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Summary Evaluation Report – State of Palestine Country Portfolio (2011–mid-2015)*

Executive Summary

This country portfolio evaluation covered all WFP operations in the State of Palestine from 2011 to mid-2015, and the 2014–2016 country strategy. It assessed WFP's alignment and strategic positioning, the factors and quality of its strategic decision-making, and the performance and the results of the portfolio activities as a whole.

The State of Palestine is a lower-middle-income country with per capita gross domestic product of USD 1,600, but it is still extremely dependent on aid. Conflict, political uncertainty, geographical fragmentation with movement and access restrictions, and fragile national institutional foundations are the main constraints on the Palestinian economy. Food insecurity is a significant challenge, with almost a third of households – 1.6 million people – being food-insecure in 2014 and evidence of the double burden of malnutrition. 80 percent of the people in Gaza depend on social assistance. The State of Palestine has an extensive social protection programme.

With the goal of sustainably building food security WFP focused on three pillars: i) relief – meeting urgent food needs; ii) resilience – supporting resilient livelihoods and economic activity; and iii) preparedness – improving national capacity for emergency response.

** 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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WFP's country office performed well in both the relief and preparedness pillars of the portfolio. In the dominant activity – general food assistance – it worked competently and showed strong strategic responses during the crises that erupted in Gaza in 2012 and 2014. Not only did it maintain WFP's reputation for capable logistics in the delivery of in-kind food assistance, but it also helped to build a growing reputation for competence and innovation in use of the electronic voucher modality, which was one of the portfolio's stronger achievements. Outcomes included an increase in the proportion of voucher beneficiary households with acceptable food consumption from 68.6 percent in 2013 to 83.6 percent in 2014, with additional benefits for participating shopkeepers, processors and producers. Despite limited staff resources, WFP worked carefully and well to address nutrition challenges.

Much of the emergency preparedness had to remain an external responsibility. WFP contributed well to this work, but more significantly it also made an important contribution to building national preparedness systems through the Palestinian Civil Defence. The resilience pillar was the hardest to define and deliver satisfactorily. While resource constraint was a major reason, there were also serious conceptual and strategic limitations in the determination of what WFP could achieve through general food assistance, school feeding and food assistance for assets/training. Food assistance helped to protect livelihoods but it did not promote or rebuild them.

The evaluation made seven recommendations, including redefining the focus of WFP's food assistance on food security and protection of livelihoods; restructuring its portfolio design; providing technical advisory services to the Palestinian Authority's school feeding and labour-intensive public works; developing staff profiles; refining the targeting of beneficiary households; developing monitoring and analytical systems; enhancing advocacy and resource mobilization for the Nutrition Awareness Campaign; and clarifying respective roles in the field of nutrition with other United Nations agencies in the State of Palestine.

Draft decision*

The Board takes note of “Summary Evaluation Report – State of Palestine Country Portfolio (2011–mid-2015)” (WFP/EB.1/2016/5) and the management response in WFP/EB.1/2016/5/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. This country portfolio evaluation (CPE) covered all WFP operations in the State of Palestine from 2011 to mid-2015, and the 2014–2016 country strategy (CS). It assessed WFP's strategic alignment and positioning; the factors and quality of WFP's strategic decision-making; and the performance and results of the portfolio as a whole. It was conducted by an independent evaluation team, with fieldwork in August 2015. The team augmented available data and a document review with semi-structured interviews undertaken with more than 200 stakeholders, including donor representatives and beneficiaries.
2. The Office of Evaluation selected this evaluation using systematic criteria related to WFP's programme of work. The CPE was timed to provide evidence for informing the next cycle of country strategic planning in 2016 and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF).¹ There has been no previous evaluation of WFP's portfolio.

Context

3. The State of Palestine is a lower-middle-income country with per capita gross domestic product of USD 1,600,² but one of the highest rates of aid per capita in the world – USD 626 in 2013.³ In 2011, 25.8 percent of the population was living below the poverty line.⁴ Poverty rates in Gaza (38.8 percent) are more than twice those in the West Bank (17.8 percent); the 40 percent unemployment rate in Gaza is double that in the West Bank.⁵ Conflicts, political uncertainty, and movement and access restrictions are the main constraints on the Palestinian economy.
4. The State of Palestine has endured decades of conflict. It is geographically fragmented: the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza are separated from each other, and there are obstacles to movement within the West Bank⁶. In 2014, the estimated population was 4.8 million.⁷ Palestinian refugees comprise 44.2 percent of the population. Food production is limited by natural conditions and by strict Israeli land-use controls in Area C, the largest subdivision of the West Bank.
5. Food insecurity is a significant challenge, with a captive economy, high prices and threats to livelihoods leaving 27 percent of households overall – 1.6 million people – food-insecure in 2014: 47 percent in Gaza and 16 percent in the West Bank.⁸ Food security has been gravely jeopardized by military emergencies in Gaza, most severely, in 2014.

