

Nepal: An Evaluation of WFP's Portfolio (2002-2009)

Context

During the past decade, Nepal was characterized by high levels of food insecurity, high poverty and malnutrition rates, food price inflation, and periodic droughts and floods, and was host to about 100,000 Bhutanese refugees. A decade of civil conflict came to an end with the signing of a Comprehensive Peace Accord in 2006, but political tension has continued. By 2009 there were more than 3.5 million highly food-insecure people in Nepal; more than half of the population of 27 million is estimated to live on less than US\$1.25 per day. The predominant livelihood system is rainfed agriculture, which employs three-quarters of the labour force.

The WFP portfolio in Nepal

WFP has assisted Nepal since 1963; from 2002 to 2009, it implemented 15 operations, worth US\$282 million, with the aims of saving lives, investing in disaster preparedness, protecting and rebuilding livelihoods, reducing malnutrition, improving educational outcomes and developing government capacities. The Nepal CP and the PRRO for conflict-affected populations constitute the two largest expenditures, accounting for 29 and 38 percent respectively. Food assistance to Bhutanese refugees accounted for 27 percent of the portfolio budget. WFP implemented five EMOPs, with 6 percent of the budget; four were in response to flooding, and one to drought. While some programmes in the portfolio focused on capacity development of government ministries, many activities were implemented through non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Objectives and Scope of the Evaluation

The evaluation served the dual objectives of accountability and learning. It enabled the Nepal country office to make informed strategic decisions for its next country strategy and to improve ongoing operations.

The evaluation covered the period 2002-2009 and was carried out between February and June 2010 by a team of independent evaluators.

The evaluation report was presented to the Executive Board in November 2010.

Although WFP attempted to address medium-term livelihood recovery needs, constraints related to multi-year funding for more development-oriented interventions prevented better alignment. Government capacity development has become a priority for both donors and the Government, but is not consistent with WFP's approach of working primarily with NGOs for FFW/food-for-assets (FFA) interventions.

WFP has been a strategic partner for NGOs and United Nations and donor agencies, because of its operational capacity, geographical reach and willingness and ability to support programme synergies.

Key Findings and Conclusions

Alignment and Strategic Positioning

The objectives of the portfolio were well aligned with the WFP global Strategic Objectives in the WFP Strategic Plan (2008–2013) and with the Government's concerns and the population's needs. WFP provided assistance to remote food-insecure populations, and was one of the few organizations that continued helping communities throughout the conflict period. In 2006, signing of the CPA ushered in a new phase of WFP programming. From 2006 to 2008, WFP activities were aligned with the Government's Three-Year Interim Plan, focusing on peacebuilding, reconstruction, rehabilitation and reintegration. During this period, WFP began a strategic shift towards using NGO partners to facilitate rapid response. Since 2009, however, while continuing to address the short-term needs of food-insecure populations, WFP has been constrained in addressing the underlying causes of chronic food insecurity, now clearly a government priority.

Making Strategic Choices

WFP has made a number of effective strategic choices regarding geographical coverage, programme categories and content, partnerships and delivery channels. In the early 2000s, it had a sizeable CP in place, which provided a platform for expanding the coverage of a development programme from 2002 to 2003, through FFW/FFA, and for keeping operations going in an environment where others withdrew.

Nepal's civil conflict prevented the Government from working in certain areas of the country, making it imperative that WFP work with NGOs to deliver its programmes in those areas. The repositioning of emergency response equipment and resources under the 2005 special operation was credited with facilitating a swift response to the 2006 drought in western Nepal. WFP was able to scale up when the CPA was signed, and moved FFA/FFT from the CP into the PRRO – a programme modality specifically suited for transitional programming.

Spreading resources across a wide area worked well in providing as many people as possible with a peace dividend after the signing of the CPA. However, it made it more difficult to achieve sustainable livelihood recovery objectives; greater programme concentration is now needed to address chronic food insecurity.

Although WFP has made significant investments in nutrition and has increasingly taken the lead in implementation, it is not seen as a key player in nutrition in Nepal and has been slow to engage in policy dialogue. It still has to position itself more strategically with bilateral agencies, as a partner with the capacity to address nutrition challenges.

