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Evaluation Reports

For consideration

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Summary Evaluation Report – Mauritania Country Portfolio (2011–2015)

Executive Summary

This country portfolio evaluation covered all WFP operations in Mauritania from 2011 to 2015. It assessed strategic positioning and alignment of the WFP portfolio; factors in and quality of WFP's strategic decision-making; and the performance and results of the portfolio. The dual aims of the evaluation are accountability and learning. The evaluation was timed so that lessons learned and recommendations could inform the formulation of a new country strategy.

Response to the drought in the Sahel in 2011/12 and arrivals of Malian refugees since January 2012 shaped WFP's portfolio in Mauritania over the evaluation period. A strategic shift occurred in 2014 with adoption of a resilience-building strategy.

WFP's responses to crises and its resilience-building strategy were relevant to the country context. However, it tended to lose sight of the capacity-development objectives of the country strategy (2011–2016) formulated at the start of the evaluation period. WFP's portfolio was aligned with national policies and complemented the national response to the 2011 drought, but when pursuing its national capacity-building objectives, WFP faced the complexity, instability and limited decentralization of national institutions. In both its operations and its technical dialogue with the Government, the country office aligned itself with WFP's overall orientation towards diversification of assistance modalities. Despite strategic coherence with other United Nations agencies, little progress was made towards achieving common institutional support goals. However, WFP contributed to social protection initiatives of the World Bank, including school feeding.

WFP's strategic decision-making was supported by an effective and regular food-security monitoring system, but national dependence on WFP's support has not diminished. Competition for resources and operational tensions strained relations between United Nations partners in 2012 and 2013. Although the situation has improved, effective collaboration remains limited. Shortcomings in strategic continuity were exacerbated by the unstable human resources in the country office, particularly at the management level. Learning and innovation efforts were concentrated on cash transfer activities. The monitoring and

In line with the Evaluation Policy (2016–2021) (WFP/EB.2/2015/4-A/Rev.1), to respect the integrity and independence of evaluation findings some language contained in this report may not be standard WFP terminology; please direct any requests for clarification to the WFP Director of Evaluation.

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evaluation system was inadequate, but was strengthened with support from the Regional Bureau from 2014. Inadequate funding strongly influenced the direction of WFP's portfolio. Funding of emergency operations in 2012–2013 was characterized by strong support for cash transfers and nutrition activities. WFP's programming does not seem to have anticipated the region wide reduction in emergency funding observed from 2014.

WFP's assistance to Malian refugees was effective, improving their food consumption and contributing to sharp reductions in the incidence of acute malnutrition. The effectiveness of assistance to food-insecure Mauritanian populations varied widely across activities and over time. With the exception of activities supporting the treatment of moderate acute malnutrition, and unconditional cash transfers in 2012 and 2013, WFP faced difficulties in implementing its planned activities, and synergies among activities – which the country strategy 2011–2016 rightly emphasizes – could often not be achieved. The strategy had to contend with inconsistent implementation of individual activities, and despite the stated intention to focus interventions, they remained geographically dispersed. Sustained efforts were made to improve the targeting of food assistance, and efforts to strengthen resilience activities continue. Major constraints linked to inadequate referrals to the healthcare system constrained performance of the nutrition component, while the ineffective Country Office monitoring system hampered the measurement of outcomes.

The evaluation recommends that WFP refocus on its initial strategy objectives of 2011, which were to build national institutional capacities, taking into account the changing context.

Draft decision*

The Board takes note of “Summary Evaluation Report – Mauritania Country Portfolio (2011–2015)” (WFP/EB.A/2016/7-B/Rev.1) and the management response in WFP/EB.A/2016/7-B/Add.1, and encourages further action on the recommendations, taking into account considerations raised by the Board during its discussion.

* This is a draft decision. For the final decision adopted by the Board, please refer to the Decisions and Recommendations document issued at the end of the session.

Introduction

Evaluation Features

1. The Mauritania country portfolio evaluation (CPE) covered WFP's country strategy (2011–2016) and actions implemented from 2011 to 2015. It was conducted by an independent team of evaluators between June 2015 and February 2016 and is based on document review and interviews with about 350 stakeholders. Its dual goals are to support accountability and learning. The evaluation was timed so that lessons learned and recommendations could inform the formulation of a new country strategy. Like all WFP CPEs, it is structured around three main questions:
 - the alignment and strategic positioning of WFP's portfolio;
 - factors and quality of, WFP's strategic decision-making; and
 - the performance and results of the portfolio.

Context

2. Mauritania lies at the border between the Arab Maghreb and the western Sahel, with 3.5 million inhabitants and an immense – 1 million km² – and mainly arid territory. The urbanization rate of more than 48 percent is very high for the region. Mauritania context was dynamic during the evaluation period. In 2014, Mauritania was classified as a middle-income country,¹ but revenues have shrunk since the fall in prices of export commodities. Official statistics report considerable poverty reduction, from 42 percent of the population living below the poverty line in 2008 to 31 percent in 2015. Poverty remains a highly rural phenomenon, with 44 percent of rural people living in poverty compared with 16.7 percent of people in urban areas.² However, some social indicators, including access to education, reversed or stagnated during the evaluation period: the gross enrolment rate was 76.8 percent in 2014 against 90.8 percent in 2008.³ In 2014, Mauritania ranked 139th of the 155 countries in the gender inequality index.⁴
3. Mauritania faced two major crises during the evaluation period: a severe drought in 2011, leading to a sharp rise in food insecurity and malnutrition, which then remained well above their values prior to the period under evaluation (Figure 1); and, starting in 2012, arrivals of refugees – 73,000 in 2013⁵ – fleeing insecurity in Mali. Risk factors associated with both crises persist. Mauritania is particularly vulnerable to climate change and shocks, and to security and migratory risks caused by regional instability.
4. These crises have attracted international attention, with a 30 percent increase in development assistance from the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development in 2012 related to the regional security conditions arising from the Malian crisis. However, humanitarian funding declined sharply in 2014, with 41 percent of the consolidated appeal needs met in 2014, compared with 62 percent in 2012.⁶

¹ World Bank. http://data.worldbank.org/about/country-and-lending-groups#Lower_middle_income

² *Enquête permanente sur les conditions de vie des ménages* [household survey], 2014.

