



Evaluation of WFP Country Strategic Plan in Eswatini (2020–2025)

CONTEXT

Eswatini is a lower middle-income country with a gross domestic product (GDP) per capita estimated at USD 3,936.

The 2024 Integrated Food Security Phase Classification Report indicated that 20 percent of the population were in IPC Phase 3 (crisis) and malnutrition was widespread across the population. According to the most recent data available, 58.9 percent of the population live below the national poverty line and Eswatini has the 10th highest income inequality in the world.

Chronic food insecurity has been compounded by external shocks such as climatic events (El Niño), economic challenges (increasing unemployment due to the outbreak of COVID-19), social unrest and spikes in food prices.

SUBJECT AND FOCUS OF EVALUATION

The Eswatini Country Strategic Plan (CSP) was approved for a five-year period (2020–2024) and subsequently extended by one year to align with the 2021–2025 United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF). The CSP had an original budget of USD 26.2 million, aiming to reach 199,593 beneficiaries. The budget was revised five times, increasing it to USD 76.8 million, and a corresponding expansion in planned beneficiaries of 331,852 (August 2024). Key changes in the budget were due to the COVID-19 response and an increase of coverage under the Strategic Outcome 1 (crises response).

As of August 2024, the CSP was funded at 45.5 percent. The major funding sources came from flexible funding and Japan, contributing 32.9 percent and 30.9 percent respectively of total contributions.

OBJECTIVES AND USERS OF THE EVALUATION

The evaluation served the dual purpose of accountability and learning and was designed to contribute to discussions around WFP's future engagement in Eswatini.

The evaluation covered the activities under the CSP from 2020 to mid-2024, as well as activities continued from the preceding Transitional Interim CSP (T-ICSP) 2018–2019.

The main intended users of the evaluation are the WFP Country Office in Eswatini, senior management and relevant technical units at global HQ, the Government of the Kingdom of Eswatini, the people assisted, the WFP Executive Board, donors, members of the United Nations country team, and cooperating partners.

SUMMARY OF KEY CONCLUSIONS AND INSIGHTS

1. Relevance, use of evidence and strategic positioning

The evaluation found that the CSP included a comprehensive analysis of the extent and causes of food security in Eswatini which linked clearly with the strategic outcomes. However, the design offered few details on the specific approach to resilience building, climate change and social protection activities.

While the CSP focus on strengthening social protection systems was relevant, certain assumptions about the government's appetite for increasing coverage were only partially valid given the limited fiscal space. The evaluation identified some gaps and opportunities in the design of the social protection activities such as the introduction of poverty-oriented cash transfers and strengthening of administrative capacities. Moreover, WFP's engagement in social protection was constrained by an overly narrow focus on a limited set of partners, which hindered its ability to play a more strategic role within this domain. For example, in parallel to WFP, the World Bank engaged in supporting the development of adaptive social protection but there was limited evidence of coordination. This was a significant missed opportunity, as the World Bank's agenda and substantial financial support had gained considerable traction with the Government.

2. Effectiveness

As Eswatini was impacted by a succession of exceptional, unanticipated food security shocks over the period of the CSP, WFP partially pivoted back to crisis response which was appropriate given the scale of needs. The unconditional food assistance provided by WFP was found to have improved the food security of crisis-affected populations at scale – although results were compromised by resource limitations from 2021.

Despite some positive results the overall approach to livelihood and resilience-building interventions was fragmented and lacked a vision on how the activities could be brought to scale. The duration (3–4 months) of some activities, and the amounts provided (approximately USD 94), were too small to generate lasting improvements in livelihoods.

WFP supported generalized “climate smart” interventions for smallholder farmers, including shade nets, drip irrigation, and drought-resistant seed varieties, but the evaluation found that WFP did not prioritize and identify locally appropriate climate smart agriculture technologies.

Achievements in capacity strengthening were most notable in the areas of school feeding and disaster management where WFP had established long partnerships and where WFP was able to offer relevant technical expertise. WFP also supported the development of a Social Protection Policy and Action Plan as well as a Road Map (2023–2028). It is still too early to judge the utility and effectiveness of these documents, and no national funding has yet been committed.

3. Cross-cutting issues

Despite initial investments in gender and nutrition analysis, mainstreaming efforts decreased during the subsequent implementation phase of the CSP. This was mostly related to resource constraints which significantly affected the county office staffing capacity.

4. Key factors affecting performance

The CSP's ambitions were hindered by insufficient funding. This led WFP to primarily rely on flexible funding for its implementation, including for capacity-strengthening activities. However, this type of funding lacks the predictability and sustainability that is needed for long-term progress.

Alternative funding sources, such as partnerships with governments and international financial institutions, were not fully explored and WFP struggled to secure competitive funding opportunities. This was compounded by insufficient collection of evidence from pilot projects needed to demonstrate the viability of the approach and inform national policy making.

5. Sustainability and transition strategies

WFP has registered positive progress in creating sustainable change in the area of disaster management.

The necessary legislation, policies and guidelines to support the operations of National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) were drafted and are close to being formally adopted. Government staff capacities have been strengthened in assessment, cash distributions and logistics. After exceptional COVID-19 related allocations in 2020/2021, budgetary allocations from Government for disaster management have continued at a predictable level.

The main exit strategy for the CSP focused on sustained transfers and services delivered through the national social protection systems. WFP aimed to start by filling the policy gap, by promoting the development of a shock responsive social protection policy, but progress has been slow.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluation makes five recommendations to WFP:

Recommendation 1: WFP should conduct a thorough assessment of potential resources and calibrate the design of any future CSP against a pragmatic assessment of probable resource availability.

Recommendation 2: WFP should continue to support capacity strengthening of national authorities to own and sustain school, and pre-school, feeding.

Recommendation 3: In partnership with the GoKE, WFP should define a value proposition including the areas of climate change adaptation and social protection.