

Evaluation Brief

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



Mauritania: An evaluation of WFP's Portfolio (2011-2015)

Context

Mauritania is a lower-MIC and food-deficit country with 3.5 million inhabitants and an immense – 1 million km² – and mainly arid territory. About 31% of the population lived below the poverty line in 2015 (down from 42% in 2008). The urbanization rate of more than 48% is very high for the region.

Prone to climate change and shocks, Mauritania is also vulnerable to security and migratory risks due to regional instability. Three major crises occurred during the evaluation period: i) a severe drought in 2011-2012; ii) a security crisis in Mali in 2013, causing about 75,000 people to seek refuge in Mauritania; and iii) a second drought in 2014-2015. These crises contributed to worsen the food security and nutrition situation during the period. According to official records, 13 % of the Mauritanian households are severely food-insecure; during the lean season which last 5 to 6 months in a year, about 20% households are chronically food-insecure. Fluctuating from 13 to 20%, the prevalence of global acute malnutrition (GAM) is often above emergency levels. Mauritania relies heavily on cereal imports, thus is also affected by fluctuations of international prices. In 2015, the country's cereal production covered only 30% of the needs.

WFP's Portfolio in the Mauritania

WFP's Country Strategy 2011–2016 focuses on three strategic objectives: i) to improve coordination and consultation; ii) to reduce risks and create national capacity to prevent and manage crises; iii) and to invest in human capital.

During 2011-2015, assistance was provided through 2 country programmes (CP), 5 emergency operations (EMOP), 2 protracted relief and recovery operations (PRRO) and 3 special operations (SO) with total funding \$282 million (51% of requirements). WFP provided relief assistance for refugees and drought-affected populations; school feeding; nutrition interventions (moderate acute malnutrition - MAM treatment and Blanket Feeding); Food-Assistance-for-Assets (FFA); a resilience project through the Adaptation Fund of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change; and logistics augmentation; and air services (UNHAS). Cash transfers were partly used for relief assistance (GFA) and FFA.

Objectives and Scope of the Evaluation

The evaluation covered WFP's Country Strategy (CS 2011-2016) and portfolio in Mauritania between 2011–2015, addressing three key questions: i) strategic alignment and positioning; ii) factors and quality of strategic decision-making; iii) performance & results.

Key Findings

Alignment and Strategic Positioning

The evaluation found the portfolio broadly relevant and aligned with the needs of women and men and with government policies, particularly on social protection and food security to which formulation WFP contributed. However, WFP lost sight of some of the country strategy objectives such as sector-specific capacity development in preparedness, early warning and nutrition during the period.

Portfolio strategy was relevant, combining community-level social protection and promotion of economic activities for chronically food-insecure populations with interventions contributing to reducing malnutrition levels, including in refugee populations.

The programmatic approach was appropriate and relevant to contextual changes: combining a gradual shift from assistance based on household vulnerability with a diversification of assistance modalities (cash and in-kind), and a more rigorous identification of refugees.

WFP's strategic directions were highly consistent with those of donors, United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations particularly for REACH initiative, the National Social Protection Strategy and the Country Resilience Plan.

Largely due to its standard design, WFP's country strategy was not sufficiently useful to steer operations for effectiveness and efficiency.

Factors influencing and Quality of WFP's Strategic Decision Making

Strategic decision-making was based on an effective and relevant food and nutrition security monitoring and analysis, which was also crucial to sector actors when determining their strategic directions. However, the gender analysis was inadequate and national dependence on WFP's support has not diminished.

WFP played a positive role in humanitarian coordination, particularly in logistics and food security work. Cash transfers were found to be dynamic and innovative and the country office's new resilience approach was appropriate and adapted to the Mauritanian context.

Nevertheless, decision-making was adversely influenced by funding constraints for all portfolio activities, except for cash-based transfers, nutrition and refugees; rapid turnover of country office management and inconsistent distribution of responsibilities within the country team in 2012–2013. Competition for funds hampered UN collaboration and the coordination of institutional support including at operational level. However the situation improved from 2014.

Portfolio Performance and Results

Overall, portfolio activities reached 665,000 beneficiaries including 75,000 Malian refugees and slightly more women than men (52 percent). Cash transfers covered 59% of GFA beneficiaries, including refugees and 39% of FFA beneficiaries.

With contribution from WFP's intervention and other actors' efforts, GAM incidence was reduced from 20% in 2013 to 9.9% in 2015 among [Malian refugees](#).

[GFA](#) coverage for drought-affected populations varied across modalities and over the period. Cash transfers were widely used in 2011 (100% of actual versus planned transfers) but declined to 30% as funding dropped after 2014. In-kind transfers often arrived late, negatively affecting seasonal GFA interventions. But there were positive but limited effects on food consumption scores (FCS), with end-of-operation FCS of 34% to 54% of their initial values, against a target of 20%.

Due to funding constraints, [school feeding](#) coverage was low at 27% and rations distributed only for 2-4 months a year. The number of WFP-assisted schools dropped from 1,673 in 2014 to 487 in 2015. There were limited opportunities for a fruitful strategic dialogue due to frequent changes of leadership in the line ministry. However the end of the reporting period was marked by a renewed interest from the government authorities.

Coverage of [nutrition](#) was adequate for MAM treatment (79 to 100%) but highly inconsistent for Blanket Feeding for the prevention of acute malnutrition, which started late in 2012 and reaching 80% coverage, but was suspended in 2013. The weak integration of WFP-assisted nutrition centres with healthcare facilities led to the application of different admission criteria from those of the National Nutrition Protocol for MAM treatment, making it difficult to measure nutrition outcomes.

[FFA](#) also suffered from funding shortages, leading to reduced implementation of activities in 2013 and 2014. Positive initiatives were started such as the introduction of a demand-led approach to targeting based on vulnerability analysis and the use of the Community Participatory Planning. There were however some weaknesses in the design and implementation including insufficient technical control which undermined the sustainability of the assets created

Conclusions and Recommendations

Overall Assessment

Relevance, consistency and alignment: WFP activities were relevant and appropriate to the national context, but coverage and allocations of resources were not always proportional to needs among activities. The portfolio made good use of cash transfer modalities and adopted a new resilience strategy in line with national and WFP policies. However, less attention was given to building national sectoral capacities than was anticipated in the Country Strategy.

Ultimately, the mismatch between WFP's ambitions for the portfolio and funding availability led to difficulties in operationalizing the chosen strategies, particularly at the end of the period.

Effectiveness and efficiency: Assistance to Malian refugees was effective, and the collective efforts of the humanitarian community contributed to reduce the incidence of GAM. There were mixed results for assistance to Mauritanian populations, characterized by unpredictable implementation of school feeding, FFA and Blanket Feeding, serious delays for seasonal GFA and Blanket Feeding and quality limitations, particularly for MAM treatment. Efficiency declined due to a high turnover of country office management as well as weakened human resource capacities following funding shortfalls.

Connectedness and sustainability: Internal and external synergies were pursued, but their achievement was hampered by financial constraints and unpredictable implementation of activities. Sustainability of social safety nets (multi-annual transfers, school feeding and nutrition) was low because of limited government ownership of WFP-supported orientations. The fragile sustainability of FFA reduces impact prospects.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. WFP should focus on supporting the national social safety nets programme, particularly linking these transfers to explicit objectives for addressing the underlying causes of malnutrition, based on updated gender and food security and nutrition analysis, including food consumption practices.

Recommendation 2. WFP should contribute to strengthening the national food and nutrition security monitoring and early warning systems.

Recommendation 3. WFP should strengthen efforts to improve the institutional environment for nutrition through coordinated efforts with UN agencies and other development actors towards increased dialogue among the national institutions in charge of nutrition.

Recommendation 4. The country office should enhance the governance, quality and sustainability of its resilience approach.

Recommendation 5. WFP's school feeding support should be made conditional on securing Government commitment to funding a national SF programme

Recommendation 6. The country office should concentrate its activities geographically in fewer willayas and reinforce synergies among activities.

Recommendation 7. WFP should stabilize and strengthen the country office's human resources by reinforcing capacities in nutrition, gender, education and rural development and by encouraging the continuity of international staff in key management positions.

Reference:

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