women and the Caribbean Development Bank have embraced and are building on the concepts and tools initially launched by WFP. The Caribbean is heavily exposed to a range of climate-related disasters and a key area of innovation and value-added for the Caribbean MCO has been the **strategic use of top-ups to CCRIF⁶ macro-insurance policies to incentivize governments to invest part of their insurance premiums in coverage to enable them to directly address the needs of the most vulnerable households in case of catastrophic loss**. WFP stands out for its significant contribution to addressing Climate Change adaptation through various forms of disaster risk financing. KIs clearly indicated a high level of support for WFP's work in supporting communities and governments with a range of risk financing tools, from macro- to micro-levels, anticipatory finance, and integrated risk management approaches. WFP has piloted using macro-insurance to allow rapid and significant financing to reach social protection recipients after a catastrophic shock. In Dominica, Belize and recently Saint Lucia WFP has negotiated a top-up to existing CCRIF insurance policies of 100,000 USD, which, in case of a major catastrophe allows for a proportional payout that will go through the social protection system, and directly to persons impacted by the catastrophic event. In addition to contributing to the greater viability of the entire risk insurance system, these measures also serve to embed awareness of the role of social protection in responding to shocks within Ministries of Finance and serve as a springboard to facilitate disaster risk contingency and operational planning within various ministries, including social protection.

Looking forward, with so many institutions at the regional and sub-regional level interested in programming on SRSP, the **Caribbean MCO is considering how to further strengthen capacity in SRSP in the region and increase the pool of specialists available to all agencies by developing a degree programme/diploma in Shock-Responsive Social Protection** with University of the West Indies, based on the SRSP in the Caribbean Handbook and the learning modules developed with the University of Wolverhampton. This appears to be key to a longer-term sustainability strategy to ensure that agencies can find trained personnel familiar with this approach within the sub-region itself.

⁵ WFP and CDEMA (November 2021). Shock-Responsive Social Protection in the Caribbean Handbook.

⁶ Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility Segregated Portfolio Insurance Company.

Contribution to longer-term outcomes

Considering the Caribbean MCO only became a fully established multi-country office in 2021, many KIs consider that it **is too early to be looking for the achievement of significant long-term outcomes in terms of enhanced SRSP system performance (enhanced speed, coverage, adequacy and coordination of national systems to respond to emergencies)**. Taking Dominica as an example, where the evaluation field visit was carried out, despite a significant level of activity by WFP and government partners, few aspects resulting from the social protection system strengthening were fully institutionalised prior to the 2022 elections, when changes of cabinet portfolios and ministries paused agreements between WFP and the Government of Dominica. This pattern of starts and stops based on changes in government is an inevitable aspect of SRSP work that WFP needs to take into consideration and adapt to.

In terms of **coverage, the evaluation found that in Dominica, WFP's ability to mobilise funding – first for Hurricane Maria, then for COVID-19 and finally for the 'Eastern Trough' storm event in 2022 have been used expand coverage both vertically, among PAP recipients and horizontally to non-PAP recipients**. Especially in the response to Hurricane Maria, this resulted in a massive increase in coverage of households impacted. These funds placed WFP in an excellent position to advocate for enhancing the social cash transfer procedures, working closely with the social protection partners who oversee the PAP. In all cases, while some of the recipients were regular social assistance beneficiaries, other groups were included who were considered vulnerable but not regular beneficiaries – thus **the system was 'expanded' on a temporary basis, for the purpose of these emergency programmes**. This has been the case in **Jamaica, Belize, Barbados and other countries** where COVID-19 emergency funds allowed WFP to temporarily increase coverage through vertical and horizontal expansion of public assistance programs. In the case of Saint Lucia, the temporary measures transitioned to a permanent expansion supported by a World Bank project. A key contribution of WFP's work on targeting and registration processes in the sub-region is seen to be the transparency brought by having clear criteria and processes in place which improve public trust and donor confidence.

