

Evaluation Brief



Afghanistan: An evaluation of WFP's Portfolio 2010-2012

Context

The Afghanistan country portfolio evaluation covered the period from April 2010 to June 2012, concentrating on WFP's strategic and operational work under protracted relief and recovery operation 200063. WFP's operations underwent considerable change over the portfolio period, concomitant with the changing political and security context. Initial optimism in 2009 gave way to reluctance to fund the operation in the face of security and governance constraints. Most international actors focused on state building and governance in the last decade, but attention is shifting back towards humanitarian concerns as displacement increases.

WFP's operating environment is characterized by insecurity for staff and partners and increasing politicization of the humanitarian space. The country office has responded with a series of internal situation assessments and reappraisals of operational activities, the findings of which complement and contributed to this evaluation.

The WFP Portfolio in Afghanistan

Total official development assistance (ODA) to Afghanistan in the period 2006–2010 exceeded US\$25 billion.¹ The PRRO was launched in April 2010 with a target over three years of 816,882 mt of food costing more than US\$1.2 billion. As planned, it was the second largest PRRO in the world, representing 9 percent of WFP's total global budget.

The PRRO aimed to enhance food security and improve the human and productive capital of 7.6 million food-insecure Afghans. Its intended outcomes were to:

- i. stabilize acute malnutrition and improve food consumption (WFP Strategic Objective 1);
- ii. establish early warning, contingency and monitoring systems (Strategic Objective 2);
- iii. improve access to assets in transition situations, school enrolment and access to education, and increase household capital (Strategic Objective 3);
- iv. increase fortified food production capacity and improve the success of tuberculosis (TB) treatment (Strategic Objective 4); and
- v. increase market opportunities through local purchases by WFP, and make progress towards government-owned hunger solutions (Strategic Objective 5).

From mid-2011, funding constraints and the onset of

¹ US\$25.50 billion in net ODA receipts for the period 2006–2010 (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] Aid Statistics 2012).

drought forced reprioritization of the PRRO to 4.5 million beneficiaries, through a reduction in food for education (FFE) and the shifting of activities in 14 drought-affected provinces to an emergency operation. Operating in 34 provinces, the PRRO included a range of relief, recovery and capacity building activities.

Objectives and Scope of the Evaluation

The objectives of the CPE were to facilitate learning, by evaluating how and why decisions were made, and accountability, by measuring the performance and results of the PRRO. It focused on three key evaluation questions: i) the portfolio's alignment and strategic positioning given the particularly challenging humanitarian situation and complex geopolitical context; ii) the factors that have driven, and the quality of, WFP's strategic decision-making; and iii) the performance and results of the operations over the portfolio period.

Key Findings and Conclusions

Alignment and Strategic Positioning

The evaluation found that WFP was appropriately and closely aligned with the evolving general architecture of government policy, despite there being some incoherence over national strategies relating to food security. Together with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), WFP has agreed to support six thematic areas in food security, which are in line with the overarching 2009 Afghanistan National Development Strategy.

Operationally, the evaluation found that while WFP worked closely with government partners at the local level for delivery, monitoring and follow-up, there were challenges and concerns related to partners' legitimacy in some regions and the adequacy of their management of WFP's food distribution. WFP's cooperation and alignment with non-governmental organization partners have been less than that with the Government, owing in part to the challenge of finding viable and legitimate non-governmental partners at the local level, and in part to WFP's association with an international agenda aligned with an occupying force – a representational compromise that some non-governmental organizations are not willing to make.

With respect to its alignment with good practices for engagement in fragile states, the evaluation found that the original PRRO design had not undertaken or applied a thorough conflict analysis. Without this, the PRRO was never likely to be sufficiently adaptive and responsive to contextual changes as they emerged.

Reacting to volatility meant that WFP had to make two major budget revisions to the PRRO in just two years. The portfolio had to shift towards what is feasible rather than sticking to its original ambitions.

Declining humanitarian space in Afghanistan has been an acute issue for WFP, given its relationship with a government whose legitimacy is challenged by some sections of the population, and its placement within the United Nations integrated mission. WFP has lobbied – as yet unsuccessfully – for a separation of the roles of Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator, to increase advocacy for access to contended areas/populations.

Factors Driving WFP's Strategic Decision-making in Afghanistan

Key factors driving WFP's decision-making in Afghanistan include the aid environment, security and access constraints, monitoring and evaluation data, and targeting strategies.

