

Evaluation of WFP's Assistance to China (1979–2005)

WFP's Assistance to China

WFP has been present in China for 26 years. During this period, a total of 68 operations have been undertaken. These operations were related to development assistance, with the exception of four Emergency Operations that assisted refugees and people affected by natural disasters in the beginning of the 1980s and in 1998. About 30 million people have benefited from WFP's assistance, valued at about US\$1 billion.

Until the mid 1990s, WFP provided sector-based development assistance to forestry, fishery, agriculture and dairy projects. At this time, WFP began shifting its support towards an integrated rural development approach, which in addition to meeting the food needs of the poor, also addressed the development of human resources through training and education. The Government's recognition that achieving sustainable poverty reduction required integrated services led to the decision in 1996 by the Ministry of Agriculture, WFP and The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) to establish a programme partnership.

In 2001, WFP introduced the Country Programme (CP) approach. Land development and irrigation, combined with education, functional literacy and other training courses for women in particular, as well as health and sanitation, were the foundation of the five-year CP, which would phase out by the end of 2005.

Total Cost: WFP provided 4 million metric tons of food worth US\$1 billion; IFAD provided loans of US\$148 million, starting in 1996; and the Government contributed US\$1.16 billion as counterpart funds in addition to covering all costs related to project management and transport.

Objectives and Scope of the Evaluation

Objectives

(a) To review and record the main elements of WFP's 26 years of assistance to China; (b) to evaluate WFP's Country Programme CP, with a focus on activity outputs and outcomes; and (c) to capture lessons of corporate interest and use. The evaluation report (WFP/EB.1/2006/7-A) was presented to the WFP Executive Board on 20–23 February 2006.

Scope

The evaluation comprised a historical review covering the period 1979–2000¹ and an evaluation of the CP (2001–2005).

Key Findings and Conclusions

WFP's Assistance to China (1979–2000)

Use and Role of Food Aid

Food aid combined with financial and technical inputs has been a catalyst in enhancing the development process. It contributed to meeting the short-term food needs of food-insecure households while helping to create assets to make a shift towards more

sustainable livelihoods. It also served as an incentive for beneficiaries to participate in various project activities and to diversify their activities as well as a budgetary support to the host government.

Achievements

WFP's experience in China was exceptional in terms of physical achievements, mobilization of beneficiaries, efficient food management and sustained government support. This has been demonstrated in terms of increased food production, expansion of productive infrastructures and improvement in beneficiaries' living conditions.

Impact on Household Food Security

Land improvements have resulted in increased yields and achievement of self-sufficiency². Grain production, which historically left a food gap of two to three months each year, has increased to cover basic food requirements, and thus a steady increase in farm and family income.

Sustainability

Past evaluations show that increased involvement of beneficiaries in design and monitoring through a participatory approach and training encouraged ownership of the assets created, thereby improving sustainability of rural development activities.

¹ Desk Review undertaken in Rome

² Demonstrated in the WFP assisted activities in Loess Plateau

Approach and Design

WFP adapted the approach and design of its assistance to fit into the government's comprehensive development programmes.

Government Support

Strong financial and technical support by the Government was consistent, and the structure of the Project Management Offices was effective for project implementation.

Partnership

The collaboration between the Government of China, WFP and IFAD brought commendable results in terms of productive assets, social infrastructure, training and micro-credit support. However, in a few instances lack of synergy and timing of the assistance led to less than optimal results.

Country Programme Evaluation (2001–2005)

Design and Targeting

Targeting of the poorest was found to be effective. However, the programme approach made the design of the CP less site-specific than in the past. This combined with low levels of funding caused resources to be spread over large areas, thus reducing local impact. The programme approach does not require appraisal and technical review at the activity level. Such a review might have detected this problem.

Impact of Activities

In the social infrastructure, land, water and natural resource components, overall achievements were remarkable. Training activities provided a solid basis for further capacity building, but the duration was sometimes insufficient to assure sustainability.

Beneficiary Participation and Socio Economic Impact

Beneficiary participation has been massive and active. The use of participatory processes enabled the people to influence the design to match their needs. The impact at household level was mainly achieved through land development, which resulted in increased grain yields and increased income.

Gender Aspects

Women's participation in project activities has increased significantly. Women became the largest group benefiting from the CP interventions on Food for Work and Food for Training. Through interviews the mission was able to establish that this participation had increased their status within the family, although it had also increased their workload.

Budget

Substantial shortfalls in funding led to cancellation of activities (in Xinjiang) and to low implementation rates in all the other provinces. The government's strong commitment was demonstrated by its growing counterpart ratio (1:2.8), making it the only country to cover the ocean freight and all transport landside cost. This resulted in a reduction of WFP's overall operational cost. However, it also reduced the other direct operational and direct support costs available to the country office, as they are calculated based on the total costs.

Monitoring, Phase-out and Transition

WFP made an important contribution to strengthening partner capacity in participatory methods and to systematizing monitoring of project outputs and outcomes. However, in light of the phase-out of assistance, the quick staff downsizing resulted in sporadic monitoring of activities and did not allow for adequate reporting on the phase-out process. On 31 December 2005, all project activities ended, but a small office has been kept open to maintain relations with the Government of China.

Lessons

Land development and irrigation schemes through FFW have shown impressive results in China. This was possible because WFP's assistance was part of the Government's sustained efforts to improve agricultural productivity.

Technical appraisals and reviews allow for identification of problems during implementation. Cutting down on these management tools can negatively effect the outcome of the activities.

When limited resources are spread out too thinly, the required synergy between project activities can suffer and reduce the desired impact.

Progressive counterpart funding, and cost sharing of project administration and freight and transport, should be explored in other countries with similar capacity as China.

Particular attention should be paid to phasing out to ensure sustainability of the intervention, and to capitalize on the experience from the country where the intervention took place.

Improved beneficiary participation leads to increased relevance of the interventions, more ownership of the assets created and more sustainable results.

Timing of assistance provided by different actors in joint programme activities is essential to achieve the expected results.

Reference: Full and summary reports of the Evaluation of WFP's Assistance to China (1979–2005) are available at: <http://www.wfp.org/operations/evaluation>

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