In terms of **speed of response**, the evidence that was gathered by the evaluation team demonstrates mixed results. A good example of improved speed of response as a result of WFP's capacity strengthening efforts was identified in Belize, where a strategy of preparing social protection actors for the hurricane season resulted in the ability to deliver cash transfers through social protection to households affected by Hurricane Lisa within one month. This is a notable success. The response to La Soufriere 2021 in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines was also mounted quickly, under the leadership of the government but with significant technical and material support from WFP. In Dominica, while introducing digital data collection to register and target beneficiaries in the COVID-19 response certainly sped up the identification of beneficiaries compared to using paper forms, these new digital processes also took time to be put in place. KIs suggest that in this case improvements to the speed of response were limited because the tools and methods introduced by WFP have not yet been institutionalised due to government changes. Also in Jamaica, it was commented by KIs that despite WFP's investments, it took the Ministry of Labour and Social Security six months to roll out a social cash transfer for a storm event in 2022.

The **adequacy of assistance** appears to be a significant gap. In FGDs with beneficiaries, there was perceived concern that the **amount of transfers provided through government social protection systems with WFP funds for the COVID-19 response and the Eastern Trough in Dominica had been limited and that they made small difference in terms of food and nutrition security of recipients**. The Caribbean has been experiencing high food price inflation and is highly dependent on imported food products. WFP previously called attention to this through its implementation of the CARICOM Food Security Household Survey in 2022. Nevertheless, it is important to mention that increasing values of social transfers may have significant implications and trade-offs particularly in the context of limited fiscal space experienced by many SIDS.

In terms of **enhanced coordination and collaboration with other actors**, UN and otherwise, at country level this represents an area where **WFP could be** providing more leadership or providing further support to government actors, despite significant efforts made to date. These include WFP's active participation in the OECS Social Protection Cash Transfer (SPCT) coordination group (attended by all Permanent Secretaries for Social Protection in the Eastern Caribbean and as well as some UN agencies/IFIs), WFP's participation and support with the convening of the Saint Lucia Country Coordinating Committee, and participation in multiple joint programme technical working groups and steering groups. Furthermore, WFP co-chairs the Eastern Caribbean Development Partners Sub-Group on Climate Change and Resilience and jointly presented with UNICEF on SRSP in coordination session of the Eastern Caribbean Development Partners Group. It has also regular coordination meetings with UNICEF on social protection and coordinates on a need's basis with different World Bank team members on both social protection and disaster risk financing.

WFP's engagement in British Virgin Islands is a positive example of its leadership in coordination and investment in the fundamentals of the social protection system. In April 2022, the British Virgin Islands government faced a crisis which prompted it to reform the social protection system and move cash grants to the Social Welfare Department, in close coordination with UNICEF. According to KI interviews and briefing notes, **WFP assisted the Social Development Department in transitioning 300 households from House of Assembly Transitional Grant to the Public Assistance Programme, including through technical support to intake, registration, enrolment, payment and follow-up, as well as the development of an interim information management system to handle the quick transition.** This included developing digital data collection tools and processes for registration and verification, piloting tools and developing Standard Operation Procedures on processes – which was particularly important to provide transparency and enhance trust in the system. Within the sub-region, WFP's support to the overall reform of the whole social protection system, rather than strictly focusing on the system's shock responsiveness, is considered by KIs as a good practice as it allowed WFP to support the overall functioning of social protection programmes as a foundation for building in shock-responsiveness in the future.

