



Evaluation of Ecuador WFP Country Strategic Plan 2017-2021

CONTEXT

Ecuador is an upper-middle-income country with high levels of inequality and chronic malnutrition; about 52 percent of the population has inadequate access to nutritious food. Food insecurity in Ecuador is correlated with socioeconomic vulnerabilities, such as those related to gender and rurality. The country is highly vulnerable to disasters and climate change. In recent years Ecuador has experienced the impact of the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic and the arrival of large numbers of Venezuelan migrants.

SUBJECT AND FOCUS OF THE EVALUATION

The country strategic plan for 2017-2022 placed particular emphasis on complementing national social protection systems, supporting smallholder farmer households, fostering climate change adaptation and resilience and broadening humanitarian response through inclusion of Venezuelan migrants in direct assistance activities. The CSP was originally structured around four strategic outcomes (SOs), with a fifth introduced in 2020 to address WFP focus areas of resilience building, crisis response and root causes.

With a needs-based plan of USD 41,597,853, the CSP was initially intended to reach 175,950 beneficiaries. Since 2017, the CSP has been revised six times to target 1,791,269 beneficiaries, with a budget of USD 197,247,946. As of 31 December 2021, the CSP was 72 percent funded, with emergency response accounting for 79.4 percent of allocated resources.

OBJECTIVES AND USERS OF THE EVALUATION

The evaluation was commissioned by the independent Office of Evaluation to provide evaluative evidence for accountability and learning to inform the design of the next WFP CSP in Ecuador. It covers WFP activities implemented for the period 2017 until August 2021.

The evaluation was conducted between April 2021 and June 2022. It assessed WFP's strategic positioning and role and the extent to which WFP has made the strategic shift expected by the CSP; WFP's contributions to strategic outcomes; efficiency; and factors that explain WFP performance. The main users for this evaluation are the WFP Ecuador Country Office, the Regional Bureau for Latin

America and the Caribbean, WFP Headquarters technical divisions, the Government of Ecuador and other stakeholders in the country.

KEY EVALUATION FINDINGS

WFP's strategic position, role and specific contribution based on country priorities and people's needs as well as WFP's strengths

The CSP has been relevant to needs of food insecure and vulnerable populations and national priorities and has allowed WFP to position itself as a key player in the area of food security. However, too limited attention was paid to chronic malnutrition, breastfeeding practices and obesity.

WFP has managed to successfully adapt to contextual changes, including the influx of migrants and refugees and to Covid-19, assisting around 9 times the original number of planned beneficiaries during the reference period.

By means of the identification of synergies and complementarities, WFP successfully partnered with a broad range of other UN organizations, both for emergency response activities and activities addressing root causes.

Extent and quality of WFP's specific contribution to CSP strategic outcomes in Ecuador

Under **Strategic Outcome 1** assistance to refugees, displaced persons and vulnerable Ecuadorians, WFP's response including Covid 19, implied a significant scale-up of assistance. The assistance achieved improvement in terms of beneficiaries' access to food, yet behavioral change in terms of feeding practices was not notably enhanced.

Under **Strategic Outcome 2** to enhance productivity and incomes of targeted smallholder farmers, CSP activities had a positive effect on capacities and incomes of farmers, yet obstacles for them to access public contracting schemes prevailed. WFP provided effective capacity strengthening for the consolidation of the national school feeding programme. Nevertheless, various challenges related to budgeting and programme management at decentralized level at the time of this evaluation had yet to be overcome.



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Under **Strategic Outcome 3**, enhanced capacities to adapt to climate change, WFP has contributed to ensure that national plans included climate change adaptation as a means to combat food insecurity. At community level, activities have experienced significant delays. Also, the assets built in those communities were little diversified. On the positive side, various activities under this outcome have benefited from innovative approaches. Emergency preparedness and response activities have been effective and were delivered in synergy with the governments' response.

Under **Strategic Outcome 4** strengthened capacities of national institutions and programmes, a broad range of evidence generation, capacity development and technical assistance activities have informed public policies and social dialogue related to food security.

Under **Strategic Outcome 5**, WFP's service provision to humanitarian partners in Ecuador was adaptive and leveraged efficiencies in terms of the country-wide Covid-19 response.

