

Evaluation Brief

WFP Office of Evaluation: *Measuring Results, Sharing Lessons*



State of Palestine: An evaluation of WFP's Portfolio (2011-mid 2015)

Context

The State of Palestine is a lower-middle-income country with per capita GDP of USD 1,600, but one of the highest rates of aid per capita in the world (USD 626 in 2013). In 2011, 25.8% of the population was living below the poverty line. In 2014, poverty rates in Gaza (38.8 %) were more than twice those in the West Bank (17.8%); the 40% unemployment rate in Gaza is double that in the West Bank. Conflicts, political uncertainty, and movement and access restrictions are the main constraints on the Palestinian economy.

The State of Palestine has endured decades of conflict. It is geographically fragmented: the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza are separated from each other. In 2014, the estimated population was 4.8 million; of which Palestinian refugees comprised 44.2%. Food insecurity is a significant challenge, with a captive economy, high prices and threats to livelihoods leaving 27%, or 1.6 million people, food-insecure in 2014: 47% in Gaza and 16% in the West Bank. Food security has been gravely jeopardized by military emergencies in Gaza.

WFP Strategy and Portfolio in the State of Palestine

With the goal of building food security in sustainable ways, WFP's 2014–2016 Country Strategy (CS) focuses on: **i) relief** – meeting urgent food needs; **ii) resilience** – supporting resilient livelihoods and economic activity; and **iii) preparedness** – improving national capacity for emergency response. It includes expanding voucher modality; a conditional voucher programme for agriculture and tree planting; capacity development for emergency preparedness; and deploying cost-effective productive safety nets.

The portfolio under review covered two emergency operations (EMOPs), two protracted relief and recovery operations (PRROs) and two special operations. Its main components comprised relief (general food assistance-GFA), food assistance for assets (FFA), food assistance for training (FFT), school feeding (SF), strengthening logistics, and support the Food Security Sector (FSS).

Beneficiary numbers reached 1.6 million in 2014 – a third of the Palestinian population in the State of Palestine. During the evaluation period, 243,597 mt of food was distributed and USD 60.7 million of food vouchers were redeemed by beneficiaries. The total requirement was USD 704 million, of which only 64% had been received by August 2015, with PRROs accounting for 55%, and each EMOPs and SOs 73%.

Objectives and Scope of the Evaluation

The CPE covered the period 2011–mid 2015. Focusing on the portfolio as a whole, the evaluation assessed: i) the alignment and strategic positioning of WFP's CS and Portfolio; ii) the factors and quality of strategic decision-making; and iii) the performance and results of the WFP portfolio.

Key Findings

Alignment and Strategic Positioning

The portfolio was relevant to the needs of food-insecure Palestinians. WFP was seen by stakeholders as a constructive partner in the development of national policy and strategies. It made an important strategic decision when it chose to design and deliver its activities in close collaboration with the Palestinian Authority (PA). The degree of coherence and collaboration between WFP's portfolio and those of other United Nations and partners varied over time, but the portfolio was appropriately integrated in the UNDAF and other frameworks and implicitly aligned with international humanitarian principles. WFP's relationships with bilateral partners and non-governmental organization (NGO) partners were mostly complementary.

Its alignment and strategic positioning were largely driven by the need to provide relief to help tackle chronic food insecurity while responding to periodic acute crises. It also pursued resilience strategies, intended to help small numbers of needy Palestinians to strengthen their livelihoods. Not helped by the complexity and ambiguity of the international planning landscape, WFP's alignment and strategic positioning were a fluid mix of "humanitarian" and "development" strategies. However, WFP did not take the opportunity to position its food assistance fully within the conceptual and operational framework of social protection.

Factors and quality of Strategic Decision-Making

The challenges of providing effective food assistance in this difficult institutional and operating environment were the principal factors affecting WFP's strategic decision-making. WFP understood and responded to these challenges to a large extent realistically. The CS systematically presented the factors it assessed in determining WFP's proposed approach. But, WFP was not sufficiently realistic about the way it conceptualized and presented 'development' support roles.

Also, WFP's analysis was constrained by limitations on data and analytical capacity. Because of the context, a range of other factors – including the need to help assure the food security of the Palestinian people, the need to pursue resilience strategies, the PA's institutional fragility, and funding shortfalls – often had to take precedence in determining the country office's strategic and operational priorities. However, WFP showed strong strategic responses during the crises that erupted in Gaza in 2012 and 2014. Its experienced and committed personnel demonstrated their ability to think clearly and act decisively at difficult times.

Despite limited staff capacity in nutrition, WFP's strategic decision making on the subject was sound. WFP's analysis of gender issues in the Palestinian context and portfolio was limited but useful. Gender-sensitization trainings and the identification of "gender advocates" culminated in 2014 in the development of a gender strategy.

WFP lacked the institutional and staff skills to tackle the challenges of promoting sustainable livelihoods convincingly.

A lack of corporate guidance, national frameworks for livelihood programming and clarity in programme documents regarding how to rebuild livelihoods contributed to WFP’s inability to secure much funding for resilience activities. There was little synergy between the relief and resilience pillars of the CS, not least because the resilience pillar was weakly developed and the prospects for recovery were so massively constrained.