“Let us use the metaphor of a plug. You can change the plug; you can upgrade it. But to be useful it needs to fit into a socket which is linked to the whole electrical system. Unless governments in the Caribbean are ready to invest in modernizing and upgrading the system as a whole, changing the plug is not going to lead to systems change.”
– WFP Partner

The sub-region, predominantly made up of SIDS, is characterised by small ministries with few personnel and multiple mandates – which translates in practice into 'limited bandwidth' for the SRSP agenda. Various **external KIs are asking WFP to play a more active role in harmonising technical assistance from different agencies.** Gaps in coordination may have in limited number of cases resulted in redundancies where WFP invested in developing tools that were not compatible with those advanced by other agencies.⁷

With respect to longer-term outcomes, several KIs were of the opinion that the results of **WFP's contribution to SRSP require more time to be seen, and that coherent system change demands a comprehensive approach to social protection system strengthening that goes beyond responding to immediate needs and gaps identified by government partners.**

⁷ An example was WFP's work in Saint Lucia to develop a Vulnerability Index, where in parallel WB was providing technical assistance to develop an Eligibility Index for the same institution to determine who would be part of an expanded social protection programme. According to one KI: “Both of these cannot be used – it is one or the other – so the Eligibility Assessment is being rolled out which means that WFP Vulnerability Assessment will have to be put on hold”. This duplication occurred despite the fact that the Ministry of Equity hosts a coordination platform for partners.

ENABLERS AND BARRIERS

The Caribbean MCO arrangement has a number of challenges and opportunities when compared with a single country office. Key advantages: according to KIs, the Caribbean MCO set up allows WFP to build on similarities between the small island nations that make up the region, to align WFP's expertise with the common needs and opportunities of different national governments which historically have weaker and fragmented social protection systems. As governments processes can be slower relative to WFP and competing priorities exist for the governments in the sub-region, **WFP can offer its support to various countries and move on multiple fronts simultaneously**. During the field visit to the Caribbean MCO and Dominica, the evaluation team could see that WFP staff were routinely traveling from one island country to the other and were able to cooperate as a multi-country team from different satellite office locations. Another opportunity seized by the Caribbean MCO was to work not only directly with national governments, but also with key regional institutions including CDEMA, CARICOM OECS and CCRIF - which can build efficiencies through supporting regional institutions to develop model legislation, training materials, evidence generation and other processes in support of SRSP while supporting them to replicate capacity development on SRSP with member/participating states.

Among challenges is the sheer number of government partners, all at different stages of maturity in terms of their social protection systems and their specific needs for technical support. A challenge often mentioned by WFP key informants is the predominantly demand-led approach to strengthening shock-responsiveness, where they find themselves responding to a large range of needs from governments. Staff and partners would like to see a more predictable and standardised approach to SRSP that balances between the demands and longer-term goals and builds on synergies with investments of other partners. This has to some extent been addressed by WFP's operational SRSP Guidance.



The **Caribbean MCO arrangement and continuous travel of key staff between islands necessarily requires staff time and travel budgets**. Key regional partners, such as OECS and CARICOM are not based in Barbados, for instance, and the countries covered by the Caribbean MCO correspond to the offices of five separate UN Resident Coordinators, which, according to MCO team members, partners and donors, significantly increases time spent on reporting and UN coordination compared to regular country offices. Furthermore, it is more challenging to coordinate with other UN partners since most partners have different coverage areas,⁸ except for UN Women which has the same coverage area as the Caribbean MCO. WFP has worked to develop technical capacities outside the Barbados office through the creation of satellite offices including six programme officers and national programme associates/monitors based in key countries. Shifting more operational capacities to satellite offices is a priority for WFP, but a challenge is to find the human and financial resources for this purpose.

⁸ UNDP has individual country offices that follow the RCO structure, UNICEF has separate country offices in Belize, Trinidad, Jamaica and Barbados/OECS.

External Enablers

The main external enabler is clearly **political will and the presence of government leadership to carry forward reforms and adaptations to social protection systems** to render them more shock-responsive. The Caribbean MCO provides a number of examples where government changes in leadership and commitment to SRSP have worked both for and against the adoption and institutionalization of an SRSP agenda. According to KIs, the key for WFP is to plan for change, and introduce and advocate for consolidating key changes while the windows of opportunity exist.