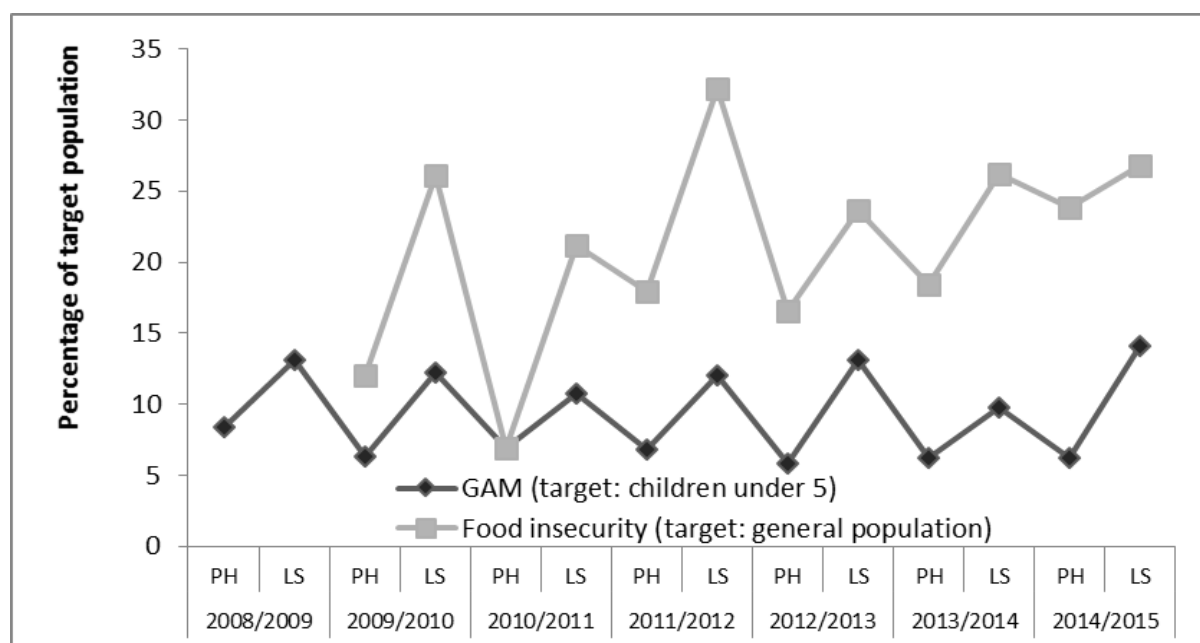
³ *Recensement général de la population et de l'habitat* [general census], 2014.

⁴ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). 2014. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/gender-inequality-index-gii>

⁵ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR): <http://data.unhcr.org/SahelSituation/settlement.php?id=86&country=501®ion=66>

⁶ Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) financial tracking system.

Figure 1: Changes in prevalence of acute malnutrition and food insecurity between 2009 and 2015



Source: United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), national Standardized Monitoring and Assessment of Relief and Transitions (SMART) surveys; WFP Food Security Monitoring System (FSMS) surveys 2008–2015. PH = post-harvest, survey in December of the first year; LS = lean season, survey in June of second year.

The WFP Portfolio

5. The evaluation period was marked by the 2011 adoption of the country strategy 2011–2016, focusing on three strategic objectives for WFP in Mauritania: improve coordination and consultation; reduce risks and create national capacity to prevent and manage crises; and invest in human capital.
6. WFP has implemented 12 operations in Mauritania since 2011 (Figure 2). In 2014, it started implementation of the *Projet d’amélioration de la résilience des communautés et de leur sécurité alimentaire face aux effets néfastes des changements climatiques* (PARSACC, Project for Improving Communities’ Resilience and Food Security to Overcome the Adverse Effects of Climate Change) through the Adaptation Fund of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. WFP’s entire portfolio in Mauritania amounted to USD 553 million, of which USD 282 million was resourced. This is a modest figure for a WFP country office with so many operations.
7. The three phases of WFP’s activities during the evaluation period corresponded to the evolving context, shifts in WFP’s programming priorities, and the country office’s management phases:
 - In 2011, country programme (CP) 100290 ended and CP 200251 was formulated, guided by the country strategy for 2011–2016.
 - In 2012–2013, WFP launched emergency operation (EMOP) 200333 and others⁷ in response to the 2011/12 drought, but efforts were concentrated on EMOP 200438 in response to the arrival of Malian refugees. During the evaluation period, the nutrition and rural development components of CP 200251 were transferred to EMOP 200333. In 2013, protracted relief and recovery operation (PRRO) 200474 was launched to support recovery; and air services were established between Nouakchott and the main cities in the south through special operations (SOs) 200406 and 200803.