Minimizing overlaps among beneficiaries of the various operations has limited the opportunities for synergy in the overall programme portfolio. Where overlapping occurred, participants acknowledged that food security improved, children were healthier and households migrated less.

WFP Nepal's food security studies to improve the targeting of its resources to the most food-insecure populations were commended. WFP's vulnerability analysis and mapping system currently manages the most comprehensive food security monitoring system in the country, developed in collaboration with the Government, civil society and local expertise in food security analysis.

Portfolio and Performance Results

Relevance. WFP support to Bhutanese refugees, in conjunction with UNHCR, prevented a major humanitarian crisis from becoming worse, and is seen as a significant contribution by the Government.

WFP is recognized as one of the most important emergency response agencies in Nepal because of its geographical reach, logistics capacity and ability to mobilize resources quickly.

Since the early 2000s, WFP has had a sizeable programme in the midwest and far west regions, giving it a platform for providing support to food-insecure populations located in conflict-affected areas where the Government of Nepal had withdrawn.

Given the high burden of malnutrition and iron-deficiency anaemia in Nepal, WFP's MCHC programming and distribution of micronutrient powder (MNP) have been highly relevant to the population's needs.

WFP school feeding programmes are implemented in areas with high levels of food insecurity, poor maternal and child health indicators, and large gender disparities in primary school enrolment.

Effectiveness and impact. WFP demonstrated its comparative advantage in emergency, protracted relief (including refugee operations) and early recovery situations. Food assistance was efficiently and effectively delivered, and WFP produced positive outcomes with its food-for-work/-assets/-training, nutrition and education interventions and its general food distributions.

WFP's support to refugees has been highly effective, and has adapted appropriately to changing situations while maintaining the nutrition status of the camp population.

WFP food assistance through FFW/FFA/CFA has helped food-insecure people to meet immediate food needs and has mitigated negative coping strategies. Significant impacts in increased income, reduced migration and reduced use of credit for food purchase were shown in 2008 and 2009.

Implementation of MCHC in selected wards of selected VDCs across nine districts has spread the intervention too thinly; impact is not visible at the district level.

The Food for Education and Girls' Incentive Programme (GIP) components have been successful in increasing attendance and enrolment. GIP has proved efficient in retaining girls in school after first grade, when many traditionally drop out.

Sustainability. Sustainability of the food security monitoring system, which was developed by WFP and is being institutionalized in the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, is an area of concern. It has been heavily funded by external actors, and it is doubtful that the Government of Nepal will be capable of providing sufficient funding to sustain its current functions. Given external agencies' utilization of the system, it is reasonable to suggest that they take on some responsibility for funding over the long term.

The country office felt that it was important to engage in livelihood recovery in its transition programming. However, the timeframe for activities was too short to restore essential productive assets sustainably, and a lack of multi-year funding made it difficult to maintain recovery-focused activities.

The sustainability of MCHC outcomes is related to building the capacity of Ministry of Health and Population staff and behavioural change in communities; activities have been fully implemented since only 2008/09 and their impact has yet to be seen.

Food-for-education activities are likely to be sustainable because they are already integrated within the Ministry of Education. The programme has also improved the Government's capacity in food transport and management, and led to improvements in infrastructure and school facilities.

Recommendations

For Future Country Strategy

Recommendation 1. The next country strategy should consider engaging in longer-term productive safety nets.

Recommendation 2. The next country strategy should develop a comprehensive integrated life-cycle approach to nutrition.

Recommendation 3. The next country strategy should maintain an emergency response capacity.

To improve current country portfolio

Recommendation 4. Reintroduce local-level procurement of traditional staples.

Recommendation 5. Refine WFP's nutrition/MCHC programming further, and demonstrate the impact.

Recommendation 6. Combine FFE and GIP activities with other education improvement activities.

Recommendation 7. Select partner NGOs with greater transparency and clear selection criteria, because of high politicization.

Recommendation 8. Foster women's participation within the country office and among cooperating partners.

Recommendation 9. Enhance WFP's role in policy dialogue.

Recommendation 10. Strengthen monitoring and evaluation of programme activities.

Recommendation 11. Identify regions where local production is sufficient to allow local procurement without causing shortages or market distortion.

Reference: Full and summary reports of the Evaluation are available at: <http://www.wfp.org/about/evaluation>
For more information, please contact the WFP Office of Evaluation