



SAVING
LIVES
CHANGING
LIVES

Evaluation of WFP Sierra Leone country strategic plan (2020-2025)

CONTEXT

Sierra Leone, a low-income country of 8 million people, faces significant development challenges, exacerbated by past crises including civil war, Ebola, COVID-19, and persistent inflation. Poverty is widespread, with 26 percent living below the national poverty line and 59 percent experiencing multidimensional poverty. Food insecurity increased sharply, rising from 53 percent in 2018 to 82 percent in 2024, while chronic malnutrition remains high (26.3 percent stunting; 5.2 percent wasting). Agriculture, which employs half the population and contributes 58 percent of Gross Domestic Product, is constrained by low productivity, climate vulnerability, and gender inequalities limiting women's access to resources. Education outcomes are also weak, with low literacy (49 percent) and a secondary school completion rate of just 21.7 percent, despite progress in primary enrolment.

SUBJECT AND FOCUS OF THE EVALUATION

This evaluation assesses the Country Strategic Plan (CSP) from 2020 to 2025. Initially designed to support the transition from Ebola recovery, the CSP aimed at enhancing WFP's crisis response capabilities, bolstering government-led school feeding programmes, and promoting local agricultural development through the Home-Grown School Feeding approach. The CSP also prioritized a strategic shift from treating moderate acute malnutrition (MAM) towards more sustainable prevention-focused interventions, alongside strengthening social protection mechanisms and advancing gender equality and women's empowerment. The needs-based plan evolved substantially from an initial USD 53.2 million to USD 117.9 million by 2025. As of August 2024, 70.6 percent of the needs-based plan was funded.

OBJECTIVES AND USERS OF THE EVALUATION

The evaluation assessed WFP's strategic positioning, effectiveness, efficiency, and contributions to food security and nutrition in Sierra Leone. It examined WFP's adaptability, identified lessons, and provided recommendations for the next CSP. Key users include WFP (country office, regional bureau, headquarters, executive board), the Government, UN agencies, partners, donors, and beneficiaries.

KEY EVALUATION FINDINGS

Strategic positioning and alignment

WFP's CSP was well aligned with national priorities, including the Feed Salone initiative and policies on food security, nutrition, and education. Its focus areas – school feeding, resilience, and emergency response – responded to pressing needs and leveraged WFP's comparative advantages. However, linkages across outcomes, particularly between nutrition, education, and resilience, could have been stronger to enhance coherence and impact. WFP maintained a strong operational presence and contributed to coordination platforms and UN cooperation frameworks.

WFP's contribution to CSP strategic outcomes

Strategic outcome 1: WFP provided life-saving food and cash-based assistance to vulnerable and crisis-affected populations across multiple districts. The distribution of Specialized Nutritious Foods during the COVID-19 pandemic was effective in mitigating malnutrition among children and other vulnerable groups. Cash-based transfers improved short-term food security, although their limited duration and the timing, often misaligned with the lean season, constrained long-term impact. WFP also played a leading role in strengthening the logistics and coordination capacities of national institutions for emergency preparedness and response.

Strategic outcome 2: WFP-supported school feeding contributed significantly to increased enrolment and attendance in targeted districts. However, rapid expansion constrained teaching capacity and outpaced infrastructure, leading to strained resources, reduced feeding frequency, and smaller ration sizes. WFP initiated the transition to a nationally owned Home-Grown School Feeding model, which, while promising, was hampered by delayed payments to suppliers, weak market linkages, and challenges in local procurement systems. Furthermore, monitoring of school meals also lacked consistent quality control mechanisms.

Strategic outcome 3: As part of nutrition interventions, WFP shifted focus from MAM treatment to prevention activities including Social Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC) and the promotion of local complementary food production. SBCC activities demonstrated positive behaviour change in child

feeding practices. However, the transition from treatment to prevention lacked a structured strategy, and no contingency mechanism was in place to respond to the resurgence of acute malnutrition in 2024. Production of locally fortified complementary foods holds long-term potential but faced logistical, regulatory, and capacity-related constraints.

Strategic outcome 4: WFP's Food for Assets and Asset Creation and Livelihoods (ACL) initiatives improved agricultural productivity and strengthened smallholder farmer organizations. Increased yields and access to improved seeds were observed in targeted communities. Nevertheless, challenges such as procurement delays, input shortages, inflation, and poor post-harvest infrastructure constrained consistent delivery and sustainability of results. Environmental and climate risk reduction measures were insufficiently integrated across resilience activities.