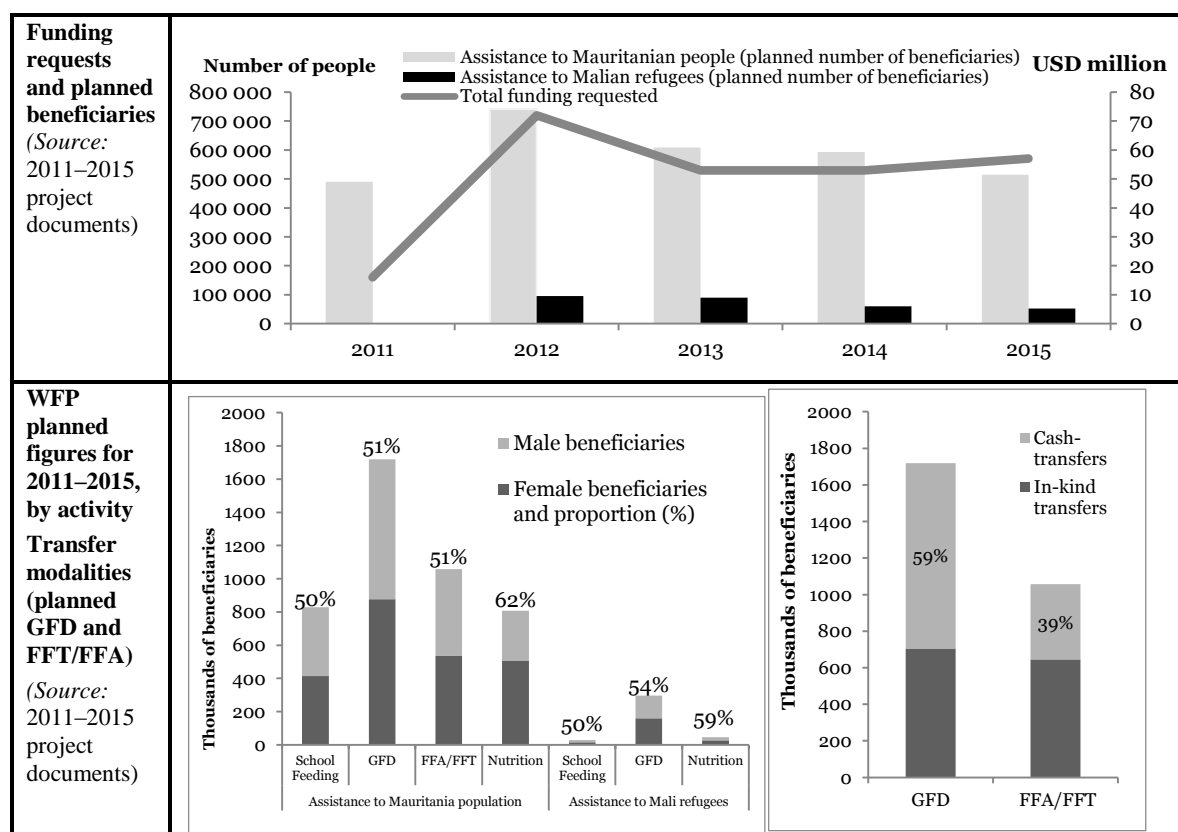
⁷ Including immediate-response EMOPs (IR-EMOPs).

- In 2014–2015, WFP adopted strategies for addressing chronic food and nutrition insecurity among Mauritanian populations and building their resilience to shocks; and for supporting assistance to Malian refugees, including by introducing emergency school feeding and engaging in discussions on the evolution of food assistance modalities.

Figure 2: Timeline of WFP’s portfolio, 2011–2015

| Year | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 |
|--|---|--------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|
| Country office management | Country Director 1 | Country Director 2 | Acting Country Director | Country Director 3 | |
| Strategic Results Frameworks (SRFs) | SRF 2009–2013 | | | SRF 2014–2017 | |
| | Country strategy 2011–2016 | | | | |
| | United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF 2012–2016) | | | | |
| Major events for WFP in Mauritania | Strategic Framework for Poverty Reduction (CSLP III 2011–2015) | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| WFP operations | CP 102090 (funded at 71%) | (since 2003) | | | |
| | | CP 200251 (funded at 11%) | | | |
| | | IR-EMOP 200034 (funded at 84%) | | | |
| | | EMOP 200333 (funded at 63%) | | | |
| | | IR-EMOP 200370 (funded at 86%) | | | |
| | | PRRO 200474 (funded at 54%) | | | |
| | | PRRO 200640 (funded at 23%) | | | |
| | | PARSACC (4 years) | | | |
| | | IR-EMOP 200401 (funded at 76%) | | | |
| | | EMOP 200438 (funded at 69%) | | | |
| | | SO 200406 (funded at 83.5%) | | | SO 200803 (funded at 64.8%) |

AGIR = Global Alliance for Resilience Initiative; EMEL = Government’s emergency food programme; FFT = food assistance for training; JAM = joint assessment mission; NSPS = National Social Protection Strategy; PRP = poverty reduction programme; SABER = Systems Approach for Better Education Results.



Main Evaluation Findings

Portfolio Alignment and Strategic Positioning

8. WFP has been responsive in adapting its programme to the changing context, particularly the crises affecting Mauritania between 2011 and 2015. In doing so, however, it has tended to lose sight of some of the objectives of the country strategy for 2011–2016. Geographical targeting has been supported by regular monitoring of food and nutrition insecurity (Table 1).

| Geographical area | | Prevalence of GAM and food insecurity (FI), 2015 | | | Change in FI since 2011 | WFP activities | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------------|------------|--|----------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|----------------|---------|-----------|-----------|-----|------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----|------|---------|-----------|-----------|---|
| | | FI (%) | GAM (%) | | | 2011 | | | 2012–2013 | | | 2014–2015 | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | GFD | VFRs | FFT/FFA | Nutrition | School Fd | GFD | VFRs | FFT/FFA | Nutrition | School Fd | GFD | VFRs | FFT/FFA | Nutrition | School Fd | |
| Mauritanian population | Guidimaka | 29.1 | 18.1 | Slight deterioration | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • |
| | Gorgol | 25.6 | 17.1 | Deterioration | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • |
| | Assaba | 28.0 | 15.5 | Improvement | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • |
| | Hodh el C | 41.1 | 14.2 | Improvement | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • |
| | Hodh el G | 28.8 | 12.7 | Strong improvement | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • |
| | Brakna | 16.2 | 16.9 | Deterioration | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • |
| | Tagant | 12.1 | 14.5 | Severe deterioration | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • |
| | Trarza | 15.9 | 7.2 | Slight deterioration | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • |
| | Nouakchott | 29.3 | 7.1 | Strong improvement | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • |
| North | 13.6 | 7.1 | Slight deterioration | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | |
| Refugees (Mbera) | | | | | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | |

Sources: FSMS and SMART surveys (2011 and 2015), project documents.

