

Evaluation Brief



Republic of Congo Portfolio Evaluation (2009-2012)

Context

The Republic of the Congo is a lower middle-income country of 4.1 million inhabitants in 2011. Years of unrest and civil war have resulted in weak national institutions with limited implementation capacity. Since 2000, the now stabilised country is transitioning from a humanitarian to a development context. The Congo has also been hosting refugees from the region. The Congo's economy has grown significantly since 2008, based on oil exploitation. The country faces development challenges including poor social indicators, food insecurity and inequality. Two-thirds of the country's food needs are imported (94% of cereals requirements).

Scope and Evaluation focus

The evaluation of WFP's work in the Congo covered 2009 to 2012 and seven main operations: 2 EMOP, 2 PRRO, 2 DEV, and 1 SO. The portfolio progressively refocused on recovery, development and capacity-building during the period in review. The four components of activities carried out were: humanitarian assistance, nutritional support, education and a conditional safety-net urban programme.

The evaluation served the dual purpose of accountability and learning and focused on assessing the: i) portfolio alignment and strategic positioning; ii) drivers of strategic decision-making; and iii) performance and results of WFP operations.

This evaluation was of particular relevance as it concerns a small office operating in a middle-income country, whose funding is increasingly coming from the host government. The evaluation also informed the preparation of WFP's new country strategy document (CSD 2014-2018) and country programme.

Key Findings

Alignment and Strategic Positioning

WFP activities were found appropriate and relevant to the population needs, improving strategic positioning and alignment in response to emerging government priorities. The portfolio has been well aligned with WFP corporate objectives, including the shift to food assistance. Although gender was included in most analysis, it lacked depth and gender indicators used in reporting were not necessarily relevant to decision-making.

Making Strategic Choices

WFP's entrepreneurial leadership was acknowledged, but operational constraints (decreasing international funding, Congo's MIC status, Government's increased funding for development activities) were insufficiently recognized and resulted, overall, in a below expectations performance.

Portfolio Performance and Results

Beneficiaries within all components received irregular or incomplete entitlements. Across humanitarian operations, 76% of total planned beneficiaries were reached with 34% of planned tonnage. In education, with 66% of school feeding days reported and 56% of planned food distributed in 2011 (77% / 52% respectively in 2012), this suggests incomplete rations. In the safety-net programme, although 195% of the planned beneficiaries were reached, they received overall only 15% of the value transfer.

WFP's achievement was limited by an ambitious agenda not matched with sufficient resources for implementation. Its recent innovative experience in social protection and national capacity development needs to be consolidated by strengthened technical and operational capacity in service delivery and capacity-building.

Main Lessons Learned

The evaluation identified lessons on the challenges and opportunities of small country offices operating in middle-income countries: (a) especially where funding from host countries is available there is potential for innovating and piloting new approaches, that can feed into the organizational knowledge base; (b) progress at the policy level must be substantiated by solid operational performance, and attention to inputs that will determine the quality and quantity of outputs, is required (in particular staffing, and enhanced monitoring and reporting systems); (c) the need for better coordination between corporate policy making and support given to the implementation at country level to ensure that relevant recent policies are used in design and reflected in implementation.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Operation design and implementation could be strengthened with specific gender analysis and capacity development consideration within every component of activities.

Overall Assessment

Relevance: Appropriately targeted, operations remained relevant, adapting well to the changing context and needs. In education and social protection, WFP has strategically engaged with the Government to support policy development.

Efficiency: Across the portfolio, weaknesses in design, planning, implementation and monitoring resulted in WFP performing below expectations. Earlier constraints of funding and resources have receded in the recent period, with activities predominantly funded by the Government. Efficiency constraints still exist in the area of non-financial resources, which were not adjusted to the changing needs of the portfolio and context.

Effectiveness: In the humanitarian domain, improved nutritional status of refugee populations was recorded but it was not possible to establish whether this can be attributed to WFP activities. There is evidence that nutritional support to PLWHA and TB patients brought improved nutritional recovery and survival/treatment completion rates. In education, WFP-supported schools saw an increase in enrolment and attendance and an improvement in gender parity. It was too early to make an informed assessment of the safety net programme.

Impact and Sustainability: Lack of baselines, change of monitoring indicators, inconsistent outcome monitoring, unfilled gaps in analysis gave WFP a partial understanding of the contribution of food assistance to the food and nutrition status of the population in the Congo, and of the factors for success of interventions. Nonetheless, the close alignment of WFP operations with government priorities, the increasing government involvement in programming and implementation, and the expanded government funding of WFP's operations, constituted important steps toward sustainability.

Recommendations

R1: Conduct an independent formative evaluation of the safety net programme to inform the planned scale-up and identify priorities and strategies for continued support to this area as one of the main components of the new Country Strategy (CSD 2014-2018).

R2: As part of the immediate implementation of school feeding, the country office, in collaboration with partners, should identify elements of the Essential Package that is realistic to roll out in the current programme on a pilot basis, in line with corporate guidance, and to roll out progressively to all WFP-supported schools within the new CSD period.

R3: Before the 2013/14 school year, the country office, in cooperation with the Government and the International Partnership for Human Development, should review the current approach to community cooks' incentives and ensure that appropriate compensation is provided in line with WFP school feeding policy, harmonized among partners and proposed for inclusion in the Government's school feeding strategy.

R4: Ensure the humanitarian assistance component of the new CSD includes capacity development of the Government and operational partners, especially in the area of disaster mitigation and preparedness.

R5: The new CSD, while addressing both humanitarian and development needs, should prioritize capacity development and knowledge transfer; include a transition road map for further increasing government responsibility and takeover of funding; and contain explicit commitments and strategies for enhancing coordination efforts by the Government.

R6: Develop a joint WFP–Government capacity development plan for the priority areas in the new CSD and ensure its inclusion in the detailed planning for component implementation.

R7: Under the framework of the annual performance plan, develop an implementation plan in 2014 for each area of the new CSD that maximizes alignment with WFP and government policies, identifies partners, strategies and targets; strengthens monitoring, and specifies appropriate human resource and funding needs.

R8: Conduct a review of country office staffing needs in light of the CSD priorities in social protection, market analysis, and disaster preparedness and mitigation.

R9: Before the implementation of the new CSD, conduct a comprehensive review of the country office monitoring and reporting practices, based on the new Strategic Results Framework, to strengthen links between data collection, analysis and use of data for decision-making.

R10: Draw up a funding strategy from 2014 onwards to support advocacy with the Government as to the funding of operations and staff in line with the agreed CSD and transition plan.



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