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Evaluation reports

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Executive Board documents are available on WFP's website (<https://executiveboard.wfp.org>).

Summary report on the strategic evaluation of the contribution of school feeding activities to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals

Executive Summary

This evaluation reviewed the strategic positioning of WFP with regard to school feeding and compared its performance between 2014 and 2020 with the WFP school feeding policy objectives. It assessed how well WFP is positioned and equipped to deliver on its school feeding agenda and sought to understand any factors enabling or hindering progress.

The findings, conclusions and recommendations are based on data gathered from 309 key informants at the global, regional and country levels; 11 country case studies; a global electronic survey completed by 229 WFP respondents; and an extensive review of literature, documents and data.

Restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic meant the evaluation had to rely on remote working methods; however, it was able to observe the WFP school feeding response to the pandemic, which involved exceptional collaboration with other United Nations agencies, and to note the validation of school feeding as an important emergency safety net.

During the period under review, WFP enacted substantial reforms including through the Integrated Road Map and multi-year country strategic plans. These placed greater emphasis on its dual humanitarian and development mandate, strengthened the role of regional bureaux and country offices and realigned its work towards the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, merging the former strategic results framework and management results framework into a single corporate results framework.

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 the editing of this report has been limited and as a result some of the language in it may not be fully consistent with the World Food Programme's standard terminology or editorial practices. Please direct any requests for clarification to the Director of Evaluation.

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WFP's 2013 school feeding policy guided its school feeding activities throughout this period. Activities included direct implementation of school feeding operations and related capacity strengthening in various country settings; advocacy and partnership work; and the provision of support and guidelines to WFP staff at all levels.

Like the school feeding policy, the school feeding strategy for 2020–2030 highlights multiple outcomes while stressing the need to link school feeding to other interventions in school health and nutrition. The strategy emphasizes the importance of providing support to governments in enhancing the coverage and quality of national school feeding programmes, which takes WFP involvement far beyond the direct delivery of school feeding.

The evaluation concluded that implementation of the policy fell short of ambitions due to funding and capacity constraints and insufficiently tailored responses. The strategy for 2020–2030 sets out an ambitious and transformative agenda, serving as a policy update as well as an implementation plan. Country strategic plans and regional implementation plans are increasing the visibility of the strategic role of school feeding, and WFP has a recognized role in this field. The strategy has helped highlight and is beginning to address some of the systemic constraints that hamper WFP efforts to promote and support national school feeding systems. However, there has not yet been enough focus on school feeding in humanitarian and fragile settings or as a response to shocks. Consideration of key dimensions of the Sustainable Development Goals such as gender, equity and climate change is similarly insufficient.

The evaluation makes eight recommendations focused on organizational readiness. The WFP school feeding strategy should be woven into the development of WFP's next strategic plan; thereafter an update and revision of the policy and strategy will be needed and should be informed by guidance and standards for school feeding and school health and nutrition in various country contexts, particularly in humanitarian and emergency settings as this is a major gap. The evaluation also recommends that WFP develop a resource mobilization plan and work towards securing predictable minimum financial resources and adequate levels and types of human resources to ensure implementation of the strategy and associated regional bureau implementation plans. A focused effort on capacity strengthening is vital, particularly for WFP's role in enabling nationally owned school feeding programmes. The evaluation also recommends greater attention to gender transformation and equity and more effective monitoring, evaluation and learning.

Draft decision*

The Board takes note of the summary report on the strategic evaluation of the contribution of school feeding activities to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (WFP/EB.A/2021/7-B) and the management's response (WFP/EB.A/2021/7-B/Add.1), and encourages further action on the recommendations set out in the report, taking into account the considerations raised by the Board during its discussion.

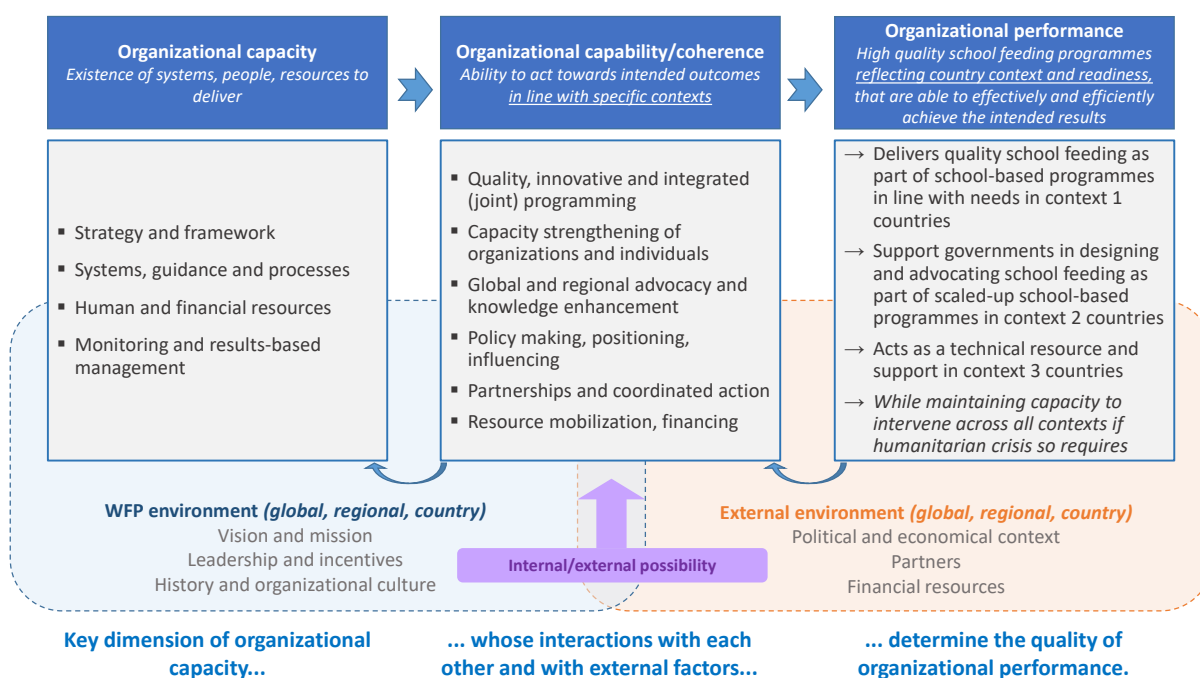
* This is a draft decision. For the final decision adopted by the Board, please refer to the decisions and recommendations document issued at the end of the session.