WFP learned from and acted on beneficiary feedback from its monitoring and evaluation system. Multiple systems were set up to collect the views of beneficiaries of vouchers and in-kind food. WFP’s sophisticated post-distribution monitoring system included checks on beneficiaries’ satisfaction. WFP systems did not readily generate expenditure data in a form that was easy to use for efficiency analysis.

Portfolio Performance and Results

Effectiveness

During the emergencies in Gaza in 2012 and 2014, WFP’s rapid response is likely to have contributed to saving lives, although there is no specific evidence of this.

GFA - WFP’s provision of food in-kind and through vouchers in the West Bank generally improved the food consumption scores (FCS) of beneficiaries. Percentage of voucher beneficiaries with acceptable consumption increased from 68.6 % in 2013 to 83.6% in 2014. There was a sizeable reduction in the proportion of beneficiary households with borderline and poor FCS. However, the FCS of households receiving in-kind GFA eroded over the same period. In Gaza, 77 % receiving only vouchers achieved acceptable FCS by 2015, compared with 36 % of in-kind food beneficiaries. Nearly 91 % of voucher-only beneficiaries had improved their FCS by at least one food consumption category.

FFA/FFT - 26% of beneficiaries had acceptable FCS at baseline, rising to 92% at the time of intervention but falling to 60 % ten months later. Funding shortfalls reduced the FFA activity in 2014 and the evaluation considered the effectiveness of FFA efforts as limited. FFT activities implemented in a small-scale for women in the West Bank showed limited economic returns.

School Feeding – Ration days were cut periodically in the West Bank from 2012, and school feeding ceased in Gaza in May 2014 due to funding shortfalls. Retention rates were already high and did not change. Concentration and learning ability fluctuated, according to the anecdotal evidence.

Nutrition and Gender – The portfolio did not have a separate mother-and-child health and nutrition component. WFP produced a strategic plan for nutrition and food technology and supported the Ministry of Health by providing technical assistance demonstrating innovative models e.g. Nutrition Awareness Campaign (NAC) which was perceived by beneficiary respondents to make a real difference to women’s self-image and empowerment.

Capacity-development – There were substantial achievements in capacity-development work on emergency preparedness and productive safety nets with the PA and on disaster risk reduction with the Palestinian Civil Defence.

Targeting – WFP targeted its beneficiaries carefully and well, while targeting criteria remained relatively simple. Households selected on the basis of poverty and food insecurity were categorized only by size, with no further differentiation of needs among beneficiary groups.

Efficiency

The cost of in-kind food assistance was USD 74.4 per person

compared with USD 91.1 for the voucher modality. However, vouchers were more effective than in-kind support at improving outcomes as indicated by the FCS score. Achieving an improvement in a household’s FCS category – (between ‘poor’, ‘borderline’ and ‘acceptable’) cost twice as much through in-kind food assistance as through vouchers. CO improved the logistics efficiency of its programming.

Sustainability

WFP made valuable progress, building capacity, systems and ownership within the PA for a social protection framework. However, its efforts to build resilience in livelihoods showed little evidence of sustainable results.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Overall Assessment

WFP maintained its reputation for capable logistics in the delivery of in-kind food assistance, and contributed to a growing recognition for competence and innovation. Reflecting a commendable commitment to innovation and learning from ongoing experience, development of the electronic voucher modality was a high point of WFP’s performance in this portfolio. Good choices were made about where and for which beneficiaries to use the in-kind food, voucher or, occasionally, combined modalities, based on appropriate but comparatively simple criteria.

Recommendation 1. The CO should redefine the focus of its food assistance in the State of Palestine as support to the assurance of food security, and thus the protection, and not building, of livelihoods, within a nutrition-sensitive national social protection framework, mitigating the erosion of assets and increasing indebtedness. This focus includes the promotion of preparedness to meet acute food security challenges.

Recommendation 2. The CO should provide technical advisory services to PA in development of policy and implementation approaches for i) school feeding; and ii) labour intensive public works.

Recommendation 3. The CO should develop staff profiles – including job descriptions – to combine the existing high operational competence with stronger strategic competence in social protection, maintaining the flexibility to respond to acute as well as chronic challenges.

Recommendation 4. The CO should refine the targeting of households whose food security will be supported by the national social protection system, so that beneficiary sub-groups are assisted according to the level of poverty, food security as well as the household size.

Recommendation 5. The CO should develop monitoring and analytical systems for: i) more comprehensive and routine analysis of the efficiency of its operations and more thorough comparative analysis of the efficiency of modalities; and ii) careful specification of solid and feasible outcome-level monitoring of the effects food assistance on livelihoods protection.

Recommendation 6. The CO should advocate and seek resources for expansion of the NAC to all food assistance beneficiary households in the State of Palestine.

Recommendation 7. The CO should consult the other relevant United Nations agencies in the State of Palestine to confirm their respective roles in the field of nutrition, advocate for adequate resourcing and fulfilment of these roles, and confirm the specific mandate of WFP in this field.

Reference:

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