

Evaluation Brief



Somalia: An evaluation of WFP's Portfolio 2006-2011

Context

Internal conflict has prevailed across most of southern and central Somalia for more than 20 years, exacerbated by both regional and global political agendas. Much of southern Somalia remains under the control of *al-Shabaab*, a militant Islamic movement with an element of popular support. In the north, Somaliland is a self-declared independent entity and Puntland a semi-autonomous region; both regions have established governance and administrative structures that ensure relative peace and security, although border areas between the two remain contested.

The conflict in southern and central Somalia is the main factor in the country's positioning as one of the poorest and most food-insecure in the world. The collapse of basic services, particularly health and education, has mainly affected women and children. In recent years, multi-agency assessments have estimated that about 25 percent of the population do not have access to sufficient food and therefore requires emergency food assistance. The situation is exacerbated by frequent and severe droughts, rising global prices for food and fuel, and a significant reduction in the humanitarian space since 2008.

WFP's Portfolio in Somalia

WFP is a leading agency in the overall humanitarian response in Somalia and is the single largest recipient of humanitarian funding, related to the level of food assistance required across the country. During the portfolio period, WFP had direct expenses of US\$825 million.

Two food assistance operations dominated the evaluation period: a relief and recovery operation from mid-2006, with 2,164,000 beneficiaries; and an emergency operation from mid-2009, which scaled up to cover 3,500,000 beneficiaries including 1 million previously covered by the Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE). The scale-up served the escalating numbers of people displaced by conflict, and the urban poor affected by high food prices and hyperinflation. The portfolio's emphasis was on emergency relief; recovery and livelihood support were not prominent until 2010.

During the evaluation period, CARE (in 2009) and WFP (in January 2010) suspended activities in *al-Shabaab*-controlled areas for security reasons and were then subsequently banned by *al-Shabaab*. This significantly affected the delivery of food assistance to critical areas of southern and central Somalia, including those areas affected by the 2011 famine.

Objectives and Scope of the Evaluation

The Somalia country portfolio evaluation (CPE) was conducted between September 2011 and May 2012 and covered the 2006-2011¹ portfolio period. It focused on three key evaluation questions: i) the alignment and strategic positioning of WFP's operations in Somalia, given the particularly challenging humanitarian situation and the complex geopolitical context, especially in south and central Somalia; ii) the factors that have driven WFP's strategic decision-making; and iii) the performance and results of WFP operations over the portfolio period. The evaluation serves the dual objectives of accountability and learning and was timed to provide lessons learned and recommendations for the development of the next WFP Somalia operation in 2013.

Key Findings and Conclusions

Alignment and Strategic Positioning

Over the evaluation period, WFP has effectively targeted areas of food insecurity and crisis mainly through general food distribution (GFD) and with a more nutrition-focused approach through a targeted supplementary food (TSF) programme since 2010. However, the evaluation found limited evidence and understanding of the extent to which the food assistance delivered met the needs of the most vulnerable sectors of the target population and was relevant to the different livelihood zones of Somalia, including pastoralist households. Since 2010, WFP Somalia has developed operational strategies that better support communities in transition, enabling them to recover livelihoods and household assets and thus ensuring better coping capacity in future crises.

Regarding WFP's alignment with international good practice in humanitarian response, from 2011, WFP has considerably improved its accountability to donors, through regular meetings in Nairobi, and to functioning state authorities, through field-based regional allocation planning meetings. However, the evaluation found that this was not replicated to the same extent with cooperating partners and beneficiaries at the community level.

The most strategic initiative with local authorities has been the decentralization of WFP's six-monthly allocation planning for food assistance - in Somaliland, Puntland and Central regions - since early 2011. This

¹ Up to the official declaration of famine in mid-2011.

has facilitated the participation of government staff and ensured that interventions comply with local authorities' priorities and plans. The evaluation found this area-based approach to allocation planning and capacity development to be an important component of increasing WFP's responsiveness to local contexts.

A main challenge for WFP was the blurring of boundaries between the United Nations political and humanitarian agendas. There was explicit United Nations political backing for the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) during this period, but the principal humanitarian response was needed in areas outside the TFG's control. This situation made it very important to ensure alignment with international good practices in conflict and fragile states, particularly given the scale of WFP operations. The evaluation noted that WFP's neutrality was brought into question over the selection of contractors and that WFP initially gave inadequate consideration to the implications of delivering food aid in areas controlled by *al-Shabaab*.