¹ UNDAF. 2013. United Nations Development Assistance Mandate derives from United Nations General Assembly Resolution 33/147 of 20 December 1978. It includes a mandate to empower the Palestinian people in their efforts to realize their right to self-determination and to build the social, economic and institutional basis for the Palestinian State.

² Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS). 2014. Labour Force Survey.

³ World Bank. 2015. Net Official Development Assistance (ODA) received per capita (current USD). <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/DY.ODA.ODAT.PC.ZS>

⁴ PCBS. 2014. *On the Eve of the International Population Day*.

⁵ World Bank. 2014. *Gaza: Fact Sheet August 1, 2014*.

⁶ Division of the West Bank into Areas dates back to the 1995 Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement. Area A, the smallest zone of the West Bank, is under full Palestinian [Palestinian Authority (PA)] civil and security control. Area B is under Palestinian civil control and Israeli security control. Area C, which is the largest zone at about 60 percent of the West Bank, is fully subject to Israeli military control. East Jerusalem is directly controlled by the Israeli authorities. (See World Bank. 2013. *West Bank and Gaza: Area C and the Future of the Palestinian Economy*. Report No. AUS2922. Washington, DC.) General Assembly Resolutions describe East Jerusalem as being part of the Occupied Palestinian Territories. See, instead of many, Resolution 70/15 adopted by the General Assembly of 24 November 2015 (United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/RES/70/15). In the Gaza Strip, Hamas constitute de facto authorities. (See: UNOCHA, 2015, *Gaza one year on. Humanitarian concerns in the aftermath of the 2014 hostilities*.)

⁷ PCBS. 2014. *Palestinians' population status in Palestine, 2014*. [in Arabic]

⁸ PCBS and Food Security Sector, 2015. *Summary of preliminary results of SEFSec 2013–2014*, p. 1.

6. Between the 2009 and 2014 nutrition surveys, there were declines in the prevalence among children under 5 of wasting, to 1.2 percent; stunting, to 7.4 percent; and underweight, to 1.4 percent.⁹ However, overweight increased from 5 to 8 percent.¹⁰ Various micronutrient deficiencies were of grave concern. Although no severe anaemia was reported, mild and moderate anaemia were reported to be 17-33 percent among children and 35 percent among pregnant women.¹¹ The double burden of malnutrition was leading to a rise in the incidence of non-communicable diseases.¹²
7. Donor funding has been provided to protect the most vulnerable people through social safety nets. Eighty percent of people in Gaza depend on social assistance. Social transfers have become an important source of income for most households, accounting for 16 percent of household consumption (31 percent among the poorest households).¹³
8. In 2010, the Ministry of Social Affairs approved its Social Protection Sector Strategy, which identified increasing services to beneficiaries living below the national poverty line as a priority. The Ministry operates and formulates social protection policies in both the West Bank and Gaza, although institutional efficiency is impaired by the limited remit of the PA in Gaza. The Palestinian National Cash Transfer Programme is considered one of the most advanced of its kind in the region.
9. Despite high net school enrolment rates of 96 percent, education outcomes are constrained by ongoing conflict and poverty. Illiteracy among women and girls was three and a half times higher than that among men and boys in 2012,¹⁴ and traditional gender roles constrain women's participation in the economy. The 2011 National Gender Strategy commits to advancing gender equality and women's empowerment.

WFP Strategy and Portfolio

10. WFP has worked in Palestine since 1991. Its first country strategy¹⁵ covers 2014–2016. With the goal of building food security in sustainable ways, WFP focuses on three pillars: i) relief – meeting urgent food needs; ii) resilience – supporting resilient livelihoods and economic activity; and iii) preparedness – improving national capacity for emergency response. Key elements of the strategy include expanding the voucher modality; a conditional voucher programme to support agriculture and tree planting; scaling up capacity development for the PA's emergency preparedness; and deploying cost-effective productive safety nets.
11. During the evaluation period, WFP's country office undertook two emergency operations (EMOPs), two protracted relief and recovery operations (PRROs) and two special operations. Figure 1 shows the planned and actual beneficiaries per year, reaching a peak of 1.6 million in 2014 – a third of the Palestinian population in Gaza, West Bank and East Jerusalem. Food totalling 243,597 mt was distributed and USD 60.7 million of food vouchers were redeemed by beneficiaries. The total requirement for these operations was USD 704 million, of which only 64 percent had been received by August 2015.¹⁶ PRROs, EMOPs and special operations received 55, 73 and 73 percent respectively of required funding. These operations supported the three pillars of the CS:

⁹ PCBS. 2014. *Palestinian Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2013. Key findings report*.

¹⁰ PCBS. 2013. *Final Report of the Palestinian Family Survey 2010*.

¹¹ PA and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). 2014. *Palestinian Micronutrient Survey (PMS) 2014*. Ministry of Health.