Internal Enablers

Internal enablers are the **consistency of senior management leadership in the Caribbean MCO**, which has not changed since the office first opened in 2018. This has allowed time for senior management to build **relationships of trust with governments in the region, regional institutions as well as donors and UN partners**. These personal relationships are seen to be key to WFP's success in the sub-region. WFP's operational field presence has helped to build WFP's credibility both with government partners, donors and IFIs seeking to invest in SRSP programming. **WFP has established a stronger operational presence** compared to a number of other UN partners, for example, which has strongly positioned it to provide on-going leadership on SRSP in the sub-region.

External Barriers

Key barriers to strengthening shock-responsiveness of social protection systems are **their fragmentation and varied degrees of maturity**. Unlike Latin American countries such as Colombia and Peru, where social registries form the basis for social protection programming and data at the household level can be shared between SP programmes, in the Caribbean, there are **few social registries and there co-exist a number of social protection programmes operated by different ministries that do not have established data-sharing agreements**. WFP's focus has therefore been one main 'flagship' programme per country, limiting its overview of the potential synergies, complementarities and duplications created with other social protection programmes. A key contribution of WFP has been precisely to render the criteria and targeting of flagship programmes more transparent to the public and policy makers. In some cases, where there is a patronage-based approach to social protection including use of social protection programs for political gain, KIs indicated that there is more political resistance to these types of changes. **Frequent changes in government and the loss of technical personnel** with which WFP has been working also present a barrier to progress. A further challenge has been, in some cases, the **limited resources and capacities of DRM function and units** which have been more difficult to mobilize than social protection counterparts.

Internal Barriers

A key internal barrier that has emerged through the evaluation has been the **predominant usage of consultancy contracts to perform key aspects of SRSP work**. There are positive aspects to this practice - some consultants interviewed have stated that this status reflects their personal preference, and there are clear advantages for WFP in terms of bringing new and specialised skills quickly into the organisation, particularly as the Caribbean MCO was a newly established office with limited stable funding. However, others have expressed concerns that their initial job-descriptions and pay grades are no longer aligned to the work they are currently performing. Consultancy contracts are subject to regular renewals that increase the administrative burden, require time and in certain cases stall the pace of work.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR FURTHER ENGAGEMENT

Based on the evaluation findings on SRSP in Caribbean MCO, the opportunities for future engagement include:

- SRSP has been embraced by **numerous partners and donors in the English-speaking Caribbean**. This presents a significant opportunity but also requires sustaining and further strengthening coordination efforts to ensure that synergies are leveraged and limited resources are used as efficiently as possible.
- **Focus on WFP's coordination leadership:** Given the findings related to the limited bandwidth of government counterparts and the need for improved coordination, two key opportunities present themselves. One is for the WFP to take a more structured role in coordination of key agencies and donors at the regional and national levels. While it is key for governments to remain firmly in the lead, it is helpful to avoid duplication, redundancies and to build efficiencies and synergies for there to return to the notion of a social protection system strengthening roadmap to which various partners can contribute based on their specific value-added. To WFP's credit, it is seen as the logical partner to take this leadership role and support governments to benefit from the assistance of different partners based on a clear and concerted step-wise process that allows for the strengthening of both routine and shock-responsive social protection systems. The model of the Adaptive Social Protection Working group in Dominican Republic, where government leadership is accompanied by WFP's role as a secretariat for work on Adaptive Social Protection could be explored.
- **Increase advocacy for governments to carry out national poverty assessments:** As highlighted above, several countries in the sub-region urgently require updated information on national poverty levels, and based on its work on behalf of CARICOM to highlight the impacts of high inflation and rising food prices on food insecurity in the region, WFP should increase advocacy for the carrying out of national poverty assessments where relevant. Further, based on its expertise in vulnerability assessment and measurement, WFP could contribute with additional analysis related to the intersection of poverty and risk/exposure to shocks.
- The Caribbean MCO has contributed significantly to knowledge and evidence on SRSP on a range of topics. WFP's publication on Migration, Displacement and Shock-Responsive Social Protection in the Eastern Caribbean⁹ identifies a wealth of opportunities for WFP and OECS to collaborate to ensure **universal access to social protection for those OECS citizens forced to displace due to climate impact, extreme weather events and other shocks**. Within the context of OECS normative framework and agreements that allow for the free movement and migration of OECS citizens between island nations, WFP can consider how to support IOM and ILO ongoing work to make social protection entitlements transferable in case that shocks result in a migratory movement between OECS member states. This can include harmonising national legislation to ensure coverage to OECS migrants, and also standardising methodologies and data access to support the integration and referral of migrants into national social protection systems, as these develop.