WFP's relationship with other actors in the United Nations country team was problematic until 2010. This was partly because WFP was concerned with how the United Nations political agenda influenced humanitarian priorities in Somalia, while others in the United Nations perceived WFP as unilaterally determining its own plans and strategies to suit its food aid agenda. These relationships have recently improved and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), UNICEF and WFP have developed a joint strategy for building resilience to shocks in the Somalia context.

Factors Driving WFP's Strategic Decision-Making

Since 2008, the country office has developed a more rigorous approach to monitoring and evaluation (M&E), with the requisite capacity at the field and country office levels to generate monthly reporting. Monthly reports provide updates on implementation quality, compliance and issues raised by beneficiaries or partners. The rigour of the reporting is considered a best practice within WFP. The target coverage for site monitoring by each area office is between 30 and 40 percent of all active food distribution points, which is well above monitoring targets for WFP elsewhere.

The contextual, programmatic and operational risks in Somalia have made it particularly challenging for WFP to ensure appropriate risk management. With respect to context, the evaluation concluded that WFP adopted a high-risk strategy from early 2009, when it became the only major food aid operator in *al-Shabaab*-controlled areas and significantly scaled up levels of food aid, in conflict with *al-Shabaab's* agenda of agricultural self-sufficiency. There was no contingency planning for possible withdrawal, and insufficient consideration of the consequences of donor policy changes² and the increased risks to vulnerable populations from the withdrawal of WFP food aid in southern Somalia in early 2010.

Insufficient measures were taken to avoid reputational risk. During the 2007-2010 period, WFP adopted unilateral and internal working methods – engaging

only with partners with which it was closely associated – and had a poor record on communications. This was exacerbated by WFP's corporate silence following the various allegations in 2009, and the lack of consultation with partners prior to its withdrawal from *al-Shabaab*-controlled areas in January 2010. The evaluation found a notable absence of a pro-active role on the part of the regional bureau and headquarters, in limiting institutional risk during this period.

The operational risks in south-central Somalia have been very high. WFP was very exposed to these risks and has lost 14 staff members and contractors since 2006. National staff members, especially field monitors, spend long periods in the field and are the main interface between the beneficiaries and WFP.

Portfolio Performance and Results

The performance and results of the portfolio were measured primarily by output-level data, which showed a heavy emphasis on general food distribution. The evaluation fieldwork found general food distribution to be the most problematic intervention regarding accountability and beneficiary value. Recent food-for-assets and nutrition interventions were found to be more rigorous, demonstrated better results – although at very small scales – and were better received by beneficiary populations.

WFP's operations grew substantially during the evaluation period, from 1.47 million beneficiaries in 2006, to 3.20 million – nearly half the population of Somalia – in 2009. This increase was driven by deterioration in the security situation in south-central Somalia, successive droughts and high food prices. Emergency relief, particularly GFD, predominated, with more than 300,000 metric tonnes distributed in 2009. From late 2010, more specific targeting was introduced in order to reduce high inclusion errors. The proportion of nutrition interventions in total WFP activities consequently increased. Other elements of the new strategy were ceasing the provision of special assistance to long-standing IDPs and increasing the use of food for work (FFW) in emergencies, as a targeted alternative to GFD. These have been positive developments that should reduce the food aid dependency associated with certain areas of southern Somalia.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Overall Assessment

Since 2010, much has been achieved to restore WFP's reputation in Somalia and to make the operational priorities more relevant to the challenging context. WFP's weak coherence with state authorities and other humanitarian actors contributed to its loss of credibility during 2009-2010; now WFP is demonstrating greater inclusion of principal stakeholders in its planning processes. Over the latter part of the evaluation period, the connectedness between emergency and transition in programme operations received more attention, as WFP focused on more stable areas where there are opportunities to improve resilience in households and communities.

WFP has made significant progress in improving effectiveness by focusing on targeted nutrition interventions in emergency response. Better use is being made of limited resources, and WFP has engaged

² Until 2010, 60 percent of WFP Somalia's funding came from United States government sources.

more strategically with some principal humanitarian partners. There are, however, still important areas to be addressed, especially improved accountability to beneficiaries, better evidence of the impacts that different food assistance interventions have on food and nutrition-insecure households, and - for future sustainability - the need to build more effective capacity in viable state institutions concerned with disaster risk management and sector planning for education and health.

Recommendations

The evaluation makes five main recommendations with nine sub-recommendations to assist implementation. The recommendations seek to improve WFP's area-based strategies, its understanding of the impact of food assistance on different livelihood groups and the approach to capacity development of both staff and counterparts. They suggest continuing recent initiatives to improve communication, outreach and cluster coordination.



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

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