- *Wilaya* targeted and activity performed. [A *wilaya* is an administrative unit in Mauritania.]
- *Wilaya* targeted but activity not performed.

9. The objectives of ongoing PRRO 200640 are relevant to the analysis of food and nutrition insecurity. They are based on a longitudinal analysis of food insecurity over five years, and a sound formulation process. They aim to combine, at community-level social protection preserving food consumption and protecting livelihoods during the lean season, with the promotion of economic activities targeting chronically food and nutrition-insecure populations.⁸ Assistance to Malian refugees, which focuses on reducing malnutrition, was relevant to the high prevalence – 20 percent – of global acute malnutrition (GAM) among refugees in 2013. Planned changes,⁹ which combine a gradual shift to assistance based on household vulnerability with a diversification of assistance modalities, are relevant to contextual changes, including more rigorous identification of refugees.
10. However, WFP's strategic shifts have been sporadic. Until 2014, too little attention was paid to school feeding, partly because of changes in the Ministry of Education. Following the transfer of nutrition and food-assistance-for-assets (FFA) activities to EMOP 200333, school feeding was disconnected from the rest of the portfolio in 2013–2014. Sector-specific capacity development, mainly in nutrition, but also in food and nutrition security analysis, did not receive the attention it deserved, particularly in 2012–2013 when other operational demands absorbed most of the country office's capacity. Under EMOP 200333, the use of village food reserves (VFRs) as a mechanism for distributing food during the emergency threatened the fragile gains made by this tool, which was originally intended for crisis prevention. General food distributions (GFDs) were somewhat inconsistent: they were suspended in mid-2013 when PRRO 200474 switched to FFA, and resumed in mid-2014 under PRRO 200640, with no change to the target group.
11. WFP's portfolio was aligned with national sectoral policies for food security, nutrition and social protection, and supported their formulation. However, support to national institutions was less consistent than envisaged in the country strategy 2011–2016. As well as internal factors, a major difficulty in operationalizing this support was related to the complexity, instability and limited decentralization of Mauritania's institutional arrangements. Responsibilities for nutrition are divided among the ministries of health and of social action, family and children and the *Commissariat à la sécurité alimentaire* (CSA, Food Security Commission). This fragmentation, combined with weak involvement of the CSA in moderate acute malnutrition (MAM) treatment and prevention programming, limited the possibilities for institutional support at the central level and reduced the effectiveness of support to local coordination.
12. For rural development, overlaps between the mandates of the CSA and the Ministries of Agriculture and Livestock limited WFP's collaboration with the CSA to the monitoring of certain activities, which often did not meet the criteria for feasibility. Institutional changes in the Ministry of Education contributed to difficulties in dialogue on school feeding. In contrast, WFP's valuable inputs to technical dialogue with the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Development should be noted for their support of implementation of the National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS, 2012) and the associated *Tekavoul* programme, which draws on WFP's experience in cash-based transfers and targeting. A high degree of complementarity was also noted between WFP's cash-based transfers and the food distributions and subsidized sales used in the Government's response to the 2011–2012 crisis.
13. WFP's portfolio in Mauritania conforms to WFP's global policy frameworks and sectoral policies, particularly through its use of a wider range of transfer modalities and, since 2014, its alignment with the resilience strategy promoted by the regional bureau.¹⁰ WFP's gender policy (2009) was gradually implemented, particularly for targeting women and involving them in activity governance, especially in PRRO 200640. Attention to humanitarian principles was clearly integrated into assistance to Malian refugees,¹¹ but was less evident in strategies for

⁸ PRRO 200640 project document.

⁹ WFP-UNHCR, 2015, Joint Assessment Mission.

¹⁰ WFP. 2013. *Roadmap for a regional approach for West Africa*.

¹¹ Materialized through efforts towards host communities, approaches to people with specific needs, priority to mother and child malnutrition.

assisting Mauritanian populations, despite the inequalities and social tensions affecting these populations.

14. The analysis underlying the country strategy (2011–2016) was relevant to the country context, but inadequate in terms of gender analysis. Only limited use was made of this analysis because of the instability affecting the country office over the period (paragraph 18) and the lack of connection between the country strategy and WFP's global strategic plans.
15. WFP's strategic directions were highly consistent with those of donors, United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). This consistency led to the pursuit of joint objectives with UNICEF in support of Renewed Efforts Against Child Hunger and Undernutrition (REACH) and with the World Bank in supporting implementation of the NSPS from 2012; resumption of the technical dialogue on school feeding, culminating in support of the Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER) workshop in October 2015; and the Country Resilience Plan formulated in 2015 and taking into consideration guidelines developed by WFP in 2014.

Factors and Quality of Strategic Decision-Making

16. WFP monitoring information on the food situation is essential to sector actors when determining their strategic direction.¹² However, during the 2011–2012 food crisis, WFP reduced the priority given to strengthening the capacities of the *Observatoire national de la sécurité alimentaire* (OSA, National Food Security Monitoring System) although OSA needs WFP's capacity-building support to reinforce its technical autonomy; address the limited availability and poor quality of complementary livestock and crop data; disaggregate data to increase their usefulness at the operational level; and address the limited attention to pastoral issues, limited analysis of the causes of food and nutrition insecurity, limited independence of OSA, and weak implementation of the *Cadre harmonisé* (Harmonized Framework).
17. Relations within the United Nations system were difficult between 2011 and 2013, including over competition for funds from the Central Emergency Response Fund. WFP's relationship with UNHCR regarding assistance to Malian refugees was strained until 2013,¹³ when it returned to normal. Inter-agency coordination has improved markedly since then, although joint efforts at the operational level are confined to a Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)/WFP/UNICEF programme, with limited operational collaboration. Leadership issues, and weaknesses in some agencies contending with the crises of 2012 and facing difficulties in financing activities hampered collaboration and the coordination of institutional support at both the central and decentralized levels.
18. Management of WFP's country office suffered from rapid turnover during the period: in five years, there were three Country Directors, an officer in charge and two periods with no Country Director (Figure 2). There were also inconsistencies in the distribution of responsibilities within the country team in 2012–2013, with considerable recourse to consultants. These three factors, together with a distant – or even conflictual – relationship with the regional bureau in the middle of the period, hampered the continuity of programme objectives and partnerships.
19. Stakeholders emphasized WFP's positive role in humanitarian coordination, particularly in logistics and food security work. However, despite making efforts, WFP struggled to involve itself in all of the many technical coordination groups related to its areas of work, some of which were relatively inactive.
20. WFP's activities were supported by efforts to innovate and learn, which varied among activities and periods. Cash transfers were dynamic and innovative after 2011, with the piloting of new modalities for transfers and targeting verification modalities. In 2015, the country office tested the use of WFP's new beneficiary registration and transfer management platform (SCOPE). For PRRO 200640 the country office is adopting the resilience support guidelines promoted by

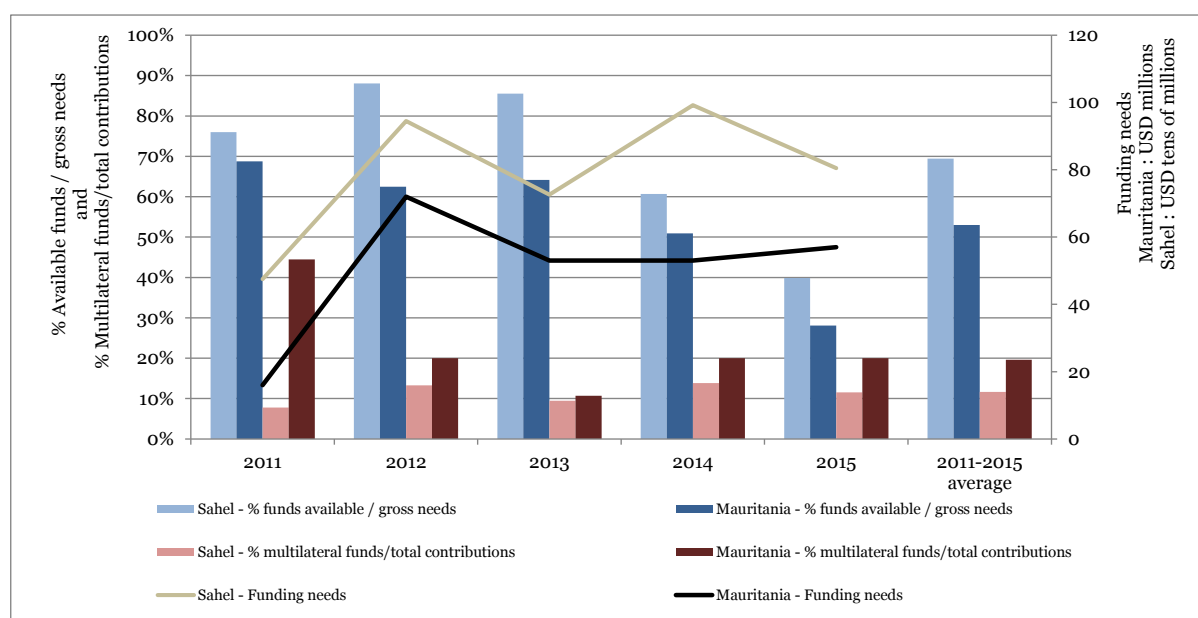
¹² According to interviews with donors and representatives of famine early warning systems, United Nations agencies, NGOs and government agencies, and evidence from WFP monitoring information underpinning the National Food Security Strategy, the National Resilience Plan, United Nations strategic response plans and Harmonized Framework analyses.

¹³ Covered by the 2013 internal inspection.

Headquarters and the regional bureau for integrated context analysis and seasonal livelihood programming, and participatory community planning. Learning and dissemination efforts have concentrated on the cash element and PARSACC, while a 2011 VFR assessment has not been widely used. Weaknesses in the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system – incomplete application of WFP standards, and shortcomings in the data collection and analysis systems – were identified during the evaluation period and have been strengthened with the regional bureau’s support since 2015. Nevertheless, the Standard Project Report (SPR) format does not produce a clear picture of the implementation of operations, particularly regarding the seasonality of activities.

21. Following 2011, when the WFP portfolio was cut back in response to limited funding (Figure 2), WFP received strong support in 2012–2013, particularly for cash-based transfers, nutrition and refugees. Despite a wide-ranging fundraising strategy, more severe financing difficulties than those of neighbouring countries (Figure 3) have been a feature of WFP’s portfolio in Mauritania. These funding difficulties, worsening in recent years despite efforts to manage and diversify donors, reflect a tension in aligning strategic and programmatic objectives with available funding.

Figure 3: Level of portfolio funding and recourse to multilateral funding: comparison of Mauritania with neighbouring countries



Source: WFP, Project Resource Overview.

Portfolio Performance and Results

22. Effectiveness of the portfolio was highly variable over the period; overall portfolio activities reached more women – 52 percent of beneficiaries – than men.
23. After a difficult start in 2012, assistance to Malian refugees (Figure 4) has been effective. Planned rations were distributed, apart from in 2015, when WFP suffered delayed deliveries for food donations. WFP prioritized in-kind distributions, based on an alpha-value study in 2013,¹⁴ but this survey was not updated in 2014. In 2013, *Action contre la faim* (ACF) tested cash transfers as a way of enhancing food diversification.¹⁵ WFP will introduce them in 2016.¹⁶ A system adapted to people with specific needs¹⁷ was adopted in 2013. To prioritize prevention and

¹⁴ The 2013 cash feasibility study for M’bera camp, Mauritania used a different methodology from WFP’s other calculations of alpha value in the period.

¹⁵ ACF. 2013. *Réponse humanitaire d’urgence en Mauritanie: Crise alimentaire au Guidimakha et crise des réfugiés maliens*.

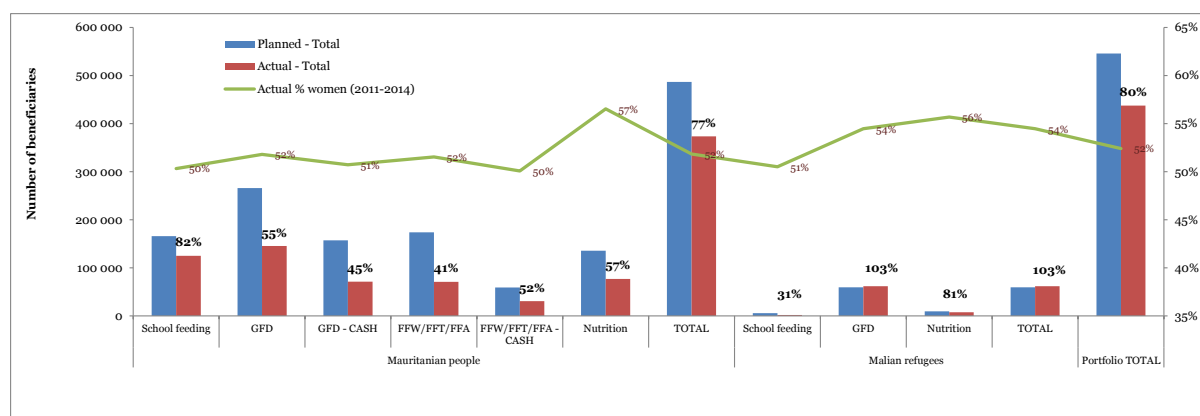
¹⁶ WFP’s records indicate that since 2013 interest in diversifying modalities as a way of securing supply has increased; in 2014 it was suggested that WFP and UNHCR link their cash transfer and supply systems.

¹⁷ System to avoid queues during distribution.

treatment of mother-and-child malnutrition, children in various age groups were targeted by MAM treatment, blanket feeding and emergency preschool and school feeding, with some overlap in target groups for blanket and preschool feeding. Along with other actors' efforts, WFP's intervention helped to ensure adequate food consumption and reduce GAM incidence from 20 percent in 2013 to 9.9 percent in 2015.¹⁸

24. Effectiveness of assistance to Mauritanian populations was mixed (Figure 4). According to annual reports, between 41 and 82 percent of intended beneficiaries were reached, but intervention quality varied.

Figure 4: Beneficiary numbers by activity and gender



Numbers of beneficiaries are annual averages over 2011–2014. Percentages of women or girls are for period 2011–2014 (data for 2015 were unavailable).

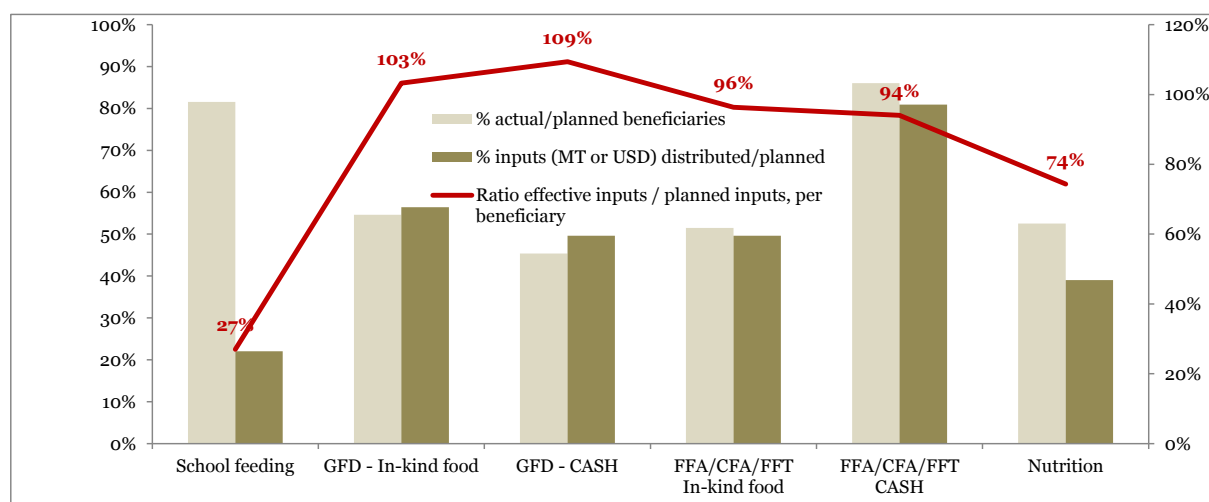
Sources: SPRs for 2011 to 2014; country office for 2015.

25. Actual versus planned GFD coverage for Mauritanian populations varied across modalities and over the period. Supported by readily available funding, levels of actual versus planned cash transfers were high – over 100 percent – at the start of the period, but declined as funding dropped, to about 30 percent after 2014. The opposite trend was observed for in-kind food transfers. Seasonal GFDs frequently arrived after the May/June lean season – sometime between July and September, depending on the year. Reasons for these divergences from plans varied and included difficulties in scaling up cash transfers at the start of the period, delayed receipt of in-kind donations, and fundraising that was too slow to match programme seasonality given the supply lead times.¹⁹ The choice of intervention modality was supported by alpha-value analyses using varied methodologies that were not always comparable.²⁰ Efforts to improve individual targeting were based on the household economy approach and greater involvement of women and local authorities. There were positive but limited effects on food consumption scores (FCS), with end-of-operations prevalence of poor FCS among target populations of 34–54 percent of their baseline values, while targets were to reduce such prevalence down to 20 percent of initial values.

¹⁸ WFP and UNHCR 2015 JAM.

¹⁹ External evaluation of EMOP 200333, CPE Annex 2, and observations of evaluation team in 2015.

²⁰ Calculations were based on monthly data or annual averages, and on data for wheat or for a mixture of commodities.

Figure 5: Ratio of beneficiaries to inputs, by activity, assistance to Mauritanian populations*

*Such ratios for assistance to Malian refugees were high until 2015 when WFP suffered pipeline breaks.

Sources: SPRs for 2011 to 2014, country office for 2015.

26. Coverage of the nutrition component was close to plans for MAM treatment – at between 79 and 100 percent, depending on the year²¹ – but highly inconsistent for blanket feeding, which was introduced and implemented at 80 percent of planned levels in 2012, but not implemented in 2013.²² Weak integration of WFP-assisted nutrition centres *Centres de réhabilitation nutritionnelle ambulatoire*. (CRENAMs) with healthcare facilities led to the application of different admission criteria from those of the National Nutrition Protocol for MAM treatment. In 2014, WFP closed CRENAMs that were more than 5 km from health centres to encourage referrals of malnutrition cases to healthcare facilities. Previous evaluations revealed mediocre monitoring of activities, making it difficult to measure outcomes.²² In addition, coverage estimates were imprecise and based on a hypothesis of uniform malnutrition rates at the *wilaya* level.
27. Food assistance for assets suffered from funding shortages, leading to reduced implementation in 2013 and 2014²³ and a similar outlook for 2015. In 2014, targeting changed from a demand-led approach to participatory identification of target villages based on longitudinal vulnerability analysis. Geographical coverage was too extensive for the number of targeted sites. Weaknesses in the design and implementation of FFA activities included superficial technical control, which undermined the sustainability of the assets created. Efforts to measure the impact of these interventions were not consistent until 2015.
28. School feeding rations per child did not exceed 27 percent of planned levels (Figure 5), and were distributed for only two to four months a year. As well as being poorly measured by the monitoring system, the outcomes of school feeding are likely to be weak. Underfunding led to a reduction in the number of WFP-assisted schools, from 1,673 in 2014 to 487 in 2015.
29. Despite strategic efforts to enhance internal synergies through geographical concentration of activities and complementarities among target groups and external synergies through partnerships for implementation, the achievement of synergies across activities was limited by unpredictable implementation of activities, financial difficulties and over-extensive geographical coverage relative to available funds.

²¹ SPRs, 2011–2014.

²² EMOP 200333 and CPE observations.

²³ No implementation in 2013–2014 for the in-kind food modality and 80 percent for cash transfers, respectively (SPRs 2013–2014).

30. Despite the scale of the various interventions of the Government, WFP and other actors, the situation remains more fragile than before the 2012 crisis. The prospects for WFP to generate impact are limited by overly specific activities (nutrition and GFD) or irregular implementation (school feeding and FFA). For social transfers and nutrition activities, sustainability depends on the Government taking ownership of WFP-supported interventions, but government ownership is currently limited. The sustainability of FFA achievements also remains fragile, as there is no rigorous approach to quality control and governance of the assets.
31. Relationships with operational partners are long-standing but technical weaknesses were apparent, particularly in nutrition partnerships. The unpredictability of funding meant that partnership agreements were somewhat erratic. The number of partners, and their thematic and geographical dispersion, made management more difficult for WFP, which started to bring partners together into geographical consortia in 2015. While acknowledging that there had been transfers of competences, particularly for cash transfers and nutrition, WFP partners felt that little attention was paid to developing their institutional capacities.
32. As regards efficiency, the country office's capacities were weakened by poor funding, and it struggled organizationally and operationally to respond to the 2012 emergencies. Despite the generally well-designed supply chain, delivery delays sometimes translated into losses, particularly affecting nutrition supplements with limited lifespans. Standard operational procedures and teams in charge of finance and logistics support systems were strengthened as recommended by the 2013 inspection. Levels of support costs, estimated at 16 percent of direct costs in 2014 against 13 percent in 2012, were comparable to those of neighbouring countries, but increased with the reducing volume of operations.

Conclusions

Relevance, Consistency and Alignment

33. WFP's strategic direction in Mauritania was relevant to the food and nutrition situation, and monitoring was effective and continuous. WFP acted to address the food crises triggered by drought and the arrival of Malian refugees. Extensive use of cash transfers and adoption of a strategy for building resilience among vulnerable populations were in line with WFP policies.
34. However, less attention was given to building sectoral capacities at the central and decentralized levels than anticipated in the country strategy 2011–2016. This lack of strategic continuity stemmed from various internal and external factors related to the government institutional framework and cooperation among United Nations agencies.
35. 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

36. Assistance to Malian refugees was effective and, in conjunction with the efforts of other actors, contributed to reducing the incidence of malnutrition. Results were mixed for interventions targeting Mauritanian populations because of uneven implementation of school feeding and blanket feeding; delays, with GFD and blanket feeding interventions often falling outside the lean season; irregular implementation of FFA activities; and poor-quality implementation of MAM treatment. Positive – albeit limited – outcomes in food consumption were observed, but systems for measuring the specific outcomes of nutrition and FFA components were too limited.
37. Efficiency was reduced by high turnover of human resources. From 2012–2013, operational support and the M&E system were strengthened to conform with WFP norms and standards.

Connectedness and Sustainability

38. Internal and external synergies were pursued, but their achievement was hampered by financial difficulties and unpredictable implementation of activities.
39. Sustainability of social safety nets – multi-annual transfers, school feeding and nutrition – depends on the Government’s ownership of WFP-supported interventions, which is currently limited. The fragile sustainability of FFA assets reduces the prospects for achieving impacts.