⁹ WFP and Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States: Migration, Displacement and Shock-Responsive Social Protection in the Eastern Caribbean, December 2021.

- At the national level, WFP should continue or increase support on the development of **management information systems**, which could include the development of social registries but also other important aspects like digitalizing data collection and defining clear targeting criteria.
- Another important conclusion is that opportunities exist for **WFP to expand efforts to work at sub-national level and across social protection programmes and ministries**, beyond one national flagship social protection programme, and to develop programming that enhances community capacities (for example at the level of Village Councils and Parishes) to create greater shock-responsiveness and resilience at the local level. In Dominica, this could mean working through the NEP to train workers on emergency preparedness and response, especially as this concerns caregivers working with the elderly and those with disabilities.
- A lesson from the Caribbean is that a focus on shock-responsive social protection needs to take into account the systems in place for routine social protection delivery. This involves a deeper dive into routine social protection policies, the structure and objectives of different types of social protection programmes and their linkages to other related services (including health, education, etc.). Experience to date suggests that there are opportunities for WFP to go beyond only focusing mainly on shock-responsiveness of systems to supporting the strengthening and coherence of routine social protection systems as a starting point for building in greater shock-responsiveness.
- Opportunities also exist for **building more synergies with between SRSP and resilience and recovery** in response to shocks. For example, in St. Vincent and the Grenadines plans are underway to develop a Home-Grown School Feeding programme, which will support the livelihoods of farmers recovering from the 2021 La Soufriere eruption, while also strengthening the quality and nutritiousness of the school feeding menu, as well as to develop a programme linking social assistance beneficiaries to livelihood opportunities, including farming. This represents a win-win and one pathway that can help governments in the Caribbean, which are eagerly looking for ways to transition vulnerable households off social assistance and build alternative economic opportunities that also enhance food security. There are opportunities for WFP to build synergies between school-based programming, livelihoods and resilience in the context of a shock-responsive approach.
- Overall, it would be important to review Caribbean MCO's overall staff structure to put in place a sustainable and appropriate structure for the future, including the recruitment of national staff with appropriate backgrounds and experience with social protection systems. After the initial stage where external highly qualified expertise helped to position WFP as strong partner in the field of SRSP, to ensure stable workforce with in-depth knowledge and understanding of national social protection and DRM systems moving forward WFP should focus on consolidating national capacities and increasing the share of staff hired locally and on longer-term contractual modalities.
- The evaluation recognizes the innovative and pioneering nature of investments to date by the Caribbean MCO in disaster risk financing. WFP should continue to expand its evidence generation and investments in disaster risk financing in the sub-region, contributing to sustainable financing models for shock response through strengthened social protection systems.

Disclaimer

The opinions expressed in this report are those of the evaluation team, and do not necessarily reflect those of the World Food Programme (WFP). Responsibility for the opinions expressed in this report rests solely with the authors. Publication of this document does not imply endorsement by WFP of the opinions expressed.

The designation employed and the presentation of material in maps do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of WFP concerning the legal or constitutional status of any country, territory or sea area, or concerning the delimitation of frontiers.

COUNTRY CASE STUDY

CARIBBEAN MULTI-COUNTRY OFFICE (CARIBBEAN MCO)

Flexible Systems-Effective Responses?

Regional Evaluation of WFP's contribution to Shock-Responsive Social Protection in Latin America and the Caribbean (2015-2022)

Decentralized Evaluation

WFP Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean