



World Food Programme

SAVING LIVES
CHANGING LIVES

Evaluation of Ethiopia WFP Country Strategic Plan 2020-2025

CONTEXT

Despite some development gains, Ethiopia remains one of the poorest countries in the world, with 68.7 percent of its population experiencing multidimensional poverty.

Recent shocks, including two years of armed conflict between the Government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (November 2020–November 2022), have threatened development gains.

In March 2023, WFP and the United States Agency for International Development uncovered evidence of food aid diversion. General food assistance was suspended in June 2023 until measures to ensure effective distribution were enhanced and investigations undertaken. In October 2023, WFP concluded that new assurance measures applied were functioning adequately and that conditions were such as to permit the resumption of food assistance.

SUBJECT AND FOCUS OF EVALUATION

The country strategic plan (CSP) and the preceding interim country strategic plan (ICSP) were similarly structured and intended to link short-term humanitarian assistance ("saving lives") with sustainable long-term interventions aimed at "changing lives", focusing on social protection, home-grown school feeding, diversification of livelihoods and food production at the household and community levels.

The original needs-based plan for the CSP had a budget of USD 2.59 billion, which by May 2023 had been revised upwards to USD 6.9 billion. By December 2023, cumulative allocated resources amounted to 57 percent of the budget for 2020–2023 (USD 5.05 billion), while expenditures reached 90 percent of allocated resources. The United States of America was the largest donor to both the ICSP and the CSP, accounting for 30 percent of funds.

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

Ethiopia. The evaluation covered the activities implemented by WFP under the interim CSP (ICSP) for Ethiopia from 2019 to June 2020 and under the CSP from 2020 to March 2024.

The main intended users of the evaluation are the WFP country office in Ethiopia, the Regional Bureau for Eastern Africa, technical divisions at headquarters in Rome, the Federal Government of Ethiopia, the Executive Board, partner United Nations entities and donors. Other potential users include civil society and non-governmental organizations in Ethiopia and WFP's beneficiaries.

KEY EVALUATION FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Relevance, adaptability and preparedness

The activity areas supported by WFP – continued relief for conflict-affected people, nutrition, school meals, and resilience and livelihoods – were highly relevant and solidly grounded in evidence of needs. There were exceptions to this, however: estimates of populations in need of crisis response assistance were contested, especially during the northern Ethiopia crisis, and there was limited consideration of government capacity gaps in the design of capacity strengthening activities.

While a shift in geographical focus from southern to northern Ethiopia and the scale-up of the emergency response demonstrated WFP's flexibility in responding to changing needs, emergency preparedness was insufficient and the CSP provided limited strategic guidance for the shift.

Strategic direction

The ambition of the CSP and ICSP to reduce the need for humanitarian assistance by strengthening sustainable food systems through programming for resilience and livelihoods was a strategically sound response to future anticipated needs and aligned with the Government's vision of robust development for Ethiopia. However, the expected shift in focus was impeded by gaps in country office technical capacity and operational planning,

overoptimistic assumptions underpinning the CSP, especially in relation to political and macroeconomic stability, and the limited integration of relief and resilience activities. Diverging views between WFP and donor partners regarding the organization's comparative advantages resulted in funding not being fully aligned with the "dual track" humanitarian and development approach.

Humanitarian principles

In Ethiopia WFP has been confronted with stark ethical dilemmas. Its long-standing operational partnership with the Government and reliance on government systems for delivering relief assistance was well aligned with its objective of strengthening national emergency preparedness and response capacity but put WFP at risk of compromising the humanitarian principles. It exposed WFP to limitations in government capacity, particularly at the local level, and challenged its ability to ensure that assistance reached those most in need without discrimination.

Effectiveness and coverage

Although the quality of available data is limited, WFP provided an unprecedented level of assistance to crisis-affected people, including refugees, helping them to meet basic food and nutrition needs. To achieve this WFP managed a massive expansion of operations in the northern region of the country under its corporate scale-up response and provided key services to the humanitarian community and the Government. In the face of insufficient resources for general food assistance, WFP tended to favour reaching more people in need over providing full rations, which reduced food and nutrition security gains at a time when the coverage of nutrition assistance was reduced. The suspension of relief assistance between June and October 2023 had notable negative impacts on food security. School meals and nutrition interventions have contributed to both crisis response and resilience, while implementation of resilience initiatives has fallen behind ambitions and results have not been well captured.

Modality shift

Despite some successes, the intended shift under the CSP from in-kind food aid to cash-based assistance where feasible was largely not achieved because WFP underestimated the time required for the transition. While pilot initiatives showed promise, external and internal constraints and high levels of in-kind donations led to delays in the intended shift. As a consequence, WFP has not been able to reap the potential benefits of cash-based assistance in locations where conditions would have permitted its use.

Gender, accountability to affected people, and protection

WFP has made progress on implementing its gender strategy and a good degree of gender sensitivity has been achieved in WFP activities. Transformative approaches to social inclusion and women's empowerment, which involve changes in power structures, is not yet evident, and gaps remain in implementation at the community level. There has been very limited mainstreaming of inclusion principles into activities.

WFP has strengthened accountability to affected people and improvements have been made as part of the assurance project, particularly with regard to community feedback mechanisms. However, WFP's capacity to identify and mitigate protection risks and strengthen accountability through systematic case management and follow-up needs to be improved.

Risk management, monitoring and evaluation

The CSP identified prevailing risks, but their likelihood and impact were underestimated and measures to prevent and mitigate them were insufficient. The discovery of aid diversion affected WFP's credibility and reputation. While partners have expressed broad satisfaction with measures put in place under the assurance project, concerns over high cost and limited cooperating partner capacity remain. With access constrained by conflict and insecurity and limitations on the use of remote methods, monitoring and evaluation has been a longstanding weak point for WFP in Ethiopia. While staffing has increased and improvements have been made under the assurance project, especially in process and output monitoring, the monitoring of outcome-level changes remains heavily focused on quantitative data and year-end organizational reporting and was particularly weak for resilience interventions and cross-cutting objectives. Greater use of qualitative data can help explain programmatic results and inform learning.

Staffing and institutional arrangements

At the beginning of the emergency response, WFP's response capacity was stretched because although staff capacity was strong in the areas of resilience and livelihoods, it was weaker in the area of conflict-driven emergency response. Infusions of staff on temporary duty assignments addressed this, but this created tensions and high staff turnover. Concerns about job security following budget cuts and staff reductions have impaired staff motivation and productivity in the country office. Discontinuity and high and unpredictable turnover in senior leadership have also hampered implementation of the CSP.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: Ensure that the next CSP identifies and explicitly addresses areas of uncertainty to ensure that its strategic direction remains relevant over time.

Recommendation 2: Continue to pursue the shift from a "saving lives" to a "changing lives" agenda.

Recommendation 3: In the area of humanitarian assistance, take steps to ensure that there is a conducive environment for principled responses to humanitarian needs.

Recommendation 4: Improve the ability to demonstrate results, in particular in terms of increased resilience, including the "graduation" of beneficiaries from relief to resilience support, and progress in cross-cutting areas.

Recommendation 5: Accelerate the shift from in-kind to cashbased assistance where its higher cost-effectiveness is demonstrated.

Recommendation 6: Improve planning for staffing needs to ensure agility in staffing and continuity in strategic direction.