

# Evaluation Brief

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



## Iraq: An evaluation of WFP's Portfolio (2010-2015)

### Context

Iraq is an upper-middle-income country, ranking 121st out of 188 in the 2015 Human Development Index. However, the sharp drop in global oil prices in 2015 and the ongoing security crisis have had significant repercussions on the national economy and food security. In 2014, an estimated 22.5 percent of the 35.87 million inhabitants were already living below the poverty line.

During the evaluation period, peace was not sustained and political tensions and insecurity prevailed. A gradual escalation of violence peaked in 2014, causing massive displacements and triggering an abrupt shift in international support to Iraq. By the end of 2015, 3.2 million people were displaced, with 3 million more living in areas controlled by the terrorist organization known as Daesh. The 2016 Iraq Humanitarian Response Plan indicated that nearly one-third of Iraq's population – 10 million people – required humanitarian assistance, of whom 2.5 million required food assistance.

### WFP's portfolio in Iraq

The WFP portfolio between 2010 and 2015 consisted of seven operations with a total budget of over US\$375 million. In 2014 it underwent a major shift to emergency operations, triggered by the events causing massive displacements.

Between 2010 and 2015 total portfolio expenditure was approximately US\$354 million, of which the majority (US\$291 million) was spent on emergency operations. Emergency and relief/recovery operations received 74 percent and 78 percent respectively of the planned budget requirements, while the development programme received only 12 percent. Humanitarian Response Plans provided the common framework for humanitarian response, with over 33 percent of total HRP funding in 2015 going to WFP and the Clusters it leads.

Designed during a period of peace, the country strategy (2010–2014) was guided by the principle that, as Iraq was a relatively prosperous middle-income country, WFP's role should be to support the authorities in achieving more effective and transparent use of their resources for solutions to food insecurity.

### Objectives and Scope of the Evaluation

The evaluation covered WFP's Country Strategy (CS 2010–2014) and portfolio in Iraq between 2010–2015, assessing three key questions: i) strategic alignment and positioning; ii) factors influencing and quality of strategic decision-making; iii) performance & results.

### Key Findings

#### Strategic Alignment and Positioning

Formulated during a period of peace, the country strategy was appropriately designed to begin the shift in WFP's role from "implementer" to "enabler" through development support to government authorities in strengthening national social protection systems, including reform of the Public Distribution System. The strategy was both relevant to Iraq's humanitarian and development needs at the time and coherent with the Government's national objectives and policies.

With the onset of the recent crisis, and dwindling donor support for development initiatives in Iraq, the country strategy became somewhat redundant. WFP successfully realigned the portfolio to respond to humanitarian needs, and established strategic alignments with UN partners (e.g. UNICEF, UNFPA, UNHCR) as part of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Level 3 system-wide emergency response.

#### Factors and quality of Strategic Decision-Making

The evaluation found a significant gap in the evidence base used to inform decisions on WFP support: since the start of major displacements in late 2014, neither a comprehensive assessment of national vulnerability nor an in-depth food security or household economic survey of displaced people had been conducted. To its credit, the country office took the major strategic decisions necessary for scaling up to a Level 3 emergency response, despite the limited reliable and up-to-date evidence. Targeting of a mobile population, especially an urban one, was a challenge. Considerable staffing shortages, including in core senior positions, high staff turnover and deployment delays during the emergency response had impacts on operational efficiency and contributed to a lack of consistency in approaches and decision-making.

#### Performance and Results

The evaluation found that programme performance was mixed. In the early part of the evaluation period, WFP and its partners assisted the Iraqi population in all the governorates with the greatest needs, albeit to a lesser extent than originally planned, because of operational challenges and funding shortfalls.

WFP used its comparative advantage and substantial logistics expertise to support a significant number of internally displaced persons across a broad geographical area, despite access constraints and security issues.

It positioned itself strategically alongside its United Nations partners, both responding to the immediate humanitarian needs and introducing more flexible support modalities, such as cash-based transfers.

WFP was widely appreciated for its recent use of cash based transfers to support internally displaced persons in a cost-efficient manner and identified opportunities to consolidate its strong position in this sector.

Social safety net activities, notably school-feeding, were less successful, being placed on hold or falling short of targets. This, together with a shortage of funding and lack of government ownership of the necessary reform agenda, contributed to the early curtailment of WFP’s capacity development activities.

### Efficiency

The CO procured a total of 191,400 mt of food commodities and distributed CBTs for a total value of some US\$80.9 million. The overall net cost per ton of food commodities was 30-40% above WFP’s corporate average. The evaluation considered this justified, given that 82 percent of the total tonnage was made up of expensive but appropriate family food parcels and immediate-response rations and the delivery-at-place trade terms without which commodities would not have been deliverable. Savings were made (15%) by changing the type of packaging for family food parcels. CBTs proved to be more cost-efficient than food - direct operation costs for distributing a net value of US \$100 of CBTs were between 3 and 7 times lower than costs to distribute an equal net value of food. Cost-control measures resulted in a saving of almost 31 percent on CBT distribution costs under the EMOP, compared to the PRRO.

### Gender

At the beginning of the period evaluated, programme design, implementation and advocacy lacked gender analysis and failed to address gender gaps, for example, in the attendance of girls in the school feeding programme. This improved from January 2015 with a dedicated officer to ensure gender accountability and protection considerations were taken into account.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

### Overall Assessment

With the onset of the crisis, the Country Strategy was rendered redundant. Overall, WFP interventions during the evaluation period were well aligned with emergency humanitarian needs, and the policies and objectives of the Government of Iraq and donors in addressing ongoing social safety net and development needs.

Performance was found to be mixed. WFP did use its comparative advantage and large logistics expertise to support a significant number of IDPs across a broad geographical area. It positioned itself strategically alongside its United Nations counterparts, both responding to immediate humanitarian needs and promoting and introducing more flexible support modalities in a challenging operational context. However, poor performance of social safety net activities, coupled with the changing context led to early curtailment of development activities.

**Recommendation 1.** The Country Office should rapidly prepare a new Country Strategy that acknowledges the protracted nature of the conflict, is based on national and localized partnerships and includes reoriented capacity development interventions for targeted safety net programmes and gender considerations.

**Recommendation 2.** In addition to the planned CFSVA, the country office should undertake a detailed gender-disaggregated assessment of beneficiary livelihoods, food security, nutrition and economic status.

**Recommendation 3.** WFP should resolve issues preventing the resumption of school feeding activities that are currently on hold. WFP should strengthen its support to national and local authorities for a government-led programme.

**Recommendation 4.** The country office should move from FFPs and vouchers to the use of cash transfers as the preferred transfer modality, wherever feasible.

**Recommendation 5.** The country office should prioritize the recruitment and placement of national and international staff to fill core positions. WFP should consider a review of corporate human resources recruitment and deployment practices in a Level 3 environment.

**Recommendation 6.** The country office should formulate and implement a more communicative and inclusive participatory approach to partnerships with the Government, cooperating partners and beneficiaries.

**Recommendation 7.** WFP should ensure that all future Level 3 responses have adequate M&E and VAM capacity in place to ensure the availability of national food security mapping and analysis on which beneficiary targeting and strategic and operational decision-making can be based.

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### Reference:

Full and summary reports of the evaluation and the Management Response are available at [www.wfp.org/evaluation](http://www.wfp.org/evaluation)  
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