

Evaluation of the Yemen Country Programme

WFP's assistance to Yemen

WFP has been supporting people in Yemen with food aid since the late 1960s. In 2002, it adopted a country programme (CP) approach for the second time. An evaluation of the previous CP had signalled the continuation of a project approach and lack of control over food distributions. The current CP, although shortened by both a delayed start and an earlier renewal, effectively built on these lessons.

Focusing largely on women and girls, the CP aimed at enhancing the capacities of food-insecure households to meet their food and nutritional needs and reduce their poverty in a sustainable manner. The CP was valued at US\$47 million, for the delivery of 116,000 mt of commodities. Main expected outcomes were the improved nutritional and health status of vulnerable women and children; reduced gender disparities in terms of access to and completion of basic education; and the sustainable improvement of women's livelihoods.

Objectives and Scope of the Evaluation

The evaluation, conducted late 2005, intended to assess activities undertaken by WFP under the CP with respect to relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability, and to incorporate lessons learnt into the design of WFP's future development activities in Yemen.

Due to the shortened implementation time span, the evaluation could not focus exclusively on outcome-level results. However, it made plausible assumptions on likely outcomes to be expected in the future, based on intended and unintended achievements since April 2003.

Key Findings and Conclusions

CP design

The evaluation found the Yemen CP to be in line with national development priorities and programmes, as well as with WFP's relevant policies. WFP food rations were considered an adequate instrument for encouraging attendance at health centers and schools, as well as a suitable means to contribute to the food basket of poor and vulnerable households.

The design and use of three different logical frameworks that did not clearly relate to each other caused some confusion and limited their benefit for programme and activity planning, management, monitoring and evaluation. It however reflected a positive intention on the part of the Country Office to improve the quality of programmes.

The CP's first component, maternal child health and nutrition (MCHN) support, was found fully justified given the widespread problem of malnutrition in the country. However, data were insufficient regarding the number of people potentially eligible for food aid in the catchment area of supported centres. The subsequent limited resources enabled the centres to support only a fraction of eligible people attending, who themselves constituted only a small part of the regional eligible population. In addition, the evaluation team found that this activity could have been better designed with regard to the criteria used for selecting eligible mothers and to the composition of rations they received.

The second and largest activity, supporting girls' education, was found relevant and well organized, with distributions rigorously monitored and fair. This constituted a strong improvement compared to the previous CP.

A third activity envisioned, improving livelihoods of rural women and their families via training and income-generating activity support, was not implemented due to deficient design of the activity and the absence of a suitable cooperating partner.

Programme management and efficiency

Although government partners formally implemented the CP, WFP led the programme due to the limited management capacities of government partners. However, the evaluation supported increased ownership by the national partners through gradual transfer of management responsibilities. Efforts to decentralize initiatives were also encouraged, in order to fully exploit field staff capacities for in-depth monitoring of the programme as well as capacity building at the district level.

For the first activity, the number of beneficiaries actually supported through health centers was determined by the level of resources available and not by need. Repeated discrepancies between resource requirements and availability adversely affected programme performance, as well as the reputation of WFP and its partners. The evaluation encouraged WFP to develop priority criteria and contingency strategies for tackling shortfalls, until then addressed through ad-hoc decisions.

While performance monitoring was globally deficient, a monitoring system of the “commodity chain” from ports up to the distribution to the beneficiaries was well established and maintained. The strong role played by WFP in food aid management and logistics resulted in food aid effectively reaching the intended beneficiaries. The Country Office was encouraged to gradually transfer the responsibility to its partners once a transparent logistics management system had been established.

The CP costs were found comparable to other projects, although on the higher range, accounting for high delivery costs due to inherent contextual constraints, particularly transport obstacles owing to difficult terrain and poor infrastructure, combined with security provisions.

Problems related to quality and packing of commodities occurred repeatedly, which led the evaluation to recommend intensifying local procurement in the country.

Effectiveness at activity level

Measuring the outcomes of the MCHN component was extremely limited since monitoring had not taken place regarding mothers’ nutritional status or nutrition education activities. However, health centre records did reveal that nutritional status improved among children who had completed a ration period.

Support to girls’ education, the largest CP activity, was highly effective in achieving planned results. The share of girls enrolled in WFP-supported schools increased from 32% in 2002/3 to 42% in 2003/4 and to 46% in 2004/5. Over three years of implementation, girls’ enrolment increased by some 80%, exceeding the intended annual increase. At the same time, the evaluation noted that Yemen benefited from a conducive environment with respect to girls’ education and acknowledged the role played by the government and other development agencies. However, food appeared to have the main impact.

Overall effectiveness and sustainability

With regard to the overall CP goal of enhancing household food security, the evaluation distinguished between the direct short-term effect of the food on household food security and the assumed indirect long-term effects through human capital building.

WFP’s capacity to reach the poorest households was considered effective in its support to school children, given the activity’s

targeting system, which focused on the most vulnerable districts. However, the ability of the MCHN component to reach the poorest was seriously compromised, given the CP requirement to select well equipped health centres and thereby leave out the most remote and vulnerable areas, as well as the quota system applied in allocating rations to health centres, which also left out many eligible people.

The overall effectiveness and potential impact of the CP was hindered by WFP’s lack of coordination with agencies operating in related fields. The evaluation urged greater sustainability to reduce dependency on WFP support, notably through more significant cooperation with other agencies and the transfer of certain functions to partners.

Recommendations

In addition to those already mentioned, the evaluation formulated the following recommendations:

Coordinated emphasis on malnutrition

Enhance information base for health and nutrition interventions and identify benchmarks by conducting baseline surveys (anthropometry and micronutrients). Set programme targets and resource needs accordingly and work towards joint programming in order to benefit from synergy.

Revised targeting strategy for MCHN

Review area and beneficiary targeting strategies based on new data to ensure that all eligible mothers and children attending a health centre are assisted. Adjust the amount of resources to meet real needs. Revise the ration composition for mothers to include a micronutrient-rich food.

Decentralization and partner ownership

Gradually increase the role of government partners and sub-office staff in planning, implementation and monitoring, and undertake related capacity building when needed.

Resource shortfalls management

Reconcile annual priority needs with actual resource levels and prepare contingency plan in the event of shortfalls, based on poverty and food-insecurity data.

Quality of programme management tools

Prepare and regularly update a clear and realistic logical frame as a basis for planning, implementation and monitoring of the CP. In addition, establish systems for outcome monitoring, notably for MCHN, and ensure quality control of monitored data.

Reference: Full and summary reports of the Yemen Country Programme evaluation are available at:
<http://www.wfp.org/operations/evaluation>

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