Introduction

Evaluation features

1. This strategic evaluation, commissioned by the WFP Office of Evaluation, served both learning and accountability goals. It compared WFP's performance between 2014 and 2020 with its school feeding policy, assessed how well WFP was positioned and equipped to deliver on its school feeding agenda and explored the factors enabling or hindering progress.
2. The evaluation addressed the following questions:
 - EQ1. How relevant is the WFP 2013 school feeding policy, considering the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and WFP's current strategic plan (2017–2021)?
 - EQ2. To what extent has WFP been able to deliver results in line with the objectives set out in the 2013 school feeding policy?
 - EQ3. How well is WFP equipped to deliver effective and equitable school feeding programmes and to assist governments with the implementation of school feeding programmes?
 - EQ4. How well is WFP equipped to focus on fostering environments that enable national institutions to design, finance and implement sustainable school feeding programmes?
 - EQ5. What key factors have contributed to progress towards the stated objectives and what key lessons can be learned?¹
3. The conceptual framework shown in figure A guided the design of the evaluation. It highlights the components of organizational readiness and the role of internal and external influences.

Figure A: Organizational readiness conceptual framework



¹ Responses to EQ5 draw on findings related to EQs 1–4 and are presented in the Conclusions section of this report.

4. The evaluation was conducted between January 2020 and March 2021; following the initial phase, all work was carried out remotely because of restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic. A rigorous review of secondary evidence preceded the collection of primary data from various country contexts and at various levels (country, regional and global). Secondary evidence included a review of over 100 evaluations and external reports and numerous internal documents. Primary evidence included global, regional and country-level interviews and an e-survey of WFP staff.² Studies were conducted of 11 countries³ selected to reflect the diversity of WFP's portfolio.
5. The primary audience for this evaluation includes the WFP Executive Board, the School-based Programmes Division (SBP), senior management, regional and country-level programme staff and school feeding programme advisors. Other users include governments, international humanitarian and development actors and nutrition and school health networks.

Context

6. Over the evaluation period, WFP carried out substantial reforms as it adapted to changing international circumstances. In response to humanitarian crises, the scale of WFP activity increased as it continued efforts to implement its dual humanitarian and development mandate. Logistics and procurement capacity remain central to WFP's role as the world's largest humanitarian organization.
7. Through the Integrated Road Map WFP sought to transform itself through mandatory reforms including multi-year country strategic plans (CSPs) that supersede individual projects as the framework for planning, budgeting and implementation. The role of the regional bureaux in supporting country offices has been strengthened amid reforms relating to human resource management.
8. The WFP Strategic Plan (2017–2021) shifted WFP's focus from the Millennium Development Goals to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 2 (end hunger) and SDG 17 (partnerships). The recent school feeding strategy identifies contributions to eight SDGs.
9. Effective results orientation was sought by merging the former strategic results framework and management results framework into a corporate results framework (CRF), which is designed to reflect the SDGs. WFP is increasingly shifting from implementer to enabler, reflecting the growing capacity and incomes of the countries it supports. WFP remains voluntarily funded, however⁴ there is no guarantee that those who finance it all share the same view of its role.

Subject

10. The 2013 school feeding policy has five objectives: to provide a safety net for food-insecure households through income transfers; to support children's education through enhanced learning ability and access to the education system; to enhance children's nutrition by reducing micronutrient deficiencies; to strengthen national capacity for school feeding through policy support and technical assistance; and to develop links between school feeding and local agricultural production where possible and feasible.

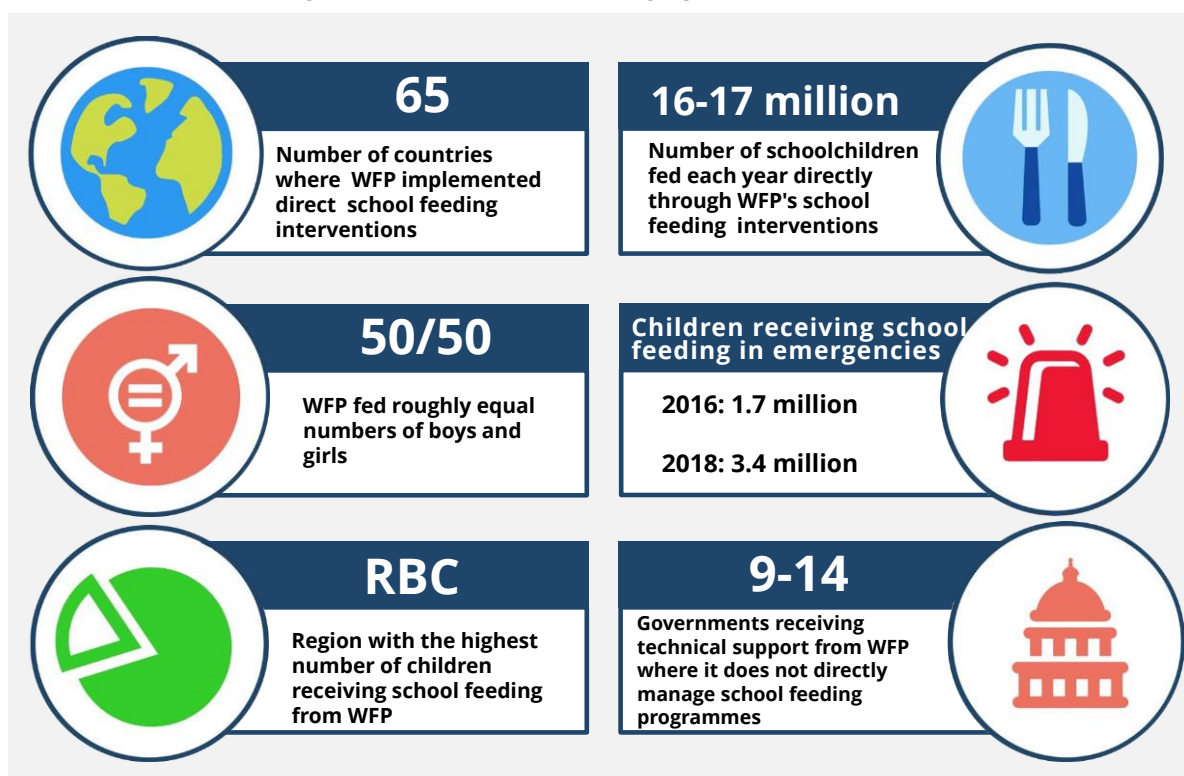
² Over 300 people (153 women and 156 men) participated in interviews and focus group discussions at the global (82), regional (34) and country (193) levels. Of 737 staff targeted, 229 responded to the electronic survey, representing a 31 percent response rate.