¹² Hussein, A, *et al.*, 2009. Cardiovascular diseases, diabetes mellitus, and cancer in the occupied Palestinian territory. *Lancet* 373(9668): 1041–1049.

¹³ PA. 2014. *The national early recovery and reconstruction plan for Gaza*. Page 31.

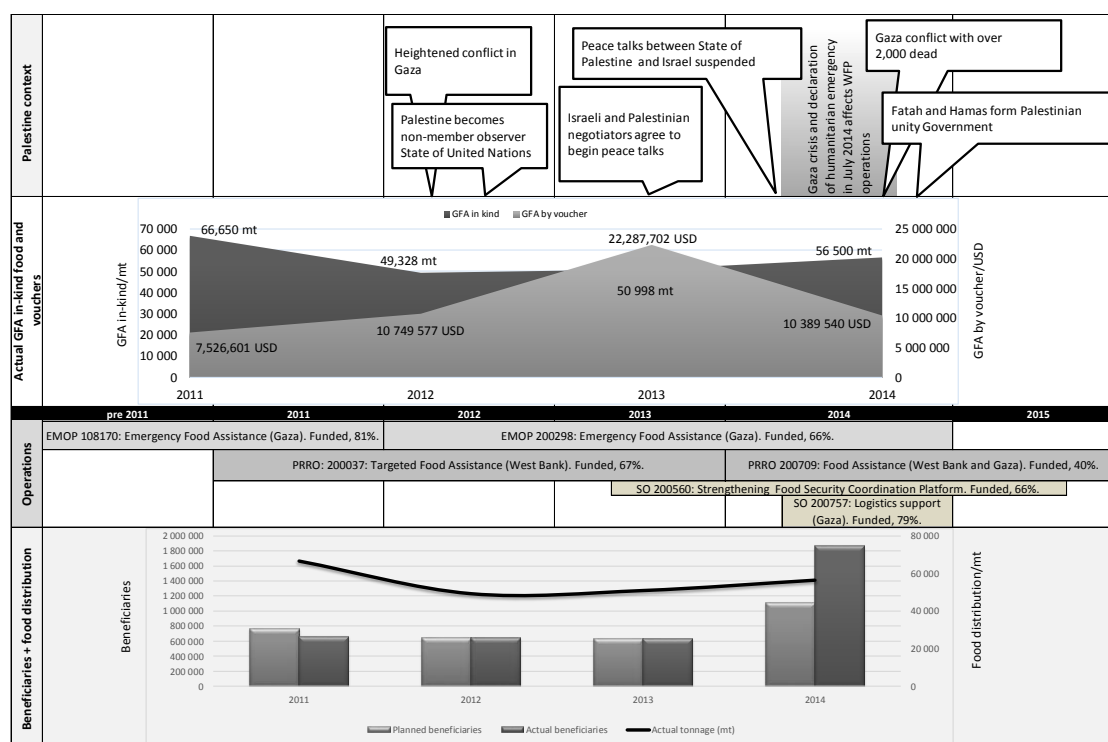
¹⁴ PCBS. 2012 data.

¹⁵ WFP. 2013. *WFP Strategy in the State of Palestine, 2014–2016*.

¹⁶ These data include PRRO 200709, which runs to December 2016.

- *Relief:* General food assistance (GFA) for food-insecure Palestinians provided increasingly as unconditional electronic value vouchers for redemption at participating shops in a system that was jointly developed with the PA. This system also served as an increasingly popular platform for social transfers by the PA and other organizations. Using in-kind food, vouchers or a combination, GFA was greatly expanded in Gaza through EMOPs during periods of military crisis.
- *Resilience:* On a smaller scale, food assistance for assets (FFA) and food assistance for training (FFT) linked food assistance to efforts to make livelihoods more resilient in the West Bank. School feeding was undertaken in the West Bank and Gaza.
- *Preparedness:* One special operation strengthened logistics support in Gaza during the 2014 crisis. The other (2013–2015) provided resources to support the Food Security Sector (FSS), a food security coordination mechanism.

Figure 1: WFP State of Palestine portfolio context and timeline, 2011–mid 2015



12. Although the portfolio did not have a separate mother-and-child health and nutrition component, WFP produced a strategic plan for nutrition and food technology and supported the Ministry of Health by providing technical assistance and demonstrating innovative models such as the Nutrition Awareness Campaign (NAC).

Evaluation Findings

Alignment and strategic positioning

13. The portfolio was relevant to the needs of food-insecure Palestinians. WFP was seen by stakeholders as a constructive partner in the development of national policy and strategies. It made an important strategic decision when it chose to design and deliver its activities in close collaboration with the PA. While this decision slowed implementation, it meant that WFP made the best possible contribution to sustainable strategic and institutional development given the difficult circumstances. The degree of coherence and collaboration between WFP's portfolio and those of other United Nations and other partners varied among partners and over time, but the portfolio was appropriately integrated in the UNDAF and other frameworks and implicitly aligned with international humanitarian principles. WFP's relationships with bilateral partners and non-governmental organization (NGO) partners were mostly complementary.

14. In the especially difficult circumstances of the State of Palestine, it was doubly important that WFP be realistic about the context as it designed and implemented its operations. WFP's alignment and strategic positioning were largely driven by the need to provide relief to help tackle chronic food insecurity while also responding to periodic acute crises. At the same time, and on a smaller scale, it pursued resilience strategies, working through the PA to help small numbers of needy Palestinians to strengthen their livelihoods. Not helped by the complexity and ambiguity of the international planning landscape within which it had to function, WFP's alignment and strategic positioning were a fluid mix of "humanitarian" and "development" strategies. Both of these categories are vulnerable to differing definitions and are presented in different ways according to the planning context, in the long-running debate about their meaning in the State of Palestine.
15. These uncertainties did not distract WFP from its core business of providing food assistance to needy Palestinians, although they were not conducive to optimal determination of what WFP should aim to be and do in the longer term. However, WFP did not take the opportunity to position its food assistance fully within the conceptual and operational framework of social protection. In general, WFP was not sufficiently realistic about the way it conceptualized and presented possible 'development' support roles for itself – despite its acknowledgement in some design documents that there was little chance of sustainable progress in the current context. The 2014 CS was too ambitious in its aims of "supporting resilient livelihoods and economic activity", its support for agriculture and tree planting and its "new focus... on East Jerusalem and other urban centres, focusing on women and youth in these settings."¹⁷

Factors and quality of strategic decision-making

16. The challenges of providing effective food assistance in this difficult institutional and operating environment were the principal factors affecting WFP's strategic decision-making. In general, WFP understood and responded to these challenges realistically. The CS systematically presented the factors it assessed in determining WFP's proposed approach in the State of Palestine.
17. WFP's analysis was constrained by limitations on data and analytical capacity. Because of the context, a range of other factors – including the need to help assure the food security of the Palestinian people, the need to pursue resilience strategies, the PA's institutional fragility, and funding shortfalls – often had to take precedence in determining the country office's strategic and operational priorities. Despite limited staff capacity in nutrition, WFP's strategic decision-making on the subject was sound.¹⁸
18. WFP's analysis of gender issues in the Palestinian context and portfolio was limited but useful. It included a review of the implications of the voucher modality for gender, analytical inputs to a United Nations study on the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women, and inputs to a gender scorecard exercise carried out for the United Nations Country Team in 2014.¹⁹ All this work contributed to the preparation of WFP's gender strategy in the State of Palestine.
19. The relief and preparedness pillars were appropriate for WFP. GFA – the bulk of the portfolio – was an appropriate priority, given the extent and severity of food insecurity. The need for relief was chronic and protracted, and meeting it was a safety net function within the social protection framework. Working to strengthen the preparedness of WFP, the international community and the PA – through the Palestinian Civil Defence (PCD) – was also an appropriate strategy.

¹⁷ WFP. 2013. *WFP Strategy in the State of Palestine, 2014–2016*, p. 13.

¹⁸ WFP worked with certain donors to set up the separate fund management and implementation systems required by their policy of having "no contact" with certain political and administrative stakeholders.

¹⁹ A.L. Esser, 2014. *Gender scorecard. United Nations Country Team (UNCT), State of Palestine*.

20. The resilience pillar was a less useful part of WFP's strategic decision-making. Resilience is a vital part of Palestinian livelihoods, where it has specific meanings concerned with "steadfastness" and people's ability to stay on their land and sustain their livelihoods. However, the CS did not articulate or operationalize the concept sufficiently well, and the contributions that GFA relief activities could make to resilience were not clearly spelled out. WFP lacked the institutional and staff skills to tackle the challenges of promoting sustainable livelihoods convincingly. A lack of corporate guidance, national frameworks for livelihood programming and clarity in programme documents regarding how to restore and rebuild livelihoods²⁰ contributed to WFP's inability to secure much funding for resilience activities. There was little synergy between the relief and resilience pillars, not least because the latter was so weakly developed and the prospects for recovery were so massively constrained.
21. WFP showed strong strategic responses during the crises that erupted in Gaza in 2012 and 2014. Its experienced and committed personnel clearly demonstrated their ability to think clearly and act decisively at these difficult times. Staff worked closely and constructively with PA counterparts in various strategic, policy and programme settings and in the Emergency Operations Centre under the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Monitoring and evaluation

22. WFP established a sophisticated, high-quality monitoring system to report on GFA processes and key output-level indicators of beneficiary welfare: the cash equivalent redeemed through vouchers, the number of timely food distributions and the number of beneficiary training sessions. However, WFP systems did not readily generate expenditure data in a form that was easy to use for efficiency analysis. It was also difficult to assess progress related to livelihood recovery because appropriate outcome and impact indicators were lacking.
23. The CPE found useful evidence on implementation of the voucher modality from evaluations in Gaza commissioned by the country office (2011 and 2012) and from monitoring reports (2013 and 2014). These quantified the impact on beneficiary households and the economic effects of the voucher system on various local actors in the dairy supply chain.
24. WFP learned from and acted on beneficiary feedback from its monitoring and evaluation system. Multiple systems were set up to collect the views of beneficiaries of vouchers and in-kind food. WFP's sophisticated post-distribution monitoring system included checks on beneficiaries' satisfaction and comments.

Portfolio Performance and Results

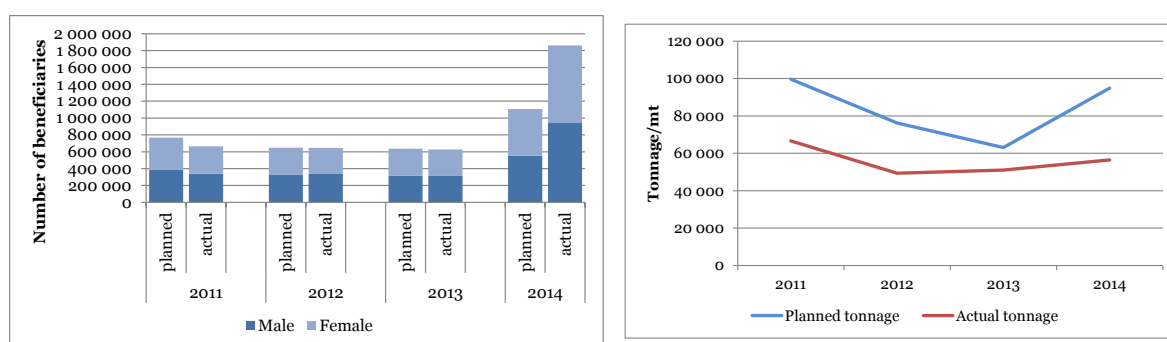
Outputs

25. WFP maintained GFA beneficiary numbers close to planned levels, and far above them in the Gaza crisis of 2014 (Figure 2). Through WFP's innovative development of the voucher modality (Box 1), the number of beneficiaries receiving vouchers grew from 32,380 in 2011 (36 percent of planned) to 121,805 in 2014 (160 percent); in both years, 50 percent of beneficiaries were women. Because of funding shortfalls, WFP sometimes had to cut rations or voucher values. School feeding days per week were cut periodically in the West Bank from 2012, and school feeding ceased in Gaza in May 2014. Between 2011 and 2014, the numbers of school feeding beneficiaries fell from 75,530 to 50,347 in the West Bank and from 93,617 to 48,054 in Gaza. FFA outputs ranged from 0 percent of target for production of tree seedlings, to 52 percent of target for hectares put under irrigation. Under FFT, 227 of the planned 317 people took part in training sessions.

Box 1: Innovations – electronic voucher delivery mechanism

- Easy to scale up
- User-friendly
- Facilitates monitoring
- Facilitates integration of safety nets

²⁰ Protection of livelihoods refers to mitigating the erosion of assets and the increase of indebtedness.

Figure 2: Portfolio beneficiaries and tonnage, planned and actual, 2011–2014

Source: WFP Standard Project Reports 2011–2014.

26. WFP assisted the PCD in development of an information management framework, including a disaster preparedness web portal. It also contributed to the development of a smartphone tool with geographic information system linkages, for use in on-site assessments.²¹ Later, it put more emphasis on training PCD staff and volunteers.
27. From mid-2013, special operation 200560 funded the FSS, a merger of three humanitarian clusters. Jointly chaired by WFP and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the FSS aims to enhance the coordination of work for, and the dialogue around, food security, and to lower the perceived barriers between United Nations agencies and the NGO community. Revision of the Socio-Economic and Food Security Survey (SEFSec) and coordination of the humanitarian programme cycle were its largest tasks. The information management systems it established for feeding data into reporting by OCHA were relevant and timely.

Targeting

28. WFP performed strongly in developing a GFA targeting system with its partners. It targeted its beneficiaries carefully and well, while targeting criteria remained relatively simple. Households selected on the basis of poverty and food insecurity were categorized only by size, with no further differentiation of needs among beneficiary groups. By the end of the review period, WFP was considering refinements to the targeting system, including a more comprehensive categorization by household size, a proxy means test formula and food consumption scores (FCSs).

Outcomes

29. During emergencies in Gaza in 2012 and, particularly 2014, WFP's rapid response is likely to have contributed to saving lives, although there is no specific evidence of this.
30. WFP's provision of food in-kind and through vouchers in the West Bank generally improved the FCS of beneficiary households. The proportion of voucher beneficiary households with acceptable consumption increased from 68.6 percent in 2013²² to 83.6 percent in 2014, and there was a sizeable reduction in the proportion of beneficiary households with borderline and poor FCS. However, the FCS of households receiving in-kind GFA eroded over the same period: the proportion with acceptable FCS dropped from 58.5 to 57.7 percent while the proportion with borderline FCS increased from 23.1 to 26.8 percent.
31. In Gaza, 77 percent of beneficiaries receiving only vouchers achieved acceptable FCS by 2015, compared with 36 percent of in-kind food beneficiaries. Nearly 91 percent of voucher-only beneficiaries had improved their FCS by at least one food consumption category since 2011.
32. Among FFA beneficiaries, 26 percent had acceptable FCS at baseline, rising to 92 percent during the activity but falling to 60 percent ten months later.

²¹ WFP. 2013. PRRO 200037 – Targeted Food Assistance to Support Destitute and Marginalized Groups and Enhance Livelihoods in the West Bank, Standard Project Report 2013.

²² GFA through vouchers was introduced in the West Bank in 2009. Baseline FCS data are not available.

33. Outcome indicators for school feeding – retention rates and pupils’ ability to concentrate and learn – were unevenly monitored. Retention rates were already high and did not change. Concentration and learning ability fluctuated, according to the anecdotal evidence available.

The electronic voucher

34. The electronic voucher modality was one of the portfolio’s strongest achievements. There were four main dimensions to this success, which also served as a model for WFP operations elsewhere, such as in Iraq, Lebanon and Turkey:

- Beneficiaries and retailers found the electronic card increasingly simple to use. The recently updated modality, developed in association with the Bank of Palestine and its “PalPay” electronic transactions system, enabled retailers to be paid in real time as they carried out food assistance transactions at their stores.
- The mechanism facilitated monitoring and enabled itemization of commodities collected in its own database, again in real time.
- The modality was easy to adapt and scale up, with beneficiaries identified through their Palestinian identity cards. Use of an “electronic wallet” made it possible for other organizations to deliver assistance through the same card. Most notably, WFP’s modality helped UNICEF to provide water, sanitation and hygiene items and school uniforms in Gaza during the 2014 crisis, when the number of food assistance beneficiaries supported through vouchers increased from 60,000 to 300,000 within weeks.
- It facilitated integration of the safety net mechanisms of WFP, the PA and other agencies, while allowing separate identification and monitoring of different beneficiaries within the system. While there remained much scope for further refinement of the mechanism, WFP’s progress and performance with the modality during the review period were widely praised by United Nations and PA informants.

35. The electronic voucher modality also produced significant economic results, directly benefiting participating shopkeepers, processors and producers and the Palestinian Treasury. Average monthly sales for shopkeepers grew by 40 percent across Gaza and the West Bank. Dairy producers’ sales rose by 207 percent in Gaza and 58 percent in the West Bank, with corresponding potential for increased tax revenues. About 300 new jobs were created.²³ The economic effects of other WFP interventions were less systematically measured, and evidence collected suggests that they were weaker.²⁴

Efficiency

36. For this evaluation, crude estimates of the average costs of the in-kind food (GFA and school feeding) and voucher modalities (GFA and FFA/FFT) were calculated. Across the portfolio, based on actual financial expenditure and beneficiary numbers, the cost of in-kind food assistance was USD 74.4 per person compared with USD 91.1 for the voucher modality.
37. However, vouchers were more effective than in-kind support at improving outcomes – the FCS score. Achieving an improvement in a household’s FCS category – (between ‘poor’, ‘borderline’ and ‘acceptable’) cost twice as much through in-kind food assistance as through vouchers.

²³ WFP. 2014. *Secondary Impact of WFP’s Voucher Programme in the State of Palestine. Findings Report.*

²⁴ Full evaluation report: Local purchases were from large dairy producers. There was a more systematic approach to accounting of the secondary economic benefits of the voucher modality than to measuring efficiency.

38. Despite conditions that inflated costs, the country office improved the logistics efficiency of its programming over the review period, including through introduction of the electronic payments system. Procurement and logistics processes continued to work well, and anecdotal evidence suggests that WFP managed its programmes well. PA officials and beneficiaries were very complimentary about the implementation of activities. This experience is confirmed by analysis of WFP–UNICEF support showing that 97 percent of beneficiaries of food, education, and water, sanitation and hygiene activities were satisfied with the delivery mechanisms.²⁵

Gender

39. The country office showed commitment and responsiveness in developing enhanced approaches for the promotion of gender equity, culminating in 2014 when it developed a gender strategy, undertook gender-sensitization training for all staff and began a process of identifying “gender advocates”. However practical effects were limited, except in the NAC. Implemented by WFP and a local NGO in Gaza, the NAC was perceived to make a real difference to women’s self-image and empowerment, in addition to its effects on participants’ nutrition awareness. Although modest in size, its achievements were important.
40. However, WFP assistance had little practical effect on enhancing gender equity. The cultural context made a gender-proactive stance sensitive at the community level, and potentially even risky for WFP staff, particularly in Gaza. The NAC appears to have been a more relevant livelihood intervention. It had a direct impact on improving household nutrition, and therefore increased human capital. It encouraged women – who had confined lives as a result of both the situation in Gaza and cultural norms – to leave their homes, mix with their peers and develop stronger social relationships. In these ways the NAC also contributed to building social capital.

Partnership

41. WFP worked proactively to fit its programming into the evolving framework of annual and multi-annual humanitarian planning. It was an active contributor to preparation of the State of Palestine’s first UNDAF.
42. Most of WFP’s work with partners at the operational level achieved cooperation and complementarity rather than synergy or multiplier effects. There was clear complementarity between WFP and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency with their responsibilities for food assistance to non-refugees and refugees, and their close cooperation during the 2014 Gaza crisis. There was complementarity with UNICEF, and again this was taken to a higher level during the Gaza crisis, when WFP’s electronic voucher platform was used for the distribution of UNICEF support. The biggest gap in opportunities for synergy and multiplier effects concerned nutrition. During the review period, nutrition capacity among WFP’s partners dwindled. They turned increasingly to WFP for nutrition advice, which put a heavy burden on WFP and its single nutrition officer, and created expectations of WFP’s nutrition services that were beyond its mandate.

Sustainability and Connectedness

43. The concept of sustainability was strongly circumscribed by the national context, and promoting institutional sustainability and connectedness became paramount. In activities that performed basic safety net functions by helping to assure food security and protect livelihoods from deep poverty, the consensus among informants was that WFP made valuable progress, building capacity, systems and ownership within the PA for a social protection system that informants considered stronger at the end of the review period than it was at the start. WFP’s small-scale efforts to build resilience in livelihoods showed little evidence of sustainable results, although there was scope to protect livelihoods and promote steadfastness through labour-intensive public works.

²⁵ Al Athar Global Consulting. 2015. *Joint emergency assistance programme to vulnerable families in Gaza. Formative review of the joint WFP-UNICEF e-voucher.*

Conclusions

Overall Assessment

44. Under the relief pillar of the strategy, WFP performed well. In the dominant activity of the portfolio – GFA – it maintained WFP’s reputation for capable logistics in the delivery of in-kind food assistance, and contributed to a growing reputation for competence and innovation in the use of electronic vouchers. Reflecting a commendable commitment to innovation and learning from ongoing experience, development of the electronic voucher modality was a high point of WFP’s performance in this portfolio. Good choices were made about where and for which beneficiaries to use the in-kind food, voucher or, occasionally, combined modalities, based on appropriate but comparatively simple criteria. Despite limited staff resources, WFP worked carefully and well to address the nutrition implications and challenges of its GFA activities in the Palestinian context.
45. Viewed through a social protection lens, relief and preparedness are closely related. During the review period, much of the preparedness had to remain an external responsibility: WFP and its partners had to be ready to react. WFP contributed well to this external preparedness, but more significantly it made important contributions to building national preparedness systems through the PCD and institutional progress in the capacities and programmes of the PA. Much remained to be done in this area. However, a degree of national ownership of enhanced systems was built.
46. While the relief and preparedness pillars of the CS achieved generally strong performance and results, the resilience pillar did not. This was the hardest area of the CS and portfolio to define and deliver satisfactorily. While resource constraints were a major reason for carrying out FFA and FFT on such a small scale, there were serious conceptual and strategic limitations in the determination of what WFP could usefully do. GFA helped to protect livelihoods but failed to enhance their resilience or sustainability. Although school feeding was identified in the CS as contributing to the protection of livelihoods, there was no monitoring of whether it achieved this purpose, and the evaluation found no empirical evidence that it had.
47. Overall, the performance and results of the portfolio show that the special context of the State of Palestine was a constant challenge – periodic emergencies disrupted normal WFP operations and necessitated rapid responses to crisis conditions. The country office had to contend with not only the crowded politics of the United Nations, but also the fragility of the State of Palestine. More common across WFP globally were the challenges of limited funding.
48. Performance was greatly strengthened by the skill and dedication of WFP staff, although in some areas, such as livelihoods and resilience, they lacked training and received inadequate corporate guidance. Ingenuity and innovation drove the country office to important successes with the voucher modality, which has served as a model for WFP work in other countries. While the portfolio benefited overall from committed and skilful management, planning of the CS was not fully realistic about what could be achieved in building resilient livelihoods, given the Palestinian context and WFP resources. Portfolio implementation helped beneficiaries protect their livelihoods, avoiding hunger and destitution – a major achievement in the circumstances.

Recommendations

49. This CPE found many areas of strong performance in the WFP portfolio under review. This section focuses on areas where a redefinition or adjustment of the portfolio would be beneficial.

