



World Food Programme

SAVING LIVES
CHANGING LIVES

Evaluation of Mali WFP Country Strategic Plan 2018-2024

CONTEXT

Mali is a vast landlocked low-income country in West Africa with a population of 20.3 million people which relies largely on small-scale agriculture.

Mali is placed 186th on the human development index (2022). The number of people classified in crisis and emergency food insecurity has significantly increased with a peak of 1.84 million people acutely food insecure during the 2022 lean season. In 2022, an estimated 10 percent of children were acutely malnourished and 21 percent were chronically malnourished.

Mali is engulfed by a multidimensional security crisis and suffers from the impact of climate change, two factors driving food insecurity.

SUBJECT AND FOCUS OF EVALUATION

The country strategic plan (CSP) and the preceding transitional interim country strategic plan (t-ICSP) were similarly structured and focused on crisis response and resilience building. The five-year CSP follows the national zero hunger strategic review of 2017 and is aligned with the UN's sustainable development cooperation framework (UNSDCF) as well as the national framework for economic and sustainable development (CREDD 2019-2023).

The original needs-based plan for the CSP was USD 525 million, progressively increasing to USD 1.32 billion through six budget revisions. In parallel, the number of planned beneficiaries rose from 3.27 million to 12.12 million. The funding level, as of September 2023, was 51.3 percent of budget, with 592 million USD raised. The European Commission, Germany and the United States have been the largest donors.

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 Mali. The evaluation covered CSP activities implemented between January 2018 to mid-2023 and also took account

of the t-ICSP covering January 2018 to December 2019. It assessed: WFP's strategic positioning and the extent to which the organization made the shifts expected under the CSP; WFP's effectiveness in contributing to strategic outcomes; the efficiency with which the CSP was implemented; and factors explaining WFP's performance.

KEY EVALUATION FINDINGS

Relevance, strategic positioning and alignment

The CSP was relevant to Mali's food and nutrition needs as identified by a variety of sectoral analyses, as well as conflict sensitivity analysis. However, a holistic analysis to guide an integrated response between crisis response and resilience pillars was lacking, and the regional dimension of the crisis has been analysed to a limited extent by WFP.

WFP was well aligned with national government plans and considered a key partner of the national government and a leading actor in the humanitarian sector. WFP played a key role in the development and implementation of the UNSDCF and Humanitarian Response Plan, and adapted well to the volatile context.

Certain assumptions underlying the CSP, such as the availability of flexible funding or a favourable security or economic context, did not materialize, and the recurrent annual lean season responses point to insufficient attention to the underlying causes of repeated crises.

WFP contributions to CSP outcomes in Mali

Overall, WFP has achieved strong output-level results in Mali, particularly for the emergency component of the CSP, which has been scaled up during the evaluated period to cover 2,492,000 beneficiaries in 2022, up from 696,342 in 2018. When resources were short, the country office opted to cut rations rather than beneficiary numbers. Outcome-level results were uneven over the course of the CSP. Malnutrition prevention activities were limited by budget constraints and pipeline breaks, while treatment continuously delivered positive results.

The integration of WFP's resilience activities has advanced during the CSP period and has been appreciated by beneficiaries. However, a fully integrated approach to planning, partnership engagement, targeting and monitoring was not achieved. A social protection approach supporting the government's unified social register was piloted during the CSP.

The asset creation activity has reached a significant number of beneficiaries and supported agricultural productivity, but could have benefited from stronger coordination at the field level and better integration of value chain approaches and sustainability considerations.

Capacity strengthening activities remained weakly structured during the CSP period, while WFP's service provision with UNHAS and other on-demand services responded well to growing demands.

WFP progressed significantly on **cross-cutting objectives**, with dedicated staff capacity and strategies guiding its efforts. **Accountability to affected populations** has been reinforced, while the growing complaints and feedback mechanisms still grapples with ensuring inclusive access to different channels. **Gender** analysis was insufficient to guide transformative programming.

Adherence to **humanitarian principles** was maintained against the background of a delicate balance between alignment with government priorities and reaching those most in need of assistance. WFP's **access** negotiation and **protection** mainstreaming capacities were strengthened. While the link between humanitarian and development programming remained underdeveloped, the evaluation found positive effects of WFP interventions on social cohesion.

Efficient use of resources

WFP has prioritized cash-based transfers, which has led to efficiencies in assistance delivery. WFP also scaled up digitalized assistance platforms (SCOPE), reduced post-delivery losses, adopted improved systems for stock management, and opened alternative logistics corridors, all favouring efficiency.

WFP has put tailored vulnerability-based targeting processes in place for its different activities overseen by WFP directly and by third-party monitoring. However, some populations did not receive adequate attention, including nomads, school children in emergencies, and longer-term displaced populations.

Challenges were encountered in the country office's harmonization of targeting across activities and in managing caseload reductions in communities after completing targeting.

Factors that explain WFP performance

The overall funding base has increased over the course of the CSP until 2023, although most of the funding was tightly earmarked at the activity level, complicating the development of integrated approaches.

WFP's monitoring system is comprehensive and relied on third-party monitors to access hard-to-reach locations.

Shortcomings include an inability to verify overlap between activities and results of the integrated resilience package.

WFP reduced the number of cooperating partners following an internal audit, favouring larger NGOs for accountability systems and relying on local partners in complicated access contexts. Short field level agreement durations remained an issue for achieving results.

Partnerships with the national government as well as other UN agencies supported the effectiveness of interventions, exploiting the complementary strengths of the agencies. Nevertheless, WFP's support to local structures remained limited.

WFP Mali significantly increased its staffing during the evaluated period, supporting the scale up and strengthening of activities. Despite this, many positions remained difficult to fill and a high turnover of staff posed further challenges.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall assessment

WFP Mali made significant efforts to respond effectively to the growing food security crisis and maintain its focus on the most complex operational areas. However, prioritizing a vast coverage of humanitarian needs decreased WFP's ability to achieve longer-term transformative results and attention to specific vulnerable groups in the country.

While the country office made steps to enhance programme integration, the implementation and monitoring of activities remained siloed, limiting sustainability and results across the nexus. While partnerships, financial and human resources developed significantly during the evaluated period, they were not yet in a manner to support a truly integrated delivery of different CSP activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1 : Strengthen the integration of activities, outputs, and strategic outcomes (planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation).

Recommendation 2 : Support the regional integration for cross-border issues and identify synergies with other country offices (Burkina Faso, Niger, Mauritania)

Recommendation 3: Strengthen planning with a view to fine-tune objectives and priorities in the design of the CSP.

Recommendation 4 : Revise partnership frameworks, considering capacity strengthening, localisation, adaptation to modalities and context, to strengthen efficiency and sustainability.

Recommendation 5: Enhance collaborative risk analysis and management for accountability to affected populations.