³ Cambodia, Côte d'Ivoire, Haiti, Kenya, Mozambique, Namibia, Peru, Rwanda, Tajikistan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Tunisia.

⁴ As explored in WFP/EB.A/2020/7-C.

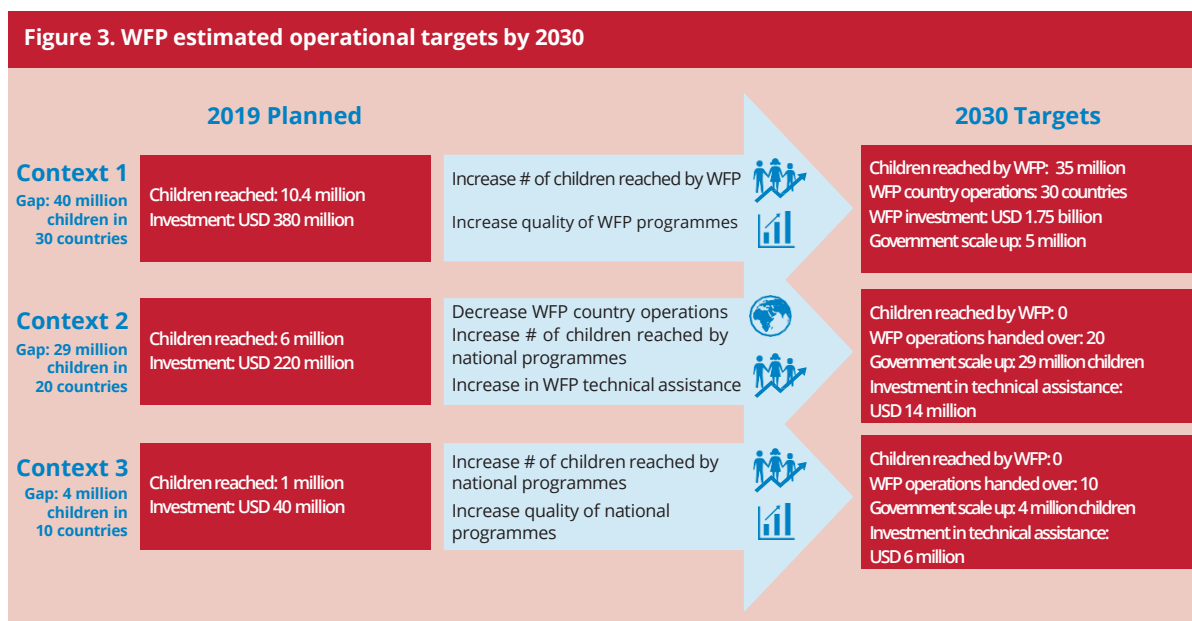
11. The 2013 policy guided WFP school feeding interventions throughout the evaluation period (see figure B). Activities included direct school feeding operations and related capacity strengthening, advocacy and partnership engagement and support and guidelines for WFP staff at all levels.
12. The evaluation also looked at the WFP school feeding response to the COVID-19 pandemic; in addition to references throughout the main report, a dedicated annex provides further details on that subject.
13. The school feeding strategy for 2020–2030 is framed around multiple outcomes and places greater emphasis on linking school feeding to other school health and nutrition (SHN) interventions and on the 8,000-day paradigm, which calls for rethinking investment in the health and nutrition of schoolchildren. It prioritizes enhanced coverage and quality of school feeding through a gradual scale-up and transition of school feeding programmes to national ownership, moving WFP far beyond the direct delivery of school feeding. It sets very ambitious operational targets for WFP (see figure C).

Figure B: WFP school feeding operations, 2014–2020



Sources: Data drawn from various WFP documents including the [State of School Feeding Worldwide 2020](#).

Abbreviation: RBC = Regional Bureau for the Middle East and Northern Africa

Figure C: School feeding strategy operational targets to 2030

Source: WFP school feeding strategy 2020–2030, p.32.

Note: The financial targets are to raise annual expenditures from the 2019 figures to the figures shown for 2030.

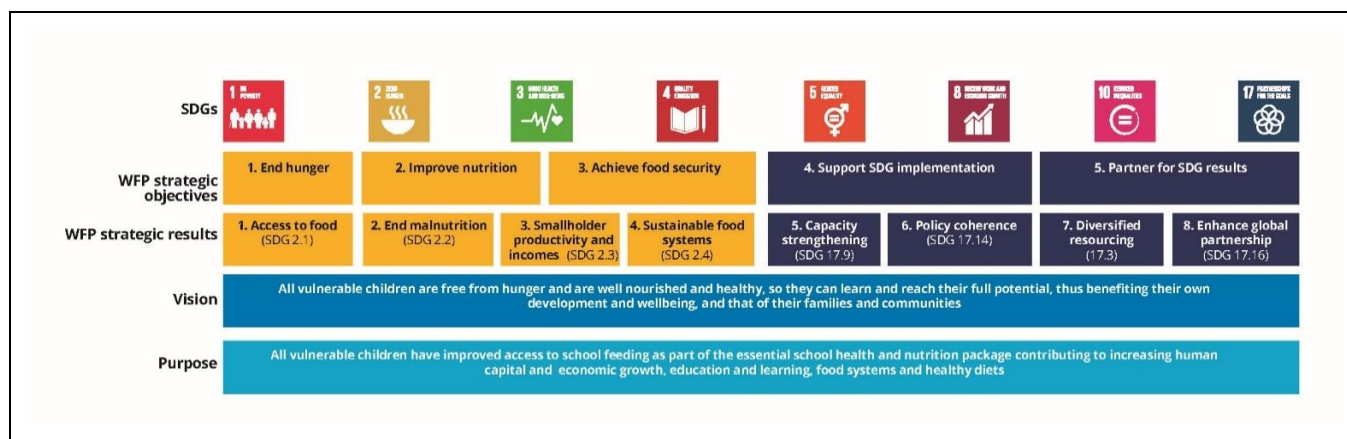
14. Oversight for school feeding was initially the responsibility of a school feeding unit and since 2018 has been the responsibility of SBP, which has a staff of 22. At the regional level, school feeding support is provided by focal points who work with country office teams of varying size. Support for countries has also come from the Centre of Excellence against Hunger in Brazil, which was established in 2011; additional centres of excellence have since opened in Côte d'Ivoire and China. Since 2019, SBP has had its own line in WFP's budget, set at USD 2.5 million annually. Over the evaluation period, WFP spent an average USD 310 million a year on school feeding programmes.

Evaluation findings

Relevance

How relevant is the WFP 2013 school feeding policy, considering the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and WFP's current strategic plan (2017–2021)?

15. The relevance of the 2013 policy is confirmed by continued research into and evaluations of multiple outcomes in the domains of safety nets, education, nutrition and support for the local economy. Evidence collected globally reveals the interdependence of education, nutrition and health outcomes, the need for a focus on the first 8,000 days of life and the important role of school feeding as part of an SHN package delivered through schools. This approach is central to the new WFP school feeding strategy. However, neither the policy nor the strategy provides sufficient strategic guidance on the planning and implementation of school feeding in humanitarian contexts, even though this remains a major component of WFP school feeding activities.
16. The school feeding strategy highlights the links between school feeding and a range of SDGs (see figure D), with a focus on human capital and on the potential relevance of school feeding beyond primary schools, highlighting gender and equity concerns and acknowledging the need for climate sensitivity. This expanded agenda is not developed in detail, however, which could present a risk if the ambition is not matched by adequate human and financial resources framed by plausible funding expectations.

Figure D: SDGs supported by the WFP school feeding strategy 2020–2030

Source: Extracted from the theory of change presented in the WFP school feeding strategy for 2020–2030

17. The policy was well aligned with the WFP strategic plan for 2014–2017, but opportunities to strengthen the visibility and positioning of school feeding in the strategic plan for 2017–2021 were missed and school feeding indicators were omitted from early versions of the CRF. WFP school feeding interventions reflected the directions set out in the 2013 policy, but a loss of momentum coupled with a reduction in school feeding capacity at headquarters led to shortcomings in the implementation of the policy. The development of the school feeding strategy for 2020–2030 under a reinvigorated SBP has led to the updating and strengthened implementation of the policy.
18. WFP has sought to be flexible and responsive to the priorities of national governments when adapting to the constraints and challenges encountered in national settings. The policy allows for considerable flexibility but the strategy classifies contexts more rigidly according to various WFP roles. This could result in insufficient recognition of operational contexts where WFP may have to play a range of roles in a single country.

Results

To what extent has WFP been able to deliver results in line with the objectives set out in the 2013 school feeding policy?

19. *Safety net.* School feeding constitutes a significant value transfer relative to household income and is therefore an important benefit for the participating households in most places where WFP operates. This is confirmed by the effectiveness of school feeding as an incentive for school attendance. Its safety-net significance is also demonstrated by its use in emergencies, as highlighted by the pressure to find alternative ways to deliver food to households when schools were closed as part of COVID-19 containment measures. School feeding coverage is quite limited in many contexts, however, and its benefits are therefore localized. Recognition of the role of school feeding in safety nets is increasingly widespread, but its systematic integration into national social protection systems remains relatively rare.
20. *Educational results.* There is widespread evidence of the positive effects of school feeding on enrolment including positive gender and equity effects. However, the educational outcomes of school feeding depend on context. Some rigorous evaluations⁵ demonstrate that well-designed school feeding programmes can reinforce learning outcomes. Yet school feeding has only occasionally and to a limited extent been systematically integrated into overall education sector planning, even though its educational outcomes depend on

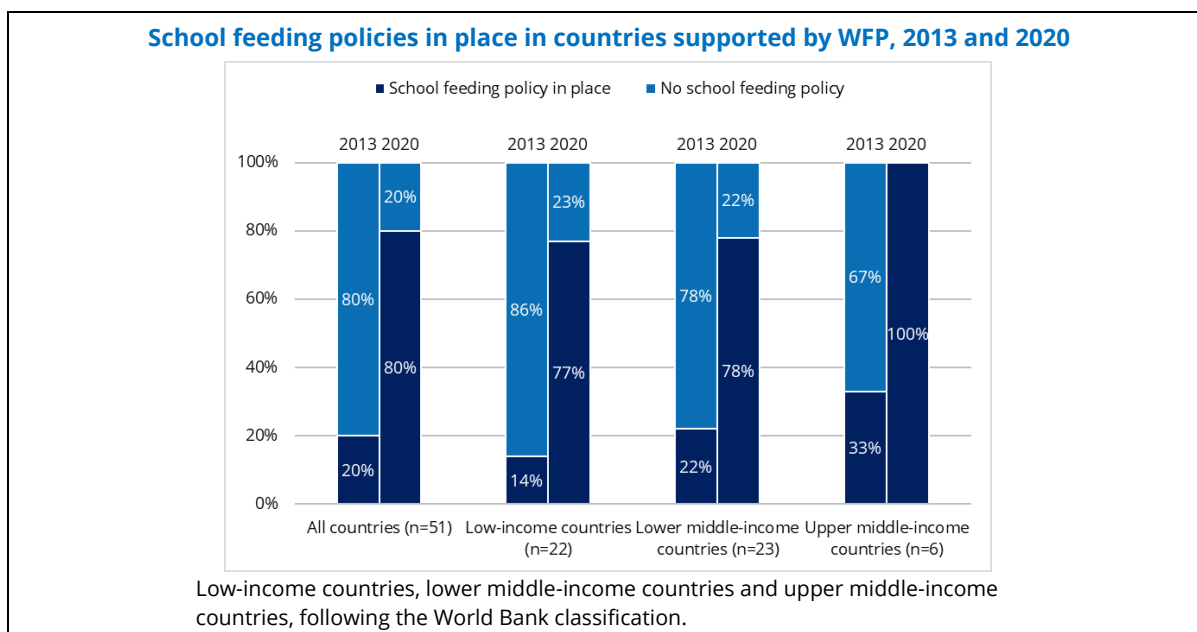
⁵ This evaluation defines “rigorous” evaluations as those with an experimental or quasi-experimental methodology that allows comparison with a counterfactual.

complementary inputs. There is considerable scope for improving monitoring of the educational effects of school feeding.