No.	Issue	Rationale	Recommendation	Responsibility and timing
1	Strategic orientation	<p>To clarify the role that WFP can most effectively play in food assistance to the State of Palestine.</p> <p>Food insecurity is a real problem in many impoverished Palestinian households. The mechanisms for addressing it should be contained in a national social protection framework, rather than external United Nations systems.</p> <p>As defined by WFP,²⁶ food security constitutes a meaningful theme for WFP in the Palestinian context. In the preparedness pillar of the CS, WFP could deploy established competence and made valuable contributions during the review period.</p> <p>The country office is not adequately skilled or resourced in livelihood development. Moreover, the Palestinian context makes it extremely difficult for WFP to use food assistance to promote more sustainable livelihoods. WFP's focus should rather be on using food assistance to protect livelihoods.</p>	<p>In the next CS, the country office should redefine the focus of its food assistance in the State of Palestine as support to the assurance of food security, and thus the protection of livelihoods, within a nutrition-sensitive national social protection framework, mitigating the erosion of assets and increasing indebtedness. This focus includes the promotion of preparedness to meet acute food security challenges.</p> <p>WFP should restructure its portfolio design and presentation accordingly. It should include protection of livelihoods, but not building livelihoods. The 'resilience' pillar is not recommended for continuation.</p>	<p>Country office, with support from the regional bureau and Headquarters: 2016.</p> <p>Implementation should be guided by the forthcoming scoping study by the regional bureau and the Institute of Development Studies on WFP's role in social protection.</p>
2	Shift to advisory role	<p>Despite the valued and useful contributions that WFP made to school feeding approaches and delivery during the review period, it would not be a good use of scarce resources to invest new efforts in further direct engagement in school feeding.</p> <p>Resourcing and implementation of FFA and FFT activities during the review period were unconvincing and offered no justification for further direct WFP engagement. FFT has no clear place in a social protection strategy. Labour-intensive public works may. This is a field in which WFP has corporate expertise.</p>	<p>WFP should provide technical advisory services to the PA in development of: i) school feeding policy and implementation approaches; and ii) labour-intensive public works policy and implementation approaches.</p> <p>The technical advisory role does not exclude joint pilot work with the PA.</p>	<p>Country office, with support from the regional bureau and Headquarters: 2016–2018.</p>

²⁶ WFP, 2015. *What is Food Security?*

No.	Issue	Rationale	Recommendation	Responsibility and timing
3	Human resources	Adjustment of strategic orientation and focus necessitates corresponding change in staff profiles.	WFP should develop staff profiles – including job descriptions – to combine the existing high operational competence with stronger strategic competence in social protection, maintaining the flexibility to respond to acute as well as chronic challenges.	Country office, with support from the regional bureau and Headquarters: 2016–2018.
4	Targeting	As the country office recognizes, a targeting approach that specifies beneficiary sub-groups in terms of poverty, food security level and household size would enhance the overall effectiveness of food assistance for the poorest groups, particularly at times when it may be necessary to reduce the level of support.	WFP should refine the targeting of households whose food security will be supported by the national social protection system, so that beneficiary sub-groups are assisted according to the level of poverty and food security as well as the household size.	Country office, in consultation with the Ministry of Social Affairs and with support from the regional bureau and Headquarters: 2016–2018.
5	Monitoring	To provide robust evidence on efficiency, and on food security and livelihood outcomes, enhancing understanding of appropriate uses of different modalities.	WFP should develop monitoring and analytical systems for: i) more comprehensive and routine analysis of the efficiency of its operations and more thorough comparative analysis of the efficiency of modalities; and ii) careful specification of solid and feasible outcome-level monitoring of the effects of food assistance on livelihoods protection.	Country office, with support from the regional bureau and Headquarters: 2016–2018.
6	Gender and nutrition	Expansion of the NAC could achieve significant gender and nutrition benefits and is a practical way of helping to achieve objectives 2 and 3 of the WFP gender policy.	WFP should advocate and seek resources for expansion of the NAC to all food assistance beneficiary households in the State of Palestine.	Country office, with support from the regional bureau and Headquarters: 2016–2018.
7	Partnership	The United Nations currently relies too heavily on WFP for nutrition expertise in the State of Palestine. Although WFP has performed well in this field, this situation is unsustainable and detrimental to the nutrition of the Palestinian population, and to the reputation of the United Nations.	With reference to work across the United Nations system on the United Nations Global Nutrition Agenda, WFP should consult the other relevant United Nations agencies in the State of Palestine to confirm their respective roles in the field of nutrition, advocate for adequate resourcing and fulfilment of these roles, and confirm the specific mandate of WFP in this field.	Country office, with support from the regional bureau and Headquarters: 2016.

Acronyms Used in the Document

CPE	country portfolio evaluation
CS	country strategy
EMOP	emergency operation
FCS	food consumption score
FFA/T	food assistance for assets/training
FSS	Food Security Sector
GFA	general food assistance
NAC	Nutrition Awareness Campaign
NGO	non-governmental organization
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PA	Palestinian Authority
PCBS	Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics
PCD	Palestinian Civil Defence
PRRO	protracted relief and recovery operation
SEFSec	Socio-Economic and Food Security Survey
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund