



WFP EVALUATION



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LIVES

# Evaluation of WFP Country Strategic Plan for Cuba 2021-2024

## Context

The Republic of Cuba is a Caribbean country with a population of 11.1 million. The country faces chronic malnutrition issues: prevalence of anaemia in 2019 was at 19 percent among women in reproductive age and 18 percent among children; prevalence of obesity among children under five years of age was at 11 percent in urban areas and 9 percent in rural areas. Regarding education, Cuba has school enrolment and literacy rates close to 100 percent.

Cuba is a natural disaster-prone country as it faces the effects of seasonal hurricanes and tropical storms. In September 2022, Hurricane Ian directly impacted 3.2 million people across the country. Agricultural productivity is low due to a lack of inputs and obsolete technology, leading to high import dependency for food supply. In recent years, economic challenges have intensified due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the conflict in Ukraine -- leading to increasing inflation -- and recurrent fuel shortages.

## Subject of the evaluation

The WFP Country Strategic Plan (CSP) focused on increasing the resilience of local food systems to meet the demand for social protection programmes; improving capacities in disaster management and emergency preparedness and response; increasing knowledge on nutrition and healthy diets; and supporting the national logistics system. With the aim of tackling the effects of COVID-19 and the economic recession between July 2021 and September 2023, WFP increased its needs-based plan from USD 28.7 million to USD 75.1 million, while the number of planned beneficiaries increased from 1.6 million to nearly 2.7 million.

As of August 2023, the overall funding level of the CSP was 60 percent of the needs-based plan. The Russian Federation was the largest bilateral donor, accounting for 39 percent of the total resources allocated, followed by the Republic of Korea (13 percent), while the remaining funding originated from other bilateral donors, WFP flexible funding, UN funds and the private sector. Crisis response and resilience components absorbed together 77 percent of allocated resources as of May 2024, whereas nutrition and capacity strengthening only accounted for 5 percent of them.

## Objectives and scope of the evaluation

The evaluation served both accountability and learning purposes to inform the design of the new CSP and the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) for Cuba. It focused on assessing the results of the CSP 2021–2024 but

also considered the work and results under the previous interim CSP (2019-2020), to analyse continuity and consistency of programming and responsiveness to evolving needs and priorities. The evaluation was conducted between March 2023 and January 2024.

## Key evaluation findings

**Relevance and strategic positioning.** The CSP was aligned with relevant national policies and strategies. WFP's capacity for continuous consultations with the Government has ensured the relevance of its actions in a dynamic and complex operating environment. WFP interventions aimed at reaching the most vulnerable population in specific locations, with particular focus on the elderly, pregnant women and school-age children. However, data gaps hampered efforts to identify the most socio-economically vulnerable people and monitor the results of interventions.

WFP is a preferred partner of the Government, supporting national efforts in risk management and emergency response, food security and nutrition, areas in which it is able to draw on its comparative advantages. WFP's proactive and collaborative approach in inter-agency groups and implementation of integrated projects helped to position it as a key strategic partner and technical adviser to government institutions. However, WFP faces challenges as it seeks to strengthen its positioning with regard to long-term development issues in Cuba and foster a debate within the UN system about the harmonization of inter-agency efforts in project design and implementation.

**Emergency response.** During the CSP period, WFP systematically achieved its emergency response coverage targets, delivering food and non-food items in a coordinated effort with the national and local governments, civil defence, and the UN country team, leading to improved access to food by beneficiaries. WFP's response to emergencies was also evident in its role as coordinator of the UN technical group for emergencies (UNETE), although complementarity among UN agencies was hindered by operational coordination challenges.

Institutional capacity strengthening for emergency preparedness and response focused on cross-sectoral learning, technical assistance, and non-food item support, with main partners being the civil defence authorities and the meteorological institute. Improvements in the meteorological information sharing systems were observed, which also led to reduction in vulnerabilities of agricultural producers.

**Nutrition.** Under the malnutrition component, actual volumes of supplements distributed were less than planned, which was partly associated with import limitations. Monitoring was limited to the coverage of nutrition activity, and there was a marked gap in

understanding the effects of the intervention on nutrition status and anaemia rates, due to WFP's limited access to data. Qualitative evidence, however, showed beneficiaries' positive acceptance and use of nutritious supplements. The distribution of supplements was accompanied by a communication strategy with educational materials and messages to families disseminated through local media on the availability, conservation and use of micronutrient powder at home and its benefits for children's nutrition. In collaboration with UNICEF, WFP also facilitated training sessions under the Government's mother and childcare programme, and educational talks by health promoters at community level. It helped to strengthen the capacity of the national food and nutrition surveillance system, including by supporting data processing on the prevalence of anaemia, which in turn informed the design of communication strategies to encourage behaviour change.