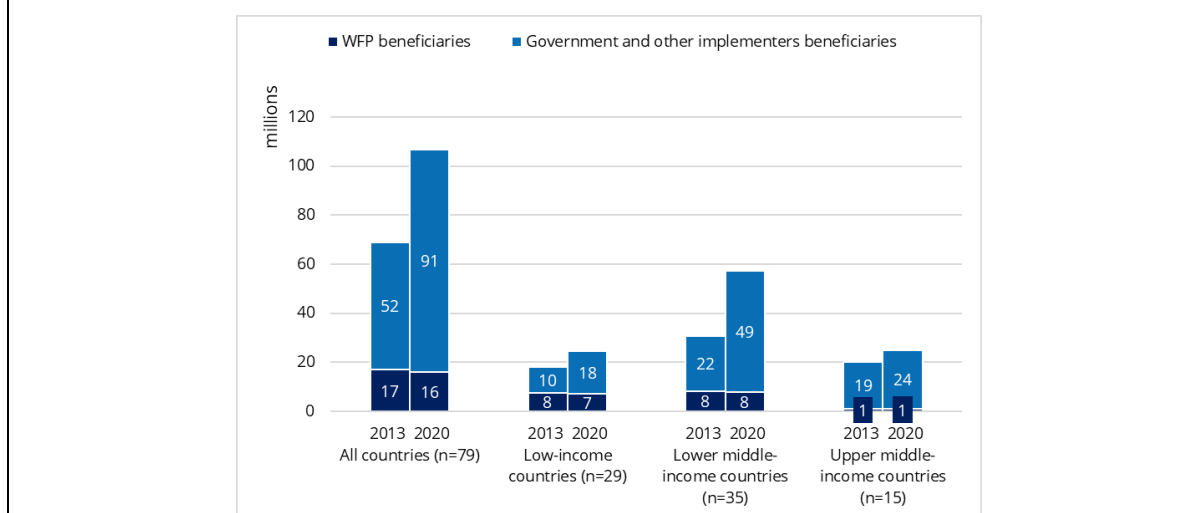
21. *Nutrition results.* School feeding rations are designed to be nutritious, but the incorporation of additional nutrition-sensitive components into school feeding programmes has been haphazard, information on their implementation is often anecdotal, and their effectiveness may be undermined by practical shortcomings in delivery. Direct observation of the nutritional effects of school feeding is generally impractical except under rigorous research conditions. The likelihood of relevant nutrition outcomes therefore has to be inferred from the quality of intervention design and implementation; good quality monitoring of implementation is rare, however, which makes credible claims for nutrition outcomes difficult to make.
22. *Supporting local production.* The number of home-grown school feeding initiatives increased during 2014–2020, frequently reflecting government demand. However, the challenges associated with operationalizing a more complex and decentralized approach have frequently been underestimated and most initiatives have been relatively small-scale with uncertain sustainability. It is also difficult to achieve the intended impacts on smallholders and communities, and smallholder suppliers face risks if demand for their produce is interrupted, for example during emergencies.
23. *Gender and equity* have often been included in programme design and the policy and strategy acknowledge opportunities to contribute to progress towards gender and equity objectives. However, school feeding interventions have tended to focus on numerical targets for the equal inclusion of women and men and girls and boys and have not identified, prioritized or adequately monitored opportunities to achieve gender-transformative results.⁶
24. *Strengthening national capacity.* There has been a significant increase in the number of countries that have adopted school feeding policies, often drawing on WFP advice and support. With few exceptions, however, national budget expenditures on school feeding have increased only modestly although the share of school feeding undertaken by governments and non-WFP implementers has risen (see figure E).
25. *Downstream efforts.* WFP has engaged extensively in capacity-strengthening activities at the national, subnational and local levels, including in schools and communities. In some countries these efforts have been linked to the handover of WFP school feeding programmes to governments.
26. *School feeding in humanitarian contexts* is a valuable intervention. However, interventions have not sufficiently recognized the specific characteristics of these complex operating environments (for example, conflict vs. natural disasters, sudden-onset emergencies vs. protracted crises, refugees vs. host communities) or protection concerns. Some emergencies may require a complete reconfiguration of school feeding operations; this has been demonstrated on a global scale by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has seen WFP adapt to school closures by providing take-home rations in some settings.

⁶ WFP defines gender transformative as follows: "An initiative (law, policy, programme, project etc.) that changes gender relations in favour of the equal sharing of power by women and men, and girls and boys. The action involves revising the socio-cultural, political and economic structures and norms that underpin inequalities". Source: WFP Gender Office. [Gender Concepts](#).

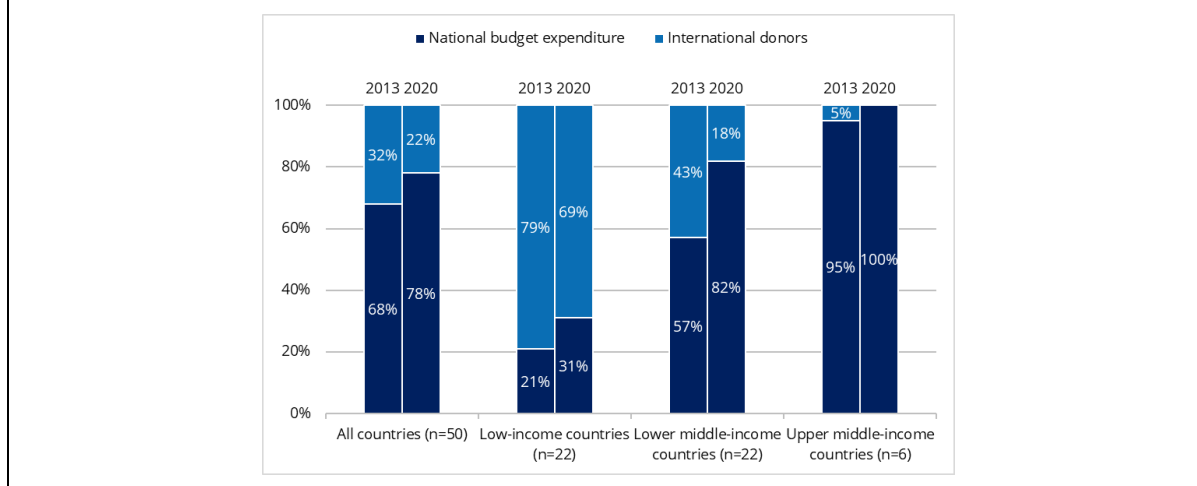
Figure E: The increasing role of governments in school feeding



Beneficiaries supported by WFP compared to those supported by governments or other implementers in WFP-supported countries, 2013 and 2020



National budget expenditure versus international donor support in WFP-supported countries, 2013 and 2020



Source: *State of School Feeding Worldwide 2020*.

Organizational readiness for delivery and support for delivery

How well is WFP equipped to deliver effective and equitable school feeding programmes and to assist governments with the implementation of school feeding programmes?

27. *Clear and coherent frameworks to support programming.* The school feeding strategy for 2020–2030 is recognized at all levels as an appropriate long-term framework for WFP work in SHN. The consultative process for the design of the strategy galvanized interest and support internally and externally. However, further clarity is needed in the following areas:
- the global targets set out in the strategy, by context;
 - recognition of the multiple roles for WFP within a given country;
 - the role of school feeding as a stress response mechanism and the circumstances specific to crisis settings;
 - the practical implications of the 8,000-day paradigm, particularly for WFP's approach to adolescent girls;
 - expectations for gender-transformative school feeding, climate-sensitive approaches, digitalization and innovation; and
 - WFP's role in the transition of school feeding programmes to national ownership, including capacity and systems strengthening, enables these transition processes.
28. Regional school feeding strategy concept notes and implementation plans have provided more clarity on priorities, in line with country and regional specificities, and emphasize common agendas; however, they require adequate resources for implementation.
29. With first-generation CSPs, WFP has been able to position school feeding more strategically within the humanitarian–development–peace nexus during planning. CSPs most frequently link school feeding to efforts to address root causes and enhance resilience. Work on the strategic connection between WFP school feeding activities and national and partner priorities and progress towards nationally owned SHN programmes is under way.
30. *Conduciveness of systems to staffing and funding WFP roles in various settings.* Country-level staffing (in terms of the number of staff and their skills and seniority) falls short of needs for school feeding programming in various contexts. Gaps in several technical areas affect WFP's capacity as an enabler. WFP staffing systems are not conducive to the recruitment, retention and continuity of the staff needed for various school feeding roles, especially the enabling role. Constraints include short-term funding, which increases reliance on consultancy and short-term contracts and limits WFP's ability to work on long-term programming and policy processes.
31. The technical assistance and support that country office school feeding teams received from regional bureaux, headquarters and the Brazil Centre of Excellence Against Hunger were insufficiently tailored to specific contexts and technical gaps. The respective responsibilities of headquarters and regional bureaux in supporting country-level school feeding programmes remain unclear and there is room to improve internal coordination and alignment. The ongoing drafting of regional implementation plans is a step towards addressing some of these concerns.
32. Constraints are also inherent in WFP budget and financing processes and systems. The following challenges risk undermining the effectiveness of WFP school feeding programming in various country settings:
- CSPs have not attracted funds in the ways envisioned, and short-term and earmarked funding continue to dominate.
 - Linking financial resources for school feeding to performance remains problematic.

- There is insufficient reflection on how to fund long-term enabling support in contexts where school feeding programmes are becoming a government responsibility and where WFP is not directly implementing school feeding operations.
33. *Leveraging resources.* The school feeding strategy raises significant challenges in terms of ambition and cost. In line with the priorities of the strategy, WFP has made considerable effort to mobilize new sources of funding by diversifying its donor base and engaging with new types of donor, with early indications of success. Mobilizing funding remains a challenge, particularly for WFP work on capacity strengthening and enabling and more generally for middle-income country contexts, where leveraging domestic resources has not been easy and opportunities to engage with international financial institutions need to be explored. WFP's resource mobilization approaches need to be compatible with its overall ambitions on partnerships and combined with stronger support for national governments in their efforts to attract resources for national school feeding programmes.
34. *Monitoring, results-based management and evidence generation.* WFP has sought to improve its results-based management and substantial progress has been made at headquarters in strengthening the CRF. However, WFP acknowledges serious shortcomings in its ability to report on school feeding performance. The "resources to results" exercise revealed that WFP cannot yet report comprehensively on its school feeding activities because such activities are not always separately identified due to the bundling of activities. Consequently, even basic information – for example, on total expenditures and beneficiaries and the costs of school feeding operations – is not routinely available. School feeding was not specifically addressed when the CRF was launched, and the corporate school feeding indicators subsequently developed are of limited use. The school feeding policy (as does the strategy now) focuses on the enabling agenda, but WFP acknowledges that appropriate indicators for capacity strengthening and influencing are still being developed.
35. In addition, there have been unrealistic expectations about the ability of regular monitoring indicators to capture all the intended results of school feeding programmes. Some outcomes are long-term, some are dependent on complementary inputs by other partners and some are impractical to measure directly on a routine basis (such as micronutrient deficiency among school feeding beneficiaries). Regular monitoring that should facilitate reporting on basic standards of delivery (number of children fed, number of school feeding days, unit costs and adherence to evidence-based quality standards) often falls short. Poor alignment of WFP monitoring and reporting systems with those of national governments is a challenge for the sustainable handover of school feeding programmes to national institutions.
36. Well-designed evaluations can complement operational monitoring by building evidence about the effectiveness of school feeding programmes. WFP has strengthened its systems for ensuring the quality and credibility of decentralized evaluations, and it is envisaged that CSPs should be accompanied by country-level monitoring and evaluation plans. However, opportunities to evaluate some of the school feeding initiatives that were not funded by major donors have been missed; meanwhile, generic approaches have made some evaluations less relevant. Recently, SBP has prioritized fundraising for evaluations and recruited an evaluation officer, which could strengthen overall performance management in respect of school feeding.
37. Since 2018 WFP has given new impetus to its work on global evidence generation and advocacy, and the 2020 edition of the flagship publication *State of School Feeding Worldwide* has been published.

Organizational readiness for strengthening enabling environments

How well is WFP equipped to focus on fostering environments that enable national institutions to design, finance and implement sustainable school feeding programmes?

