

Evaluation Brief



Central America: An evaluation of WFP's Regional Portfolio (2007-2011)

Context

Out of seven countries in Central America, WFP has a field presence in the following four: El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua. All four are Middle Income Countries (MICs), but economic disparity and poverty remain high. Micronutrient deficiencies are a critical problem in the region, exacerbated by undernutrition and poor dietary diversity.

Those development challenges create a vicious cycle with frequent recurring natural hazards such as hurricanes, floods, droughts and earthquakes – which often translate into disasters for the most vulnerable population.

WFP's Regional Portfolio in Central America

The Office of Evaluation introduces for the first time a Regional Portfolio Evaluation (RPE). This new type of evaluation aims to improve the evaluation coverage of countries with small country offices that have regional operations.

The RPE covers the four WFP regional operations in Central America, covering the four countries from 2007-2011: two regional development projects (DEV) and two regional PRROs. The evaluation also assessed whether the 2012-2013 Regional Strategic Vision developed by the Regional Bureau (RB) sets an appropriate direction.

Implemented under the umbrella of the “Towards the Eradication of Child Undernutrition in Central America and Dominican Republic by 2015” regional initiative, the regional DEVs focused on capacity development for nutrition. The DEVs aimed to generate a knowledge system to elevate the profile of hunger and malnutrition, and to increase government capacity to reduce hunger and chronic undernutrition among 6 to 36 month old children.

The regional PRROs were developed to address the food needs of the most vulnerable while simultaneously building capacity at community level to better cope with the frequent disasters. Prepositioning for contingencies was introduced for faster disaster response. Both PRROs also included food for work (FFW) and beneficiary engagement strategies intended to promote longer-term resilience.

In Honduras and El Salvador, the national governments support operations through Trust Funds.

Objectives and focus of the Evaluation

The evaluation served the dual purpose of accountability and learning. It raises findings and lessons about WFP's work in MICs and countries with

smaller COs. Those findings were included in the synthesis on this topic in the 2013 Annual Evaluation Report.

The RPE focuses on the overall regional portfolio, rather than on individual regional operations, or operations in individual countries.

Key Findings and Conclusions

Strategic Positioning at the Regional Level

Despite the absence of a WFP regional strategy during the evaluation period, or a MIC strategy, the evaluation found that the regional portfolio was strategically positioned in the region between 2007-2011, and was aligned with country objectives. Subsequently, the RB developed a Regional Strategic Vision 2012-2013, which reflected well the operating environment and challenges.

At macro level, WFP aligned well with national poverty reduction efforts, for example by reinforcing civil protection as a component of hazard response, and the regional DEVs increased investment in nutrition. The regional operations complemented country level operations and donors found them an attractive investment mechanism. However, WFP coordination with some humanitarian partners in other areas, such as assessments, could be further harmonized and improved.

Government investment in Trust Funds for WFP activities is evidence of their relevance. But the limited reporting on these activities leads to significant local contributions and related accomplishments being undervalued.

Coherence & Complementarity: Factors driving WFP regional strategy

There was no WFP strategy across the region against which to assess how regional operations would be complementary to or improve the coherence of WFP country level efforts.

Nevertheless, the evaluation found that WFP worked in complement and in coordination with Government authorities across the region. WFP's ability to identify gaps around nutrition and food security, its prioritization of and contribution to emergency response and nutrition was repeatedly recognized as valuable by many partners and donors

Although communication could improve in some instances – notably regarding Trust Funds or on the status of the SUN initiative - the regional portfolio appeared to complement Government and WFP efforts

at national level. For example, the regional food warehouse in El Salvador helped in country-level emergency responses across the region. In addition, the regional PRROs allowed the COs to respond to local hazards in complement to other country activities.

Effectiveness, Efficiency, Sustainability

The greatest limitation to measuring the effectiveness and efficiency of the regional portfolio was the prioritization of programming and service delivery over investment in M&E. The evaluation not only found gaps in M&E across the portfolio, but also gaps in guidance and systems from a corporate level; especially for activities not directly related to GFD.

Despite these gaps, the evaluation found that the regional PRROs exceeded their beneficiary targets and provided effective and efficient services to natural hazard response efforts. However, those efforts did not always reach the most vulnerable and have not yet resulted in sustainable change, as communities are repeatedly affected by similar natural hazards.

WFP's advocacy and capacity development efforts under the DEVs contributed to improved quality of national nutrition programming and there is new investment in nutrition and micronutrients across the region that appears to be sustainable.

Performance & Results of the Regional Portfolio

The overall performance of the regional portfolio derives from the three dimensions above.

Although the regional portfolio was strategically positioned in Central America, the evaluation found difficulties to measure desired medium and long-term outcomes – because outcome indicators were not defined from the outset or tracked consistently across the portfolio. There was a lack of standardization across logical frameworks and reporting within the region, and framework indicators were not necessarily consistent with local VAM indicators and measurements.

Despite the absence of quantitative performance measures, qualitative feedback indicated that WFP has contributed to improved hazard management and response, as well as improvements in the quality of nutrition interventions across the region.

Overall Assessment and Recommendations

Overall Assessment

The evaluation concluded that the regional portfolio was strategically positioned to operate in Central America. However at an operational level, the poor harmonisation of internal systems across WFP offices such as VAM, Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis (CFSVA) or M&E, would enhance opportunities for greater efficiency and effectiveness. This is particularly important for small CO's facing similar contexts.

Despite the limitations in quantitative data, the evaluation concluded that WFP was perceived as a positive partner and as a key resource for addressing hunger and poverty across the region – particularly in times of natural hazards.

Key lessons include: WFP global indicators currently used to measure performance do not correspond sufficiently to the needs of the region or to WFP's choices of responses, such as capacity development. WFP needs a strategy for working in MICs. When international donor assistance declines, successful collaboration with national governments is crucial. Moving beyond service delivery to developing capacities of regional and country partners, (e.g. in logistics) should be continued.

Recommendations.

The evaluation made nine recommendations: five in areas for new action and four to prioritize and continue existing action. To implement them, WFP should ensure that the functions of the Regional Bureau are adequately staffed and funded, in both operational and technical areas.

Recommendation 1.

WFP regional and country operations should ensure that operational planning, implementation, and monitoring efforts target the most vulnerable.

Recommendation 2.

The RB and COs should define WFP's desired role in risk management and the prevention of hazards and their effects.

Recommendation 3.

With significant input from COs and RBs, WFP Rome should develop a global MICs strategy that incorporates needs analysis, planning, budgeting, monitoring and reporting guidance.

Recommendation 4.

WFP should clarify roles and communications among and within WFP offices engaged in regional operations.

Recommendation 5.

WFP should organize a comprehensive evaluation of trust funds in Central America.

Recommendation 6.

WFP should strengthen needs assessments, VAM and M&E so they contribute to regional programme performance and not only to standardized reporting.

Recommendation 7.

The RB and COs should continue to build positive collaboration with governments and regional bodies, and South-South linkages.

Recommendation 8.

The RB and COs should continue incorporating public policy into programme design and implementation.

Recommendation 9.

The RB and COs should continue to work with governments, other regional stakeholders and donors to raise awareness of slow-onset hazards – coffee rust, drought, etc. – across the region and to develop nationally relevant protocols for response.



Reference:

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

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