



World Food Programme

SAVING LIVES
CHANGING LIVES

Evaluation of WFP's emergency response to the prolonged crisis in the Sahel and other countries of Central Africa (2018–2023)

CONTEXT

The evaluation covered eight countries in the Sahel and Central Africa (Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Nigeria). In terms of food security, the region is one of the most vulnerable on the African continent. In the eight countries studied, 39.76 million people were in Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) 3 (crisis) or above in 2023. The nutrition situation is also worrying. These high levels of vulnerability are caused by a range of structural factors intertwined with shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic, economic shocks, armed conflicts, political and institutional crises in some countries and extreme climate-related events. The intensification of conflicts has resulted in a sharp increase of forced population displacement and led to escalating levels of gender-based violence.

SUBJECT AND FOCUS OF THE EVALUATION

Between 2018 and 2023, WFP responded to four crises classified as Level 2 emergencies and five Level 3 emergencies. Between 2022 and 2023, WFP responded to six crisis designated as “corporate scale-up”, most of which were protracted, large scale and complex crises. Over this period, the number of people targeted by WFP in the eight countries increased by around 74 percent (from 11.2 million to 19.5 million), while WFP funding requirements more than doubled (from USD 1.3 billion to USD 2.7 billion). The level of funding for all eight countries fell from 80 percent of needs-based plans in 2018 to 43 percent in 2023.

The evaluation addresses WFP's capacity to anticipate, prepare for and respond to emergencies in the context of the humanitarian–development–peace nexus and how that capacity is manifested through WFP's direct response to emergency food and nutrition needs and its support for national crisis response, food and social protection systems, as well as its strengthening of the humanitarian ecosystem. It also addresses cross-cutting themes such as gender and inclusion, conflict sensitivity and protection and accountability to affected people.

OBJECTIVES AND USERS OF THE EVALUATION

This evaluation serves the dual objectives of accountability and learning, with a particular emphasis on learning. With the majority of country offices having recently undergone evaluations of their country strategic plans, this evaluation offers a cross-cutting

analysis at the regional level, building on and complementing the evaluations and studies carried out in each country. The main intended users of the evaluation include the concerned WFP country offices, the Regional Bureau for West and Central Africa, technical divisions at headquarters, WFP Executive Board, affected communities, cooperating partners and donors.

KEY EVALUATION FINDINGS

Effectiveness of WFP's response

WFP increased the number of people targeted for emergency food assistance, in line with the growing needs. Given the funding shortfalls in 2023, country offices were forced to prioritize, often reducing rations to maintain a large coverage. WFP endeavoured to align its response to seasonal emergency needs and support for the resilience of rural communities with national priorities and to strengthen the geographic convergence of its activities, notably under the integrated resilience strategy in the Sahel. However, the potential for implementing multi-year resilience support strategies was undermined by an unstable political and security situation, increased humanitarian needs, a lack of flexible and multi-year funding and limited options for supporting the resilience of people who have restricted access to natural resources.

WFP diversified its support to the **strengthening of national emergency preparedness and response capacity and shock-responsive social protection systems.** Since monitoring indicators provide little information on the quality and sustainability of support, it is difficult to assess WFP's contribution to capacity strengthening. However, the achievements in Mauritania in enhancing the responsiveness of national early warning and emergency preparedness and response systems offer lessons for the region.

Faced with a sharp deterioration in the security situation, WFP diversified its **access strategies** for its own programmes and for other humanitarian actors. However, the division of roles with its cooperating partners is often imbalanced. Faced with dilemmas in conflict situations, WFP is guided by the **humanitarian principles** to support its operational and strategic decision-making. More could be done to take stock of these dilemmas, define WFP's positioning and facilitate collective thinking about solutions.

Progress was variable on the food and nutrition security indicators related to the emergency response, with the exception of Niger

and Mauritania. This is explained by frequent ration cuts, a deteriorating security and food situation, reduced access to basic services and access constraints. However, where the Sahel integrated resilience programme was significantly scaled up, analysis of monitoring data highlighted positive effects on food security and the reduction of household vulnerability to climate-related shocks.

Inclusion, accountability to affected people, protection and conflict sensitivity

WFP strengthened **gender mainstreaming** by enhancing internal and external capacity and making progress towards the target of ensuring gender balanced teams. However, opportunities to achieve a transformative effect on gender inequality through emergency interventions are underexploited and analyses on inclusion are embryonic. WFP strengthened its capacity to integrate **protection and accountability to affected people** with significant progress in community feedback mechanisms. Nevertheless, the data collected through these mechanisms tend to be used reactively rather than in a systemic way. WFP considers **conflict sensitivity** though not systematically and plays a key role in tackling crises by contributing to good governance, reducing vulnerabilities and supporting exchanges between social groups. As effects are not measured, the use of indirect approaches to peace building are not fully considered in programme design.

