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# Corporate emergency evaluation of WFP's response in Yemen

## CONTEXT

Yemen has been facing one of the world's most severe humanitarian crises, driven by prolonged armed conflict since 2015, economic collapse, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and severe weather events such as floods and drought.

As of 2024, the two-thirds of the population – 18.2 million people – were estimated to be in need of humanitarian assistance or protection<sup>1</sup> and approximately 4.5 million individuals are internally displaced, many of whom are women and children.<sup>2</sup> In addition to very high levels of food insecurity, Yemen faces one of the most severe nutrition crises globally, with nearly half of all children under five experiencing stunting, and one in six suffering from wasting.

The conflict resulted in fragmented governance, severely impacting the provision of basic services and complicating humanitarian efforts due to different regional regulations and access challenges. Humanitarian funding varied greatly over time, in stark contrast with the rising demand for aid, highlighting difficulties to sustain support.

## SUBJECT AND FOCUS OF EVALUATION

WFP designated its operations in Yemen as a Level 3 emergency in 2025 and reclassified it as 'corporate attention' in 2022 in line with its revised Emergency Activation Protocol.

Between 2019 and 2025, WFP operated through two consecutive Interim Country Strategic Plans (ICSPs), with a similar three-pillar approach: life-saving assistance under Strategic Outcomes (SO) 1 and 2; localized recovery-oriented efforts (SO3) and humanitarian services (SO4). WFP extended the duration of both ICSPs and revised their budgets several times to respond to evolving needs.

The original budget of the ICSP 2023-2025 totaled USD8.55 billion, of which 36 percent was funded; in sharp contrast with the ICSP 2019-2022 which was 59 percent funded.

The United States of America was the largest donor to both ICSPs, accounting for 39-44 percent of the funding received. The second largest donors were Saudi Arabia (12 percent) for the ICSP 2019-2022 and Germany (8 percent) for the ICSP 2023-2025. WFP originally planned to reach 24.9 million beneficiaries under the ICSP 2023-2025.<sup>3</sup>

## OBJECTIVES AND USERS OF THE EVALUATION

The evaluation aimed to provide evidence and learning on the performance of WFP's response in Yemen during the period 2019-2024, as well as accountability for results to stakeholders.

The evaluation covered all WFP's interventions in Yemen under the ICSP 2019-2022 and ICSP 2023-2025 from January 2019 to October 2024. The evaluation was timed to inform the design of the next ICSP.

The main intended users of the evaluation were the WFP country office in Yemen and its key stakeholders at country level including the United Nations country team, the humanitarian country team, cooperating partners, affected populations, local authorities and donors. Other key users included WFP senior management, relevant functions within WFP global headquarters and the WFP Executive Board.

## SUMMARY OF KEY CONCLUSIONS AND INSIGHTS

### 1. Adaptability and timeliness

Through its large-scale operational capacity, WFP effectively navigated the complexities of the protracted crisis and demonstrated flexibility and adaptability in delivering life-saving interventions under one of the largest humanitarian operations globally. Key enabling factors included WFP's proactive supply chain management and the use of advance

<sup>1</sup> OCHA. 2024. Humanitarian Response Plan 2024.

<sup>2</sup> UNHCR. 2024. Yemen Fact Sheet, January-December 2023.

<sup>3</sup> In December 2024, the ICSP budget was reduced by nearly USD 3 billion, lowering the planned beneficiaries for 2024-2025. However, since this revision occurred after the data collection phase, it is not reflected in the report.

financing mechanisms, which, together with effective use of monitoring data to inform decision-making, significantly enhanced operational responsiveness. However, a deteriorating funding landscape increasingly undermined WFP's adaptive capacity, forcing the country office to scale down its interventions and hindering long-term planning.

## **2. Coverage, targeting and prioritization**

WFP strived to support a significant proportion of the population affected by food and nutrition insecurity in Yemen. However, the general food assistance programme remained static for too long, with extended periods without updates to beneficiary lists. This led to the exclusion of some vulnerable groups including people newly displaced from the frontlines. WFP engaged in complex negotiations with both the Internationally Recognized Government and the Sana'a based authorities on a retargeting exercise to ensure that assistance reaches those most in need but encountered persistent barriers including divergent expectations around data sharing and restricted access to communities to verify needs. A pause of general food assistance in the north in late 2023 affected millions of people. While the exercise represented a positive step toward more principled and needs-based programming, the evaluation found that the negative effects of such a prolonged interruption in WFP assistance could have been better mitigated.

## **3. Effectiveness and efficiency**

WFP effectively addressed large-scale food insecurity and nutrition needs in a challenging context, delivering essential assistance and helping to prevent a significant deterioration in food security. However, several factors limited effectiveness, including insecurity, staff detention, restricted humanitarian access, and reduced funding, all of which contributed to irregular and short-term assistance to beneficiaries.

In addition, insufficient geographical prioritization for resilience-building interventions along with weak linkages between activities, led to missed opportunities for synergies that could have enhanced overall performance. The costs of WFP operations in Yemen were high due to the challenging operating context, but WFP took steps where feasible to increase cost-efficiency.

## **4. Cross-cutting areas and humanitarian principles**

Progress on cross-cutting issues was mixed. WFP made noticeable improvements in its community feedback mechanisms but more regular direct in-person community engagement, where feasible, would have enhanced understanding of beneficiaries' perspectives. While limited attention was given to gender equality and women's empowerment and some opportunities to draw from local knowledge were not seized, WFP increasingly incorporated environmental and climate-related shock considerations into its operations.

Despite many context-related challenges, WFP has showed commitment to conflict sensitivity and upholding humanitarian principles and successfully navigated external pressures and bureaucratic obstacles to maintain a principled response.

## **5. Strategic and integrated nexus approach**

Managing a large-scale humanitarian response in a challenging operational context constrained WFP's ability to adopt a more strategic and integrated approach across its portfolio. Progress in transitioning to resilience and more sustainable solutions where feasible was limited, and further challenged by Yemen's complex context of insecurity, political instability and economic fragility. Going forward, WFP will need to engage with the relevant coordination structures to contribute to cohesive, strategic, and impactful interventions that bridge humanitarian assistance and long-term development goals in Yemen.

## **6. Fostering and strengthening partnerships and localization**

WFP made progress in fostering and strengthening partnerships with other United Nations agencies and national responders. WFP was also recognized for its cluster leadership role. However, the evaluation found further scope for complementarities with other agencies to maximize programmatic results and minimize resource duplication. Greater emphasis is needed on strategic engagement, complementary and joint programmes and on strengthening local capacity.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The evaluation made six recommendations to WFP:

**Recommendation 1.** Ensure future programming retains a strong focus on implementing an agile and scalable humanitarian response while seizing opportunities to support resilience and promote greater coherence and synergies across activities in order to enhance overall performance and reduce humanitarian needs.

**Recommendation 2.** Strengthen where possible partnerships with authorities and local actors and expand direct engagement with communities in the design and implementation of WFP programmes.

**Recommendation 3.** Foster stronger partnerships with other United Nations agencies, the World Bank, donors and other international actors to support greater complementarity supported by predictable and flexible funding.

**Recommendation 4.** Better tailor activities to local realities by investing in contextual analysis, including conflict dynamics and the root causes of food insecurity, and adopting evidence-based approaches.

**Recommendation 5.** Integrate gender equality and women empowerment, protection and inclusion considerations in all activities. Set achievable and context-sensitive objectives for WFP interventions to support the meaningful participation and inclusion of women and other marginalized people.

**Recommendation 6.** Take steps to resolve the recurring supply chain challenges for specialized nutritious food.