**Resilience.** Through its short food supply chain model, WFP aimed to increase food production by agricultural producer cooperatives and support their supply of fresh vegetables to the national social safety net system. Key results in this area include: an increase in the production, value and volume of agricultural product sales; reduced vulnerability of agricultural producers to climate thanks to better-informed decision-making; an increase in participants' awareness of environmental protection; a change in attitudes towards the consumption of vegetables thanks to communication campaigns on healthy eating incorporated into school curricula and the use of demonstration gardens as a learning mechanism; improved dietary diversity at the family care system site level.

**Contribution to cross-cutting aims.** WFP systematically mainstreamed gender in its activities, achieving progress in terms of women representation in project management committees. Elements of improved gender equality and empowerment of women were observed in the short supply chain model. In terms of social inclusion, WFP prioritized food security and nutrition for vulnerable groups but lacked systematic attention to the needs of young people. While WFP presence in the field was assessed as a positive factor for accountability to affected populations, a systematic beneficiary feedback system is lacking, hindering issue resolution. The CSP implementation maintained a focus on environmental issues through climate monitoring and the promotion of adaptation strategies, with room for further engagement with authorities and producers on waste management and water conservation, among other areas.

**Sustainability.** There is evidence of ownership by national counterparts of approaches, technology and tools for risk management and emergency preparedness, the pre-positioning of food and non-food items, nutrition status monitoring, and links between producers and social protection networks. In addition, WFP interventions mobilized local funds and succeeded in changing the perspective of producers and school-level participants with respect to healthy nutrition.

In terms of institutional sustainability of the short food supply chain model, there is promising evidence about coherence of the national social protection, education, agriculture and health sectors. There are opportunities to strengthen the generation of evidence around the effects of the model to promote its scale-up, which could be achieved through the implementation of the food and nutrition security law (Ley SAN). To improve the financial sustainability of the model, WFP has been discussing with the Government the possibility of providing resources to facilitate the contracting and payment process, as current delays may affect agricultural producers' willingness to participate.

**Efficient use of resources.** Overall, WFP has provided emergency response in Cuba in a timely manner, demonstrating the importance of pre-positioning food and non-food items. However, exogenous factors related to the availability of maritime transport for imports of key equipment, as well as project approval processes by the Government, have delayed the implementation of other components of the CSP, increasing costs and impeding WFP's ability

to meet implementation deadlines agreed with donors. In light of unfavourable currency exchange rates, WFP strategically shifted to purchasing items for pre-positioning and internal equipment from suppliers outside Cuba to mitigate elevated costs and collaborated with government entities and the UN country team to streamline import procedures.

**Key factors explaining performance.** Key success factors of WFP performance in Cuba included solid partnerships with the government (including its scientific development institutions) and UN entities, along with the presence of skilled and highly committed personnel who enabled efficient implementation, coordination and support, particularly during crises. Synergy between the short food supply chain model and the generation of meteorological information was a key success factor, as it reduced the vulnerability of agricultural producers to climate shocks and the risks of losses, supporting more informed decision-making.

On the other hand, operations were hampered by challenges in resource mobilization, context-related delays in administrative and logistics processes, limited access to data needed to improve targeting and accurately measure intervention results, and significant staff turnover among WFP counterparts, potentially affecting the sustainability of capacity strengthening actions.

## Overall assessment

Addressing food and nutrition insecurity in line with Government's policies and priorities, the CSP effectively met its humanitarian and development objectives, with evidence of enhanced links between agricultural producers and national safety nets beneficiaries.

Over time, WFP maintained strong partnerships with the Cuban government and UN agencies fostering collaborative efforts in emergency preparedness and response, resilience and food systems, but there is room to improve inter-agency operational coordination in crises response.

Several implementation challenges arose from a complex operational context, particularly on the administrative and logistics sides, prompting a need for a balanced intervention breath in the future. Improved access to data would enable the generation of evidence about WFP results and better inform targeting of its interventions.

WFP in Cuba benefits from a recognized, capable and experienced workforce, however staff retention is an emerging challenge that deserves further reflection in terms of talent management and staff motivation.

## Recommendations

1. Strengthen advocacy with the Government on critical issues related to the availability of information, exchange rates, project approval and implementation processes, and imports, in conjunction with other UN entities in Cuba.
2. Enhance programmatic harmonization and complementarity with other United Nations entities in Cuba, taking advantage of WFP positioning and field presence.
3. Implement a more strategic communication plan.
4. Prioritize CSP activities, leaving space for long-term capacity strengthening activities and cross-cutting objectives.
5. Develop and implement a country office talent retention strategy.