Evidence generation and use, and anticipation of risks

WFP invested heavily in strengthening its food and nutrition security data collection systems, particularly in hard-to-reach areas. WFP inputs to the IPC/Cadre Harmonisé process are seen as decisive by partners. Some would like WFP to share data more systematically.

Given the increasing funding constraints, the use of data to prioritize programmes and beneficiaries is insufficient. The definition of household targeting criteria sometimes suffers from a lack of detailed, intersectional analysis of food insecurity at intra-household level. The UNHCR-WFP Joint Programme Excellence and Targeting Hub is a good example of inter-agency efforts to improve targeting.

Through the expansion of cash transfers since 2018, WFP has become more agile. It also contributed to promote financial inclusion for women. However, barriers to the use of cash transfers are likely to continue to grow in the future.

WFP corporate emergency preparedness mechanisms have been instrumental in supporting its capacity to respond. Through its partnership with the African Risk Capacity, WFP strengthened its early response capabilities along with those of some partner states. The function of forecasting long-term risks is underdeveloped within WFP. However, WFP has begun to explore anticipatory action more systematically. Finally, measures to strengthen corporate risk management systems since 2018 have been widely applied in the eight country offices.

Partnerships

WFP's essential role in supporting regional institutions is recognized (sharing of food and nutrition insecurity analyses, methodological developments in the Cadre Harmonisé, joint advocacy initiatives etc.). WFP's technical support capacity remains underutilized, however, and the organization could play a more active role in policy dialogue, given the convergence of strategic thinking with regional institutions.

WFP diversified its ecosystem of financial, strategic and technical partners, with tangible results in terms of fund mobilization and the effectiveness of its emergency and resilience response. Significant progress was made in diversifying partnerships with funding institutions and the private sector through country offices

risk becoming overstretched. Partnership approaches are pragmatic but sometimes considered insufficiently collaborative.

WFP invested heavily in strengthening the capacity of national NGOs but with a focus on risk management and improving service delivery rather than supporting localization. WFP's organizational framework and partnership management systems and processes, particularly financial, are still not conducive to strengthening the strategic and operational autonomy of local organizations.

CONCLUSIONS

The evaluation concluded that WFP has provided strong and rapid support to populations affected by the many crises in the region while mobilizing its capacity to support local, national and international actors. Due to acute funding shortfalls in 2023, WFP often chose to reduce rations in order to reach the greatest number of vulnerable people. Despite effective implementation, the indicators associated with WFP's emergency response interventions showed mixed results. Notwithstanding its determination to provide a layered and sequenced response in the areas most affected by security crises, WFP often encounters challenges in effectively supporting the recovery and resilience of conflict-affected populations. WFP has demonstrated its ability to innovate and invest in systems that support its emergency response in increasingly complex environments. In the context of shrinking and increasingly politicized humanitarian space, WFP's various access strategies have proved effective. However, humanitarian principles insufficiently guide WFP's decision making. Moreover, WFP has diversified its strategic partnerships, but its partnerships with local non-governmental organizations are too transactional and insufficiently focused on localization. WFP produces a great deal of data but not enough knowledge to guide emergency response, support work at the humanitarian–development–peace nexus or help anticipate crises. Finally, while progress has been made in the areas of accountability to affected people, gender and protection, the cross-cutting themes of diversity and inclusion still receive little attention.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1. In light of growing needs and shrinking funding, strengthen the prioritization of the most acute needs in WFP emergency response, as well as refine the design and implementation of its support to the recovery and resilience of populations affected by conflicts.

Recommendation 2. In order to support the quality of interventions, advocacy and risk management, promote a regional research agenda focusing on emergencies, the humanitarian–development–peace nexus, anticipation, and an organizational culture of enhanced use of existing evidence.

Recommendation 3. Strengthen WFP's capacity to uphold humanitarian principles in the region and continue its efforts in the area of access.

Recommendation 4. Strengthen the approach to issues related to gender and inclusion, accountability to affected people, protection and social cohesion by promoting partnerships and building on WFP's comparative advantages.

Recommendation 5. Ensure that the partnership management processes defined by headquarters are compatible with WFP's global commitments in terms of localization and include localization objectives in existing regional strategies.

Recommendation 6. Broaden the scope of WFP's support for the response strategies, mechanisms and instruments used by regional integration institutions to prevent and manage food and nutrition crises.