Strategic Outcome 5: WFP contributed significantly to strengthening national capacity, notably by supporting the establishment of the National Disaster Management Agency (NDMA). WFP's technical support enhanced emergency coordination systems and institutional policy frameworks. However, there was limited measurement of the sustainability and long-term effects of these efforts, partly due to limited staff capacity and high turnover within both WFP and national counterpart institutions, which affected continuity and follow-up on monitoring and evaluation.

Strategic outcome 6: Through logistics and emergency telecommunications services, WFP enhanced the operational readiness of humanitarian and development partners. Its support to the NDMA through this strategic outcome enabled timely coordination during crises. However, capacities to manage multi-district emergencies remained underdeveloped, and operational redundancies persisted in some areas.

Cross-cutting dimensions and sustainability

WFP promoted women's participation in nutrition and resilience-building, particularly through Village Savings and Loan Associations and Farmer-Based Organizations (FBOs), strengthening their roles in decision-making and economic life. However, this also increased unpaid workloads – such as in school feeding and mother support groups – without adequate compensation.

Environmental and climate risks were acknowledged in the CSP design but were weakly integrated due to limited technical capacity, lack of a guiding strategy, and minimal environmental assessments. Opportunities for positive environmental outcomes, such as reforestation and land rehabilitation through Food Assistance for Assets, were underutilized. WFP upheld humanitarian principles and its commitments to accountability to affected populations, though gender and environmental issues require more systematic integration to strengthen programme quality and mitigate unintended harm.

WFP's timeliness and efficient use of resources

Approximately 60 percent of CSP outputs were delivered on time, reflecting WFP's capacity to maintain essential services despite a challenging context. However, significant delays occurred in school feeding and provision of agricultural inputs, linked to short-term donor commitments, procurement inefficiencies, and inflationary pressures. The volatility of global food and fuel prices disrupted supply chains and cash-based transfer operations. Nevertheless, WFP pursued cost-efficiencies

through measures such as closing a redundant port warehouse and regional logistics base, while expanding the use of local procurement mechanisms, which contributed to lower operational costs and increased supply chain agility.

Factors that explain WFP performance

WFP's performance was influenced by strong collaboration with the Government of Sierra Leone and alignment with national priorities, including the Feed Salone programme. The CSP benefitted from a relatively diversified donor base, notably with substantial national budget contributions to school feeding. However, short-term, earmarked donor funding restricted WFP's flexibility to address emerging needs, particularly in areas like nutrition prevention and capacity strengthening. While WFP demonstrated agility through adaptive planning, gaps in outcome-level monitoring – especially for institutional capacity development – limited evidence-based decision-making. Collaboration with the United Nations country team was effective, but further opportunities exist to deepen strategic partnerships, particularly in the education and agricultural sectors, to enhance programme coherence and sustainability.

CONCLUSIONS

WFP's flexible and adaptive response in Sierra Leone saved lives during crises and addressed root causes of hunger, with a growing focus on resilience. While efficiency gains were made, operational flexibility was limited by short-term funding and delays. Strong government partnerships and UN collaboration underpinned programme delivery, though greater strategic engagement, especially in education, could enhance impact. School feeding exceeded enrolment targets and, when linked with livelihoods support, improved food security. Yet, procurement challenges affected smallholder farmers. The shift to malnutrition prevention was relevant, with sustained SBCC efforts improving child diets. However, longer-term, flexible funding is needed to optimize outcomes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1. Address slow-onset emergencies through a targeted, increasingly integrated portfolio of programming that builds resilience and targets the root causes of hunger while maintaining flexible emergency response capacities to work across the humanitarian-development nexus.

Recommendation 2. Strengthen support for the national school feeding programme through improved partnership and collaboration.

Recommendation 3. Increase investment across nutrition programming aimed at the first 5,000 days of life, providing the foundation for a continuum of development interventions that changes the lives of Sierra Leoneans across their lifespans (as a way of reinforcing other funding investments later on in childhood (school feeding) and youth and adulthood (f).

Recommendation 4. Continued ACL support for FBOs should include market linkages through procurement processes/systems that align these with the needs of cash-strapped and poorly resourced smallholders.

Recommendation 5. Expand gender transformation and environment across the next CSP, focusing on those programming areas with the most potential for gender transformation and climate-smart outcomes.