

Evaluation Brief



Niger: An Evaluation of WFP's Portfolio (2007-2011)

Context

Food security is of primary importance in Niger. Over the last twelve years, cereal production has four times fallen below consumption needs and the country faced three major food crises between 2005-2012. An estimated 7.7 million people were food insecure at the beginning of the 2010 lean season and despite a good harvest the following year, 5.5 million people (of a total population of 15.4 million) were food insecure in November 2011.

During the evaluation period (2007-2011), Niger experienced significant political instability, with direct impact on the country portfolio.

The WFP portfolio in Niger

During the period under review, WFP implemented three Protracted Relief and Recovery Operations (PRROs), two Emergency Operations (EMOPs), and two Country Programs (CPs) for a total combined planned budget of US\$750.5 million (US\$477.5 contributed). Activities were largely determined by the disasters that occurred, most notably the 2010 food crisis.

The initial period covered by the evaluation provided a mix of relief food distributions, nutrition and rural development activities such as support to cereal banks and Food for Work (FFW) activities aimed at enhancing households' resilience. WFP Niger established cash assistance and cash transfers to replace food distributions in 2010. The two CPs also provided support to rural development, school feeding and feeding for HIV/TB affected populations.

Evaluation Questions

The evaluation addressed three main questions:

- ✓ How well the WFP Niger portfolio positioned itself strategically and aligned with government and partner strategies?
- ✓ How well WFP made strategic choices.
- ✓ How the portfolio performed and what results were achieved?

Key Findings and Conclusions

Alignment and Strategic Positioning

From 2007 to 2010, there were serious divergences in strategic orientation between the WFP and the Government of Niger (GON). The government's commitment to self-reliance led it to refuse to acknowledge the existence of high levels of food insecurity. The transitional regime recognized the severity of the impending food crisis of 2010 and the ensuing government continued to attach great importance to food security.

Following the 2010 coup, highly effective working relationships have been established with key government partners related to planning and coordinating food assistance at the national level. The Niger Country Office (CO) also works closely with GON structures at regional level. In 2012 WFP began funding regional and sub-regional food security committees requiring submission of regular field monitoring reports. This new arrangement is increasing local GON's ownership of food security interventions.

Throughout the evaluation period, the portfolio was well aligned with the strategies and goals of its main UN partners, in particular with UNICEF on nutrition issues. Alignment with UNAIDS was also close until WFP assistance to HIV patients stopped due to lack of funding in 2011. Despite weak operational synergy and alignment with FAO, both agencies have recently improved coordination to ensure that communities supported by the WFP's food distributions are also targeted by the FAO's seeds distributions.

Making Strategic Choices

The evaluation found that the response strategies developed by the CO were strongly influenced by the quality of its overall relations with the GON. When the CO was restrained in its programming choices (the CO had to discontinue its FFW activities when the Government prohibited them in April 2007, for example), it opted to implement activities that did not generate opposition on the part of the GON, notably school feeding, cereals banks and support to HIV/TB patients. With new governments in 2010 and 2011, the CO was free to programme major activities in the areas of concern: relief food distributions, blanket feeding and FFW/CFW.

The CO strategically chose to expand the role of cash assistance from 2010 onwards, which resulted in increased efficiency as it entailed lower costs than food distribution (savings of some 39%).

The CO committed to develop appropriate analytical tools and to use them to improve the effectiveness of food assistance. VAM provided assistance related to early warning systems in many critical analyses. Recently the CO developed an innovative analytical framework used for the geographical targeting of cash assistance. WFP plays a key role in food security analysis in Niger.

Portfolio Performance and Results

The evaluation found that the Niger portfolio performed well overall. All activities were relevant and adapted to the changes in the context during the evaluation period. The increasing use of cash as a modality of assistance boosted the portfolio's efficiency. There are however variations among the sectorial activities in terms of effectiveness and impact.

Relief Food distribution and the Education sectors:

WFP's assistance was crucial in saving lives and helping Niger to avoid a major humanitarian disaster. WFP's ability to mount a response reaching 38% of the total Niger population during the 2010 crisis, is impressive in light of the delayed planning due to lack of effective collaboration during the Tandja government period. The evaluation also found that the school feeding activities achieved their stated objectives.

Health and Nutrition sectors:

While blanket feeding (BF) clearly contributed to saving lives, the evaluation found the evidence to be more ambiguous regarding its specific nutritional impact (although 2012 data shows a positive effect on child malnutrition rates). The supplementary feeding programme for malnourished children was particularly pertinent and achieved its main objective of attaining cure rates of minimum 75%. The team could not assess if the HIV support activity helped the patients to attain the target weight gain of at least 5kg during their treatment because data was not collected. On the other hand, the support to TB patients showed generalized treatment success according to the results data provided by the WFP partner.

Rural Development sector:

Despite reducing beneficiary household vulnerability to food insecurity, there were deficiencies in the implementation of FFW/CFW which limited their contribution to improved agricultural productivity. The CO contributed to the development of a national strategy for cereal banks, but assessing the impact of this activity was not possible in the absence of data and defined objectives.

Conclusions and Recommendations**Overall Assessment**

The Niger portfolio contained three distinct implementing phases:

- a) From 2007 to 2010 the CO operated in a heavily constrained environment without GON support for key aspects of its strategy.
- b) In 2010 WFP Niger had to respond rapidly and effectively to a food crisis that dwarfed all other activity, and excluded longer-term planning.
- c) 2011 was the first year in the evaluation period without a major food crisis and with a constructive relationship with the GON. WFP appropriately reassessed its portfolio and initiated a number of key changes that should yield improvements in the portfolio's effectiveness going forward. These included: to expand the registering of beneficiaries of blanket feeding to capture all eligible children in the BF target age range.

Having analysed the various external and internal factors explaining the portfolio results, the evaluation found that the CO leadership and staff dealt successfully with each of the three phases, adopting appropriate intervention strategies in each case.

Recommendations**To the Country Office:**

Recommendation 1. Launch a preventive supplementary feeding pilot programme.

Recommendation 2. Find alternative solutions to the nutritional problems of people with TB & HIV.

Recommendation 3. Establish a multi-year programme to support agro-pastoral activity.

Recommendation 4. Streamline support to cereals banks by defining specific objectives.

Recommendation 5. Strengthen the training offered to school canteen management committee members.

To the Country Office and Headquarters:

Recommendation 6 Increase the age range of children targeted by school feeding activities to include both pre-school children and children enrolled in secondary school.

Recommendation 7. Reduce the number of program categories used by concentrating activities in PRROs with recourse to EMOPs in emergency situations.

Recommendation 8. Move to a longer-term contracting horizon in FLAs with key implementing partners.

To Headquarters:

Recommendation 9. Review WFP information technology systems to deal more effectively with cash transfers.

To the Country Office, government and other partners:

Recommendation 10. Study the feasibility of modifying the Standardized Monitoring and Assessment of Relief and Transitions surveys and the joint household vulnerability surveys to provide more precise detailed geographic analysis.

**Reference:**

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

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