Faced with shrinking resources and constrained operational space, WFP has opted, with some exceptions such as the cash and voucher pilot, to do broadly 'less of the same'. Beneficiary numbers within targeted provinces have remained largely unaffected by the drastic reductions in budget; and operations siloed and discrete. Different ways of doing business, such as joint programming and partnerships on the ground, have only recently become a priority.

The evaluation found that main groups identified for targeting approximate the vulnerable groups identified in the Afghanistan National Development Strategy. However, these groups are being targeted by a range of actors simultaneously, and there was a marked lack of coherence in WFP's targeting at the operational level until recently.

Relatedly, WFP is far from meeting its commitments on gender in Afghanistan. Efforts have lacked a clear institutional vision of WFP's goals in gender and food security over the PRRO period; without guidance on implementation strategies; lacking partnerships with other agencies for achieving what WFP alone cannot achieve; and without clear accountability processes or comprehensive internal training. A full *Do No Harm* analysis, which would inform this response, was not evident.

Security and access seriously constrain WFP's ability to monitor its food distributions in Afghanistan. WFP's strategy has contracted private programme assistance teams (PATs) that travel to the growing number of areas inaccessible to United Nations staff. Despite some challenges with implementation of the PAT system, the evaluation found that issues encountered are being proactively addressed and are likely to lead to significant improvements over time.

There has been a lack of robust or systematic approaches to monitoring until recently. Changes made since 2011 include the establishment of a monitoring and evaluation unit and systems – including key performance indicators – that enable real-time collection of distribution data. These systems functioned discretely, however, and there is yet a need for harmonization.

Perhaps most importantly, conflict-sensitivity within the

portfolio has remained reactive and focused on the maintenance of current activities rather than re-design. Probably because of the optimism of the prevailing environment at the time, the PRRO was less designed for context – in this case high levels of volatility and risk – but rather forced to respond reactively to the operational threats arising once deterioration began.

Portfolio Performance and Results

Data paucity, due to intermittent access and capacity constraints among partners, means that the performance and results of the portfolio cannot be easily measured. Pipeline breaks, particularly in general food distribution and school feeding activities, negatively affected the timeliness of food delivery and the perception of WFP among partners and beneficiaries. However, the evaluation found that medium- and longer-term activities such as food for assets were well received by beneficiary communities.

Mother-and-child health and nutrition projects have shown some encouraging results, particularly where inter-agency collaboration has improved. In terms of actual versus planned outputs, the poorest performing portfolio activities in 2011 were FFE, FFT and cash/voucher schemes. Targeting has been a problem across all activities, especially GFD and cash/voucher schemes. Inclusion and exclusion errors have been most severe where food aid is distributed to conflict-displaced communities, partly because of access difficulties.

For recovery activities, increasingly greater depth of coverage in selected geographical areas will build on WFP's comparative advantage, and the evaluation found these activities to be the most in 'demand' from beneficiary communities.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Overall Assessment

Rarely has it been necessary to reconfigure a PRRO in such a radical manner as that of Afghanistan in 2011-2012. WFP undertook major organizational reviews and restructuring in 2011. The deteriorating operational arena compelled new approaches in two respects: first, an intensive examination of the political economy and context under which the Organization was working; and second, a restructured office to respond more readily to demands from the field. An external contextual analysis was commissioned and internal compliance, communication and more rapid data analysis capacity began to be acquired. The results have yet to fully felt, but the right questions are being asked.

The evaluation suggests that a more thorough conflict analysis – including a review of community security and protection – at inception may at least have made the PRRO more responsive to change, particularly if accompanied by priorities in the sequencing of activities, and a realistic reduction in the scale and scope of such a broad portfolio. Such a shift in perspective – one in which conflict is not just a 'background risk' but something that should be accounted for as part of programme design – would suggest that targeting and pipeline issues may themselves contain risks of exacerbating tensions, inequalities and power relations.

Recommendations

The evaluation makes six main recommendations. WFP should: i) refocus the portfolio within the shrinking humanitarian space and shifting staff capacities; ii) make activities more relevant to communities' medium-/long-term livelihoods; iii) continue the ongoing improvement of national capacity development and operational partnerships; iv) include a full conflict analysis in the design of the new protracted relief and recovery operation to improve the effectiveness of the portfolio; v) increase the focus on national ownership of all programmes; and vi) renew emphasis on gender and protection analysis within the design and implementation of all activities.



Reference:
**Full and summary reports of the
evaluation and the Management
Response are available at**
www.wfp.org/evaluation

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