Cross Cutting Areas

Substantial progress was achieved for the integration of gender across the CSP, yet WFP has not sufficiently attended to risks specific to men and more generally fell short to mitigate protection risks. WFP in Ecuador has adhered to humanitarian principles and has duly accounted to beneficiaries for its activities.

Environmental do-no-harm approaches have gained importance during the CSP period, but they have not yet been fully mainstreamed.

Nutrition sensitive approaches have been applied across the CSP's strategic outcomes, although the lack of a behavioural change strategy limited effectiveness in this field.

Capacity strengthening, evidence building and new partnerships have been important contributions to ensure the sustainability of WFP activities. However, additional efforts are required to successfully institutionalise local procurement schemes and ensure maintainance of assets.

Shortcomings were noted in terms of the humanitarian-development nexus. The limited inclusions of resident populations among targeted beneficiaries has been a missed opportunity to address xenophobia. Also, WFP could have better pursued synergies among the various CSP activities, notably regarding its emergency response and smallholder farmer support.

WFP's efficient use of resources in contributing to CSP outputs and strategic outcomes

Most CSP activities, with the exception of those benefiting climate change adaptation, have been implemented in a timely manner. This included WFP's response to Covid 19. Overall, WFP's targeting has been adequate, albeit insufficient finetuning regarding host populations.

Additional benefits and unforeseen payments for partners caused a net increase of the cost per beneficiary. New collaborative arrangements with UN entities envisage cost savings. Although the move to one sole CBT-redemption provider constituted a measure to reduce costs, beneficiaries were disadvantaged, with the provider charging higher retail prices.

Factors that explain WFP performance

The CSP design was based on evidence, yet pragmatic considerations drove changes during implementation. Often those changes were caused by contextual developments, to which WFP reacted with high levels of operational flexibility despite the limited flexibility of mobilized resources. Human resource profiles did not consistently align to programmatic requirements of the CSP; and strategic outcomes have been largely managed in silos.

Partnerships have been strengthened and were innovative, but further attention is needed at suboffice level.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall Assessment

WFP's CSP in Ecuador has constituted a relevant and adaptable framework, that has allowed WFP to ably deliver on its dual mandate (humanitarian and development) addressing the needs of the most vulnerable with high levels of alignment to national priorities with the exception of nutrition.

The CSP has enabled WFP to position itself as a lead agency in humanitarian assistance, responding with high operational flexibility and optimal timeliness to multiple emergencies that threatened food security, including the influx of Venezuelan migrants and the Covid 19 pandemic.

WFP's contributions to the 2030 Agenda went beyond the sphere of crisis response, with activities effectively addressing root causes and importantly contributing towards enhanced resilience and climate change adaptation. However, timeliness and optimal effectiveness in this area have been affected by various shortcomings.

The CSP has moved forwards on the integration of gender equality and women empowerment approaches and accountability to affected populations. With regards to humanitarian protection, the CSP needs to direct more attention to the various risks threatening male and female migrants.

The structure of the CSP was conducive to the intended strategic shift of WFP in Ecuador. However, the CSP's envisaged shift from a project orientation towards a more integrated approach did not materialize. Synergies among strategic outcomes and the reduction of transaction costs were not observed during the evaluation.

Programmatic performance analysis has not been integrated with data on financial resource management and challenges to knowledge management and monitoring have led to limited evidence-based planning and decision making, learning and accountability, to the detriment of the visibility and sustainability of WFP's interventions in Ecuador.

Recommendation 1. Strengthen the triple nexus and protection approach of WFP's response in Ecuador, leveraging on existing protection systems and alliances

Recommendation 2. Capitalize on WFP's strategic position and learning to continue to support public policy design and implementation

Recommendation 3. Review the CSP structure to include a clear definition of coordination mechanisms, in order to enhance synergies between strategic outcomes

Recommendation 4. Nutrition to be addressed as a crosscutting topic for the new CSP, emphasizing chronic malnutrition, obesity prevention and promotion of breastfeeding

Recommendation 5. Improve the integration of the performance monitoring system, financial tracking and programme management

Recommendation 6. Strengthen staff capacities in crosscutting areas, particularly in gender, protection, nutrition, monitoring and climate change