

WFP Assistance to Malawi Country Portfolio Evaluation

Context

Malawi saw between 2000 and 2008 phases of extreme crisis and instability and of recovery accompanied by gains in food security, economic stabilization and strengthening of governance including Malawi's aid architecture. This period was characterized by emergencies on two occasions – in 2001/02 and 2005/06 – triggered by a combination of external shocks and political/technical factors and static poverty and human development indicators, showing modest or no gains over this period. At the same time, the country saw improvements in food security (availability) as a result of agriculture input subsidies and strengthening of the overall policy framework and management. Institutional capacities and macro-economic performance improved, with the Government taking greater ownership and increasingly playing a stronger role in aid coordination. And, as emergency situations declined, food aid became a politically more sensitive issue.

WFP's Assistance to Malawi

Between 2000 and 2008, WFP implemented 12 operations in Malawi with a total of over 950,000 mt of food with a value of US\$556 million. During this period the Programme saw a massive scale-up of its operations in response to the droughts in 2005/06.

The main objectives of the operations were: i) saving lives in emergencies; ii) protecting livelihoods; iii) (re)building livelihoods; iv) reducing severe and moderate malnutrition of vulnerable groups; and v) improving educational achievements. The portfolio included operations of all of the four programme categories of WFP.

The main programme activities were food for work/assets, nutrition and school feeding, which took place under the various programme categories.

Objective and Scope of the Evaluation

The evaluation had the dual objectives of accountability and learning. It addressed the following three questions:

- How well did WFP position itself strategically and align with government and partner strategies?
- How did WFP make choices and how strategic were these?
- How did the portfolio perform, and what were its results?

The evaluation covered the period 2000-2008. It was carried out between September 2008 and May 2009 by a team of four evaluators.

The evaluation report was presented to the Executive Board in November 2009.

Key Findings of the Evaluation

Alignment and Strategic Positioning

Programmes were closely aligned with the Government. They contributed to food security by strengthening policy frameworks, institutional capacity and government efforts. WFP worked within the Government's policy framework and priorities and used government systems. All three programme activities (food for work/assets, nutrition, and school feeding) were well aligned, and emergency and logistics activities were well integrated into government and partner responses.

Good alignment with the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF). The current UNDAF shows a close collaboration between organizations, including WFP, but the evaluation has concerns about the implementation of these plans. In practice good cooperation exists during emergencies between WFP, FAO and UNICEF, and with others in the area of HIV and AIDS, but is not guaranteed in other areas.

WFP played a strategic role in the emergency responses of 2001/02 and 2005/06. WFP's capacity to scale up its country presence and response capacity during the emergencies underpinned the Programme's recognized strength and strategic role in emergencies. This strategic position led to tangible and positive outcomes in the delivery of services. WFP is recognized by the Government and its partners for the central role it played.

Changing circumstances demand adaptation and a changing role. After the emergencies were over and Malawi moved into recovery mode, WFP's role did not enjoy unanimous approval from all parties it worked with during the evaluation period covered, especially during periods of transition and recovery. The Government and partners alike felt that WFP's comparative advantage was in emergency response and that it was time for the Programme to scale back. At the same time, WFP's programmes remained well aligned with government priorities after the emergencies, as is shown in the delivery of food inputs into the Government's humanitarian, social protection and development priorities. However, WFP was not in a position to maintain leadership, or carve out a clear role in this changing context, even less so as dwindling resources weakened the country office's capacity for strategic positioning of the Programme or for innovative programming.

Making Strategic Choices

Robust analyses and subsequent choices during emergency periods. WFP has a clear corporate mandate for emergency operations supported by robust planning, analytical and technical assessment capacity on food security and emergency issues. WFP made a substantive contribution to the overall situation analyses used by partners, played an important role developing and coordinating the international response, and used the results of these analyses in its own emergency responses. WFP played a lead role in this respect and supported the humanitarian community at large.

The analysis underlying programme activities was less robust, with unevenness between and within operations. For the programme activities the link between analyses, strategic choices and programme design was not as clearly defined. For a number of programme activities, the operational strategies did not differentiate between emergency and non-emergency situations, and appeared based on the assumption that the difference lay in terms of scale. Situation analyses that should have informed choices about operational strategies were not systematically used and often not updated over time so that they appeared to miss important changes and trends that should have informed programmatic choices.