38. This question assessed progress in terms of the dimensions of an enabled environment shown in figure A. In line with its corporate organizational shift, WFP is paying greater attention to its role in enabling school feeding in all contexts, as reflected in CSPs. WFP faces challenges in fulfilling its dual role of implementer and enabler, particularly in terms of funding, staffing and capacity to work within the humanitarian–development–peace nexus.
39. *Advocacy for school feeding as an entry point for the 2030 Agenda.* WFP is recognized as the agency of reference in the school feeding domain and is thus well positioned to advocate policy changes aimed at the adoption of an integrated SHN approach that contributes to multiple SDGs. Since 2018 WFP has successfully stepped up global advocacy for school feeding in various sectors, but these efforts have been insufficiently connected with country-level advocacy and there is limited regional involvement. School feeding advocacy has been hindered by a lack of clarity regarding the reasons for advocacy and weak messaging around school feeding in the context of the SDGs. Efforts to address these weaknesses are ongoing. Although there are a number of country-level advocacy partnerships, WFP should systematically explore and engage in opportunities, including with partner organizations.
40. *Partnerships, networking and multisectoral coordination.* Fostering an environment that is conducive to efficient, effective and sustainable national school feeding programmes requires strong partnerships with host governments and effective multisectoral coordination. Capacity assessments have been conducted in a wide range of countries using the SABER⁷ tool. Nonetheless, engagement is insufficiently strategic and efforts to strengthen partnerships with host governments and build multisectoral coalitions need to be informed by lessons learned from countries that have already pursued these approaches.
41. The school feeding strategy has accelerated the establishment of external partnerships. Its ambitious agenda will require a shift in mindset at all levels. Since 2018 WFP has been instrumental in enhancing global external partnerships for school feeding, forging or reinforcing alliances with a range of stakeholders; however, these efforts are perceived as having a limited direct effect at the country level. There are still gaps related to guiding and prioritizing partnerships that will improve the sustainability of school feeding programmes. At the country level, there are opportunities to strengthen synergies among United Nations agencies, promote advisory partnerships with non-governmental organizations, develop a shared vision with private sector partners, prioritize partnering on learning and research with regional organizations and promote broader SHN partnerships – all areas where WFP is not often seen as a driver of school feeding partnerships.
42. *Policy/legal/strategy framework and related financial capacity.* WFP has facilitated the government-led formulation of policy and strategy frameworks that advance school feeding in various settings. There has been less focus on subnational policy, and WFP has limited capacity to engage in strategic support at that level. At the country level, WFP is conscious of the importance of anchoring school feeding in various sectors; however, progress in linking school feeding with social protection policy dialogue varies by region.

⁷ The *Systems Approach for Better Education Results* is a World Bank-hosted initiative to produce comparative data and knowledge about education policies and institutions, with the aim of helping countries systematically strengthen their education systems (<http://saber.worldbank.org>).

43. The implementation of national school feeding policy largely depends on increased financing, which is a significant challenge. WFP has started to create incentives for more sustainable models of financing and is exploring new partnerships to that end.
44. *Strengthened institutional capacity to design, implement and monitor school feeding programmes.* WFP's work to strengthen school feeding capacity remains quite narrow in scope, focused mostly on traditional WFP school feeding activities rather than institutional reforms and complementary aspects of school feeding quality programming. The latter should include attention to gender transformation, support for nutrition-sensitive local agriculture and food systems, the mobilization of and capacity strengthening for local actors and the introduction of climate-sensitive approaches. WFP could conduct more capacity assessments in these areas.
45. *Effective strategies for transition to nationally owned school feeding programmes.* The transition to nationally owned school feeding programmes is a long-term process and requires internal analysis of preconditions, country readiness, challenges and opportunities. WFP has not developed sufficiently effective, realistic, gradual, comprehensive and well supported and monitored transition strategies or plans.
46. The school feeding strategy sets ambitious targets for moving towards nationally owned school feeding programmes, yet limited corporate understanding of the process and its associated risks is hindering WFP's capacity to sustainably support countries in undertaking the task. Existing WFP school feeding transition strategies show that there is a need for nuanced and tailored approaches. Success is much more likely where government leadership and commitment is strong and where WFP systematically invests efforts in all dimensions of the enabling environment for school feeding (such as political commitment, policy agenda and the technical capacity of national institutions), with strong engagement on partnership, advocacy and capacity strengthening initiatives. WFP's role post-transition also needs to be better defined and understood.

Conclusions

47. The new school feeding strategy sets ambitious targets for WFP's school feeding agenda. The strategy is transformative in ways that underscore how scaled-up school feeding will help countries achieve the SDGs. The strategy (hence the evaluation theory of change) is premised on an understanding that, while in certain contexts WFP will continue to play a role in implementing school feeding activities, countries can gradually progress to national school feeding programmes provided that certain conditions are in place.
48. In the future, WFP will need to focus on ensuring that the transformative ambitions of the strategy can be implemented on the scale that is envisioned within the broader SHN approach reflected in the strategy.

Key factors influencing WFP school feeding performance

Conclusion 1: Various factors have played key roles in the success of WFP school feeding activities. These reflect the work and experience gained by WFP and partners and constitute strengths that WFP can build on:

- Across various contexts, WFP continues to be recognized as a partner of excellence for school feeding; WFP has a strong acknowledged position of expertise and recognized added value.
- Country teams have driven programme design and implementation and have been at the heart of much of WFP's work on school feeding. Their experience is a vital resource for future work.

- Additional international evidence and advocacy have resulted in greater recognition of the role of school feeding in education, nutrition and local economies, and as a safety net. WFP is committed to strengthening the evidence base through evaluations.
- The creation and expansion of a separate school feeding division, followed by the new school feeding strategy and the consultative process used to prepare it, have given fresh impetus to WFP's global positioning on school feeding and strengthened its commitment to school feeding. Regional implementation plans are making school feeding ambitions more concrete and highlighting gaps that need to be addressed.
- The CSPs and regional implementation plans constitute a strategic planning and budgeting framework that makes the strategic role of school feeding more visible and can enhance linkages between the various levels and areas of work of the organization.
- SBP leadership, strong backing by senior management of the school feeding agenda and recent increased engagement with external partners have advanced the positioning of school feeding, particularly at the global level, at WFP headquarters and in selected countries.
- Strong partnerships with host governments and effective multisectoral coordination have been critical to the successful transfer of school feeding programmes to government ownership and have strengthened the enabling environment in a number of countries, although this agenda remains challenging as noted under Conclusion 2 below.
- Governments are increasingly committed to national school feeding. The COVID-19 pandemic has further demonstrated the importance of school feeding globally and generated valuable lessons and experience.

