



World Food Programme

SAVING LIVES
CHANGING LIVES

Evaluation of the DR Congo WFP Country Strategic Plan (2020–2024)

CONTEXT

The Democratic Republic of the Congo remains the largest food security crisis in the world with 25.4 million people classified in crisis and emergency food insecurity in 2023. At the same time, there are an estimated 4 million cases of acute malnutrition in the country.

A precarious security situation, particularly in the east of the country, disrupts food production. Recurrent epidemics and natural disasters are additional shock factors keeping the population vulnerable.

Over 7 million people are registered as internally displaced and the recent outbreaks of conflict in the east has caused a new spike of displacement. In addition, the country hosts over 500,000 refugees.

SUBJECT AND FOCUS OF THE EVALUATION

The DR Congo Country Strategic Plan (CSP) was approved by the WFP Executive Board in November 2020. It aimed for a strategic shift towards more resilience programming in line with the national zero hunger strategic plan and followed an interim CSP, which was evaluated in 2020.

The original needs-based plan of USD 1.67 billion was revised twice, rising to USD 3.9 billion. Allocated resources reached 1.7 billion in June 2024, while expenditure levels reached 87 percent of allocated resources. With budget revisions, the importance of the crisis response pillar grew, with the percentage of funds budgeted for this part of the CSP rising from 72 percent to 76 percent.

OBJECTIVES AND USERS OF THE EVALUATION

The main purpose of the evaluation was to provide evaluative evidence for accountability and learning to inform the design of the next CSP for the DR Congo. The evaluation covered interventions implemented under the 2021–2025 CSP and the previous interim CSP in 2020.

The evaluation assessed: WFP's strategic positioning and the extent to which the organization made the shifts expected under the CSP; WFP's effectiveness in contributing to

strategic outcomes; the efficiency with which the CSP was implemented; and factors explaining WFP's performance.

The main intended users of the evaluation are the WFP country office, and technical divisions at headquarters, the Government of the DR Congo, the WFP Executive Board, partner United Nations entities, and donors.

SUMMARY OF KEY INSIGHTS

1. Strategic positioning

WFP held a strong and recognized position in the DR Congo due to its logistical capabilities, rapid response, technical knowledge, and extensive geographic presence. Its approach aligned well with national food and nutrition security priorities, as well as with the expectations of donors and humanitarian stakeholders. This provides a solid strategic foundation for the next CSP. However, WFP's mandated roles in logistics and air services were not consistently performed and its ability to share humanitarian data was not exploited.

Due to the sequence of crises unfolding in the country during the time of this CSP and the heavy earmarking of funds, WFP's contributions were heavily focused on the "saving lives" rather than the "changing lives" agenda. WFP demonstrated its capacity for adaptation, responding to these crises.

2. Breadth versus depth of coverage

While WFP remained the largest humanitarian responder in the country, it reduced its overall number of annual beneficiaries from 6.8 million in 2020 to 5.2 million in 2023. Conversely, it significantly increased the duration of emergency food assistance from three to six months for targeted households, aiming to provide a more comprehensive support package for those reached. However, WFP's overall coverage still fell short of addressing

the vast and growing food and nutrition needs across the DR Congo. This gap was primarily due to limited and inflexible funding, coupled with persistent operational challenges in the country's complex and volatile context, such as insecurity, poor infrastructure, and access constraints in conflict-affected areas.

3. Results and performance across strategic objectives

WFP performed well in delivering outputs across its CSP activities, especially in rapidly scaling up emergency assistance when needed. It also achieved good output and outcome-level results for smallholders taking part in the resilience projects. However, achievements at the outcome level varied significantly across different regions and operating environments and were inconsistent across the years. Finally, capacity strengthening initiatives suffered from a lack of strategic approach, coordination and resources, limiting WFP's achievements.

WFP programmes often lacked embedded sustainability elements, which limited long-term results. For example, resilience-building or transition strategies were not consistently applied, undermining the potential for lasting change in the lives of beneficiaries once emergency support ends.

4. Progress on cross-cutting themes

WFP made commendable efforts to strengthen key cross-cutting themes, particularly gender equality, protection including an action plan for protection of sexual exploitation and abuse, and accountability to affected populations. These included investments in staff capacity building, training for partners, and the introduction of promising tools and practices. Despite these advancements, the actual integration of these themes into programme design, decision-making, and adjustments remained uneven.

WFP analyzed conflict dynamics in the DR Congo to strengthen conflict sensitivity in its operations. It promoted social cohesion through awareness-raising, dialogue, and inclusive community engagement.

5. Humanitarian principles

Upholding humanitarian principles is particularly challenging in the DR Congo due to the complex operating environment. While WFP consistently demonstrated a strong commitment to humanity, it faced trade-offs in applying the other principles. For example, donor earmarking of funds for certain provinces as well as undocumented prioritization decisions and WFP's limited presence in the country as a whole posed challenges to operational independence and impartiality, and WFP's delayed presence in non-state actor-controlled areas raised concerns about neutrality. Although WFP set up a team to analyze such operational dilemmas, documentation of these trade-offs were limited.

6. Efficiency and operational risk management

WFP invested in strengthening its internal systems and tools to better manage operational risks, implementing an action plan that led to improved quality controls, reduced fraud, and enhanced beneficiary verification.

Due to the high share of in-kind contributions received by WFP for the DR Congo, comparative analyses of modalities were not prioritised in the DR Congo. However, the evaluation shows that cash-based transfers were a more cost-efficient transfer modality overall and supply chain issues were a cause of delays in the emergency response.

7. Human and financial resources

WFP succeeded in attracting a broader and more diverse donor base. However, the heavy earmarking of contributions significantly restricted WFP's ability to allocate resources flexibly in response to changing needs across the country. This led to gaps in coverage and limited strategic planning.

In addition, difficulties in attracting and retaining skilled staff in challenging field duty stations undermined the quality of CSP implementation.

8. Partnership management

WFP is highly dependent on the contributions and capabilities of its partners in the DR Congo. WFP's clear partnership strategy supported strong collaboration with donors, UN agencies and the mostly operational partnerships with the national and provincial governments.

WFP sought to strengthen localization by increasing the proportion of implementation partnerships with national organizations and strengthening their capacities. However, partnerships remained fragile and inefficient due to slow and short-term contracting, often insufficient funding, and payment delays.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: Continue refining the geographic, household, and modality prioritization decisions for the emergency response.

Recommendation 2: Strengthen the Integration of crisis response and resilience programmes and define WFP's role based on its comparative advantages.

Recommendation 3: Strengthen data management and utilization for informed decision-making.

Recommendation 4: Strengthen partnerships with key partners essential for achieving CSP objectives, establishing multi-year agreements and more flexible contracts.

Recommendation 5: Clarify WFP's positioning in terms of coordination and service provision to the humanitarian community.