

Mali: An Evaluation of WFP's Portfolio (2003-2009)

Context

Mali is a vast country, landlocked, half of it is desert and travel is difficult off the main roads. Development indicators were very low during the period studied. At the same time Mali faced serious international issues, including a rise in grain prices, an influx of refugees as well as a series of national crisis. Despite of these challenges, Mali has substantial potential in the primary sector (grain, cotton and gold) and the small-farm sector is one of the best organized in the sub region.

The WFP portfolio in Mali

Between 2003 and 2009, WFP implemented 13 operations, worth US\$160 million, with the objectives of saving lives, reducing chronic hunger and malnutrition, rebuilding livelihoods of food insecure population groups and strengthening government capacities. The portfolio was composed of four EMOP (including two regional), four protracted relief and recovery operations (PRRO – including two regional), three country programmes (CPs) and two bilateral programmes. The school feeding programmes represented nearly 40 percent of commitments followed by food-for-work activities (25 percent) and supplementary feeding programmes (20 percent).

Objectives and Scope of the Evaluation

The evaluation served the dual objectives of accountability and learning. It enabled the Mali country office to make informed strategic decisions for its next country strategy and to improve ongoing operations.

The evaluation covered the period 2003-2009 and was carried out between May and September 2010 by a team of four independent evaluators.

The evaluation report is presented to the Executive Board in February 2011.

Key Findings and Conclusions

Alignment and Strategic Positioning

The evaluation found WFP Mali was well aligned with international strategies and with government policies.

However, despite the "One UN" initiative which created new dynamics around joint programmes, and the recent Spanish cooperation's initiative to bring together some UN agencies and WFP; in practise this alignment is not very effective.

In respect to **nutrition** issues in Mali; WFP has supported efforts both in practical ways and in the conceptual development of framework documents. WFP continued presence in the capital and through its sub offices, established its credibility with partners.

With regards to **HIV and AIDS**, WFP has played an important role in defining the new government policy and in explaining the importance of nutrition in caring for PLHIV.

WFP's **education** activities have been incorporated in the Government's ten-year programme, and have been instrumental in the formulation and implementation of school feeding policy in Mali in 2009.

WFP's activities related to **rural development** have been consistent with national priorities: in a country that is 75 percent rural, rural development featured as the top priority in the Poverty Reduction Strategy.

With regards to **food security**, WFP's collaboration with the Commissariat a la *Sécurité Alimentaire* (CSA, Food Security Commission) and its leadership role in the group of technical partners/donors are consistent with WFP's strategy.

Making Strategic Choices

The choices that WFP made for its portfolio were based on frequent food security analyses that influenced geographic targeting and composition of programme activities. Moreover, WFP financed research on appropriate food supplements, which provided a useful base for work by the Government and the World Bank to develop related programmes.

While in line with WFP standards, the resultant geographic targeting of regions/zones did not allow for more precise targeting of communities and households. Changes in data trends were followed with adjustments in the programme.

WFP has worked with a large number of partners, which affected monitoring of performance. The gradual shift towards stronger partners has been a more judicious choice.

The two main weaknesses observed by the team are: the lack of "programme approach" (there is no synergy between activities or operations), and the limited support to the decentralization process in Mali.

Portfolio Performance and Results

Beneficiaries and Assistance Provided. With the exception of the SF activity, WFP has rarely been able to achieve the planned number of beneficiaries and ration distributed. The mission concluded that the implementation rate ranged, depending on the type of activities, between 34 and 101 percent.

Objectives Attained. Given the lower number of beneficiaries reached than originally planned, the outcomes of WFP activities fell short of expectations. The absence of good monitoring data made it difficult to assess the effectiveness of the programmes. In practice certain aspects could however be measured.

a) SF: the success of the bigger activity of the portfolio is fully recognized. Research has shown that enrolment rates are higher for schools in which WFP school feeding is provided.

b) Rural development activities seemed to be adapted to meet immediate needs. The contributions of WFP are integrated with those of partners, and while WFP provides a relatively small input, the joint programme achieves more than if the inputs were delivered in isolation.

c) The nutrition programme: the overall impact on the nutrition status of the population is not significant.

Institutional role. WFP has a major influence on Mali's education policy. It has also contributed to national nutrition and health policy.

Factors explaining results. The portfolio suffered from a chronic lack of resources (45 percent in average), which made it impossible to reach the planned number of beneficiaries or distribute the planned quantities of food. Launching operations without secure funding seriously affects operational capacities and results.

c) Re-think the monitoring system (logframes, indicators, adapting them to different situations and capacities) so that it becomes a true management system.

Recommendation 3. Reconsider WFP's position in the decentralization process, in line with decisions and actions taken in response to recommendation 2.

Recommendation 4. Make institutional adjustments with the CSA by clarifying roles and responsibilities in relation to the DNPP.

By sector

a) Nutrition and health

Recommendation 5. Review the WFP nutrition strategy in terms of choice of operations, long-term approach and the hand over strategy for HIV and AIDS activities.

Recommendation 6. Participate in research on local complementary foods.

Recommendation 7. Obtain the financial, logistical and human resources needed to properly identify people suffering from moderate undernutrition and to develop the appropriate tools and strategies.

b) Education and school feeding

Recommendations 8. Establish and systematize food-for-training activities in the schools, in order to strengthen the capacities of beneficiary communities, focusing on parents and local officials.

Recommendation 9. Make a thorough inventory of school feeding programmes, in order to adapt WFP resources to the real situation and adjust expenditures to optimize those resources.

c) Rural development and markets

Recommendation 10. Develop bilateral approaches in order to extend development and food assistance strategies, for example as used by the OMFV project.

Recommendation 11. Revise the food-for-work norms to more effectively adapt them to realities on the ground.

Recommendations

The evaluation team made 11 recommendations, 4 of them on crosscutting issues and 7 on the sectors (nutrition and health, education and school feeding, and rural development and markets):

Cross cutting issues

Recommendation 1. Optimize fundraising and adapt the scope of activities to the resources available, by for instance:

- a) Reintroduce a hub in Mopti to cover the four northern regions, which would reduce operational costs;
- b) Refocus operational activities on emergency responses for which donor support exists and provide technical support to the Government in other areas of WFP's competences;
- c) Redesign FFW activities to work with strong partners to identify opportunities where food assistance can add real value and has secure resources from the outset.

Recommendation 2. Develop programmes in an integrated way that

- a) Ensures synergies among programme activities, which would entail geographical consolidation and be more in line with the decentralization efforts of the Government;
- b) Improves the VAM unit capacity to better identify the vulnerable beneficiaries at levels lower than the regions;

Reference: Full and summary reports of the Evaluation are available at: <http://www.wfp.org/evaluation>
For more information, please contact the WFP Office of Evaluation