Key Lessons

40. Lessons from experience in Mauritania are offered for consideration during ongoing improvements to corporate performance management systems, which aim to equip WFP to design, deliver and report on strategically focused portfolios and to demonstrate results at the country level.
41. The Mauritania country strategy was not sufficiently useful as a tool for steering operations to enhance effectiveness and efficiency. Largely because of the standard design for country strategies, the Mauritania country strategy: i) was insufficiently aligned with WFP’s Strategic Plan; ii) did not adequately identify the investment risks, strategies and needs associated with fundraising and the priorities for mobilizing multilateral funding; iii) did not specify the resources needed to achieve results; and iv) did not stipulate the target numbers and measurements for programme results, based on the SRF indicators.
42. Timeliness of response is a key criterion of performance in highly seasonal contexts such as Mauritania and the Sahel. The standard corporate monitoring and reporting tools used during the evaluation period, until 2015, did not enable systematic capture of timeliness nor allow for manual entry of the relevant data.

Recommendations

43. These recommendations aim to steer WFP back to its initial strategy objectives, set in 2011, of strengthening institutional capacity. The strategy remains relevant today. The recommendations are linked to contextual features, including the Government’s renewed focus on school feeding, social safety nets and resilience, and the reduction in humanitarian funding.
44. **Recommendation 1:** The country office should build further complementarities and synergies with the national social safety nets programme, *Tekavoul*. This work should include: i) phasing in use of the national poverty register to target multi-annual conditional transfers, thus complying with associated targeting criteria; ii) linking these transfers to explicit objectives for addressing the underlying causes of malnutrition, based on updated analysis of gender issues and the causes of food and nutrition insecurity, including food consumption practices; iii) where *Tekavoul* operates, providing complementary support only in cases of shock by increasing transfer values or widening the coverage of transfer programmes; and iv) capitalizing on experience to date.
High priority – must be sustained over the long term, from 2016/17.
45. **Recommendation 2:** With the regional bureau’s support, the country office should continue strengthening national food and nutrition security monitoring and early warning systems. This work should include supporting: i) further institutionalization of the Harmonized Framework in Mauritania; ii) enhanced sensitivity to pastoral and urban issues in the National Food Security Monitoring System; and iii) formalization of a national nutrition surveillance system, complementing surveys with information on nutrition operations.
Secondary importance – must be sustained over the long term, from 2016.

46. **Recommendation 3:** The country office should strengthen efforts to improve the institutional environment for nutrition and the efficiency and effectiveness of the malnutrition treatment and prevention system, including by: i) revitalizing joint United Nations initiatives for enhanced dialogue among the national institutions concerned; ii) implementing operational approaches that reinforce local coordination of nutrition-related activities; iii) continuing efforts to build the nutrition-related capacities of national actors; and iv) conducting a joint diagnosis with United Nations partners and national institutions on the efficiency and effectiveness of the national system for MAM treatment and prevention of malnutrition.
High priority – must be sustained over the long term, from 2016/17.
47. **Recommendation 4:** The country office should enhance the governance, quality and sustainability of its resilience approach. This work should include: i) ensuring effective implementation of the corporate resilience approach, giving priority to *Planification communautaire participative* (Community Participatory Planning) and its implementation over three years to ensure that asset management, governance and maintenance issues are addressed from the planning stage; ii) supporting the ministries concerned in preparing technical standards for asset creation; and iii) investing in results beyond those included in the SRF indicator compendium, by conducting studies on the impact and sustainability of the assets built.
High priority – must be sustained over the long term, from 2016/17. Impact measurements to be scheduled for 2018.
48. **Recommendation 5:** The country office should make its involvement in school feeding conditional on the Government guaranteeing its commitment to funding a national programme. Following the SABER workshop, the technical support needs should be specified, and WFP's role and modalities defined more precisely.
High priority for 2016.
49. **Recommendation 6:** The country office should concentrate its activities geographically and reinforce synergies among activities. Geographical coverage should be reduced to the three or four *wilayas* with the highest food and nutrition insecurity levels over the last five years to make programme implementation more predictable. This geographical concentration should be complemented by effective synergies among WFP activities and increased local and intersectoral coordination.
High priority, to be addressed in 2016.
50. **Recommendation 7:** WFP – country offices, regional bureaux and the Policy and Programme Division – should stabilize and strengthen country offices' human resources, particularly in their programme units. This work includes: i) strengthening the programme unit's capacities in nutrition, gender, education and rural development; ii) ensuring strict compliance with hand-over norms; and iii) encouraging continuity of international human resources, staggering arrivals and departures to and from key posts, particularly in small country offices – such as Mauritania – that are sensitive to the negative effects of management rotation.
High priority – must be sustained over the long term, from 2016/17.

Acronyms Used in the Document

| | |
|---------|---|
| CP | country programme |
| CPE | country portfolio evaluation |
| CRENAM | <i>Centre de réhabilitation nutritionnelle ambulatoire</i> |
| CSA | Food Security Commission (<i>Commissariat à la sécurité alimentaire</i>) |
| CSLP | Strategic Framework for Poverty Reduction (<i>Cadre stratégique de lutte contre la pauvreté</i>) |
| EMOP | emergency operation |
| FCS | food consumption score |
| FFA | food assistance for assets |
| FFT | food for training |
| GAM | global acute malnutrition |
| GFD | general food distribution |
| IR-EMOP | immediate-response emergency operation |
| MAM | moderate acute malnutrition |
| M&E | monitoring and evaluation |
| NGO | non-governmental organization |
| NSPS | National Social Protection Strategy |
| OSA | National Food Security Monitoring System |
| PARSACC | Project for Improving Communities' Food Security to Overcome the Adverse Effects of Climate Change (<i>Projet d'amélioration de la résilience des communautés et de leur sécurité alimentaire face aux effets néfastes des changements climatiques</i>) |
| PRRO | protracted relief and recovery operation |
| SABER | Systems Approach for Better Education Results |
| SO | special operation |
| SPR | Standard Project Report |
| SRF | Strategic Results Framework |
| UNHCR | Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund |
| VFR | village food reserve |