Portfolio Performance and Results

General Food Distribution

The WFP logistics system delivered food assistance to Malawi programmes in an efficient and effective manner throughout the evaluation period and under rapidly changing conditions. To minimize pipeline breaks and ensure timely delivery of food assistance, WFP exchange significant quantities of food between various ongoing programmes. The Joint Emergency Food Aid Programme created at the initiative of WFP evolved into an effective and well-developed coordinating, planning and delivery capacity.

Nutrition

WFP's approach to malnutrition combined addressing underlying causes of malnutrition with curative measures, using programme categories to complement each other. However, a dynamic context would have required more adaptation, especially when the emergency situation receded.

Supplementary feeding programmes consistently achieved and/or exceeded Sphere standard indicators for recovery of children, but the same was not the case for therapeutic feeding programmes.

WFP's programmes in nutrition and institution-based HIV and AIDS relied heavily on the capacity of the Ministry of Health and the Christian health Association of Malawi with whom WFP maintained a robust working relationship.

A variety of interventions targeted a similar beneficiary profile in Malawi with limited clarity how the programmes were coordinated.

School Feeding

WFP provided much appreciated institutional and policy support to the education sector, but other investments into the sector's development are lagging behind.

WFP's school feeding objectives focused on access to education and showed positive results. It reached on average 330,000 children per year since 2000 and contributed to enrolment rates that were about 40 percent higher than comparator schools.

However, the evaluation also observed problems with the monitoring systems that limited the extent to which programme performance can be monitored and managed.

Food for Work/Assets

Food for work/assets is part of WFP's food security strategy in Malawi. 75 percent of resources for this activity were spent on public works for employment creation; an activity carried out instead of general food distribution. Activities for livelihood recovery did not receive the same level of support.

The schemes that were carried out produced significant and tangible assets, which were valued by communities.

Projects appeared to have a broad base of beneficiaries, many of whom received training related to the use and maintenance of the assets by the NGO implementers. WFP supported the creation of national networks and made effective use of them during implementation.

Distribution of benefits from most productive assets has depended on ownership patterns with the community and provided differentiated access to assets and their benefits to different community members. Shorter term benefits from, say, irrigation schemes, were valued more than those from longer-term investments into community forests.

Overall Assessment

Alignment and strategic positioning. WFP was clearly aligned to and working in the context of the Government's systems, which it supported and strengthened during phases of crises and during recovery. The alignment exists also with United Nations partners, through the UNDAF, and cooperation took place during emergency situations – albeit such coordinated efforts cannot be taken for granted. WFP played a strategic role in line with its core mandate of responding to emergencies, but found it more challenging to re-invent itself after the emergencies through a transition into recovery. This challenge was, in part, caused by the country office's reduced capacities as funding was scaled back. This led WFP into a vicious circle of declining resources and contradictory positions taken by partners, where programme choices were driven as much by funding cuts as by WFP's own strategic decisions.

Making strategic choices. WFP was well equipped to undertake the necessary analytical work in the emergency context and use the information in operational and logistics decision-making. However, analytical work for programme activities and its translation into programme strategies and design was less strong. Experience varied by sector, with nutrition finding a good combination of using the different programme categories to meet complementary programme objectives. This was less so for other programme activities. Also in this area, the challenge of shifting from emergency to recovery was noted, which would have required changes to programme strategies and their design.

Portfolio performance and results. WFP's portfolio performed well in emergency situations, demonstrating its strong logistics capacity. The performance of the other programme activities showed positive outcomes in the areas of supplementary feeding, where Sphere standards were met or exceeded over the last five years, and in school feeding, where improved enrolment rates and greater inclusion of girls was attributed to school feeding. Therapeutic feeding faced challenges in reaching Sphere standards, but more so due to circumstances whereby children entered the feeding programmes only once severely weakened and normally with other complications. Food for work/assets worked well in emergency situations as a complement to general food distributions, but showed mixed performance when used in livelihood recovery, when its performance depended on funding – which in emergency situations was switched to other programmes – and on ownership and access to the assets created.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1 The forthcoming country strategy should specifically address WFP's role in Malawi's recovery process. It should be based on

- Based on credible analytical work and agreements among partners in government and elsewhere, to the extent possible,
- Present WFP's contributions to the Government's social protection plan, and
- Stress long-term efforts to reduce dependence on food assistance.

Recommendation 2 The resource implications of the country strategy should be spelled out clearly, including requirements to meet demands to play a different role in recovery.

Reference: Full and summary reports of the Evaluation are available at: <http://www.wfp.org/about/evaluation>
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