Conclusion 2: A number of factors have hampered the success of WFP school feeding. The following weaknesses and challenges will need to be addressed:

- The nuances and dynamism of some contexts have not always been dealt with in a way that results in flexible and responsive approaches to school feeding. This has affected the success of WFP's work as implementer and enabler, including in humanitarian contexts.
- Although the handover of WFP school feeding programmes to governments and support for the development of sustainable national school feeding programmes is a long-standing objective, it has been difficult for WFP to adapt its staffing and capacity accordingly.
- WFP's capacity to perform the enabling and capacity strengthening roles that it aspires to has been limited. It remains a challenge to ensure that a sufficiently deep understanding of how to engage in transition and post-transition situations is matched by such capacity.
- Efforts to learn from programme implementation have been insufficiently systematic and comprehensive, reducing WFP's ability to capitalize on experience and demonstrate results. Monitoring capacity, including skills, systems and budgets, has been inadequate.
- The school feeding strategy, like the earlier school feeding policy, does not focus sufficiently on school feeding in humanitarian and fragile settings and as a response to shocks.
- There has not been enough focus on key SDG dimensions, particularly gender-transformative approaches, equity and climate change.

- Donors have been mostly reluctant to pay for country capacity strengthening on the scale that is required for the enabling role. Funding for middle-income countries has been difficult to mobilize, even at the level of seed funding.
- Sustained and long-term funding for school feeding remains elusive. Ultimately, the implementation of national school feeding policy depends on increased and efficient use of national funding, which continues to be a major challenge.
- Limits on fiscal space and varying levels of government commitment work against ambitions for the handover of programmes to national ownership in a range of contexts.

Validity of the theory of change and associated assumptions

Conclusion 3: Analysis of theory of change assumptions highlights areas where WFP needs to continue to strengthen organizational readiness and address key links in the theory of change.

Areas of particular concern are:

- Shortcomings in WFP's present ability to perform the facilitating and enabling role required by the strategic focus on transition to fully nationally owned and implemented school feeding programmes.
- Challenges in mobilizing funding of adequate quality and quantity to implement the strategy.
- Challenges in building sufficient capacity within WFP, especially at the country level, to implement the strategy at scale.
- Challenges in developing the partnerships needed to fulfil the cross-sector roles and secure the degree of government ownership required to realize the vision of sustainable school feeding programmes within an SHN framework.

Opportunities and risks

49. Conclusion 4 highlights the main opportunities and threats identified by the evaluation. Subsequent paragraphs describe their implications for the school feeding strategy.

Conclusion 4: Opportunities for enhancing WFP's contribution to the SDGs are presented by the momentum generated by the new school feeding strategy, the consensus and partnership that have been built around the SHN agenda, and the collaborative approaches and partnerships that have characterized the COVID-19 response. The preparation of the next WFP strategic plan is an important opportunity to reinforce school feeding as a WFP priority.

Risks to the school feeding agenda include the risk of reduced prioritization of school feeding, the risk of taking on too much with the SHN agenda and not being specific enough about WFP's role and added value, and the likely challenges in obtaining adequate funding from the international community and from recipient governments (which may become more acute in the aftermath of COVID-19).

Implications for the school feeding strategy

50. WFP has set itself ambitious targets through its school feeding agenda. Its increased attention to school feeding, enhanced engagement with partners and strategic planning efforts are important – but not sufficient – aspects of its organizational readiness to implement the strategy.

51. To achieve its objectives WFP will need to invest strategically in key areas of work that will determine its capacity to deliver, particularly in the following:
- Updating and fine tuning its policies and strategies in order to address important gaps; this includes providing more strategic guidance on humanitarian settings and defining how it will engage with the 8,000-day agenda without spreading itself too thinly.
 - Improving guidance and standards and understanding of country contexts and the roles that it can play, with a focus on humanitarian settings.
 - Strengthening implementation.
 - Prioritizing partnerships and resource mobilization in ways that match the needs of countries and priority agendas (including with regard to gender and climate change).
 - Enhancing and significantly upscaling human resource capacity in support of WFP's work in the full range of countries and contexts, while engaging in partnerships that advance the school feeding agenda.
 - Strengthening gender and other cross-cutting dimensions of school feeding in order to increase its contribution to the SDGs.
 - Strengthening monitoring, evaluation and learning in order to ensure that WFP has the capacity to learn from and disseminate the results of school feeding work in ways that highlight WFP's contribution to the SHN agenda.
52. An overriding consideration for the future will be WFP's comparative advantages relative to what other partners can contribute to the SHN agenda.

Recommendations

53. The recommendations reflect the main conclusions of the evaluation and focus on key dimensions of organizational readiness that, if addressed, will enable WFP to achieve its ambitions. Sub-recommendations provide further detail regarding how each recommendation can be implemented.

Updating the policy and strengthening the strategy

Recommendation 1: Ensure continued high-level attention is paid to school feeding by providing inputs for the development of the new strategic plan, giving an Executive Board briefing on school feeding policy and strategy and revising the school feeding policy and strategy in 2022 and 2023.		
Priority: High	Overall lead: Assistant Executive Director, Programme and Policy Development Department	
Sub-recommendations	Who	Timing
1.1 Ensure that the WFP strategic plan for 2022–2026 prioritizes the school feeding agenda	Assistant Executive Director, Programme and Policy Development Department with support from School-based Programmes Division	November 2021

Recommendation 1: Ensure continued high-level attention is paid to school feeding by providing inputs for the development of the new strategic plan, giving an Executive Board briefing on school feeding policy and strategy and revising the school feeding policy and strategy in 2022 and 2023.		
1.2 As soon as possible provide a briefing to the Executive Board that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> draws attention to the strategy and how it has taken the 2013 policy forward; notes how implementation of the strategy is being strengthened; and proposes a road map for revising the policy and strategy. 	School-based Programmes Division	November 2021
1.3 Update the policy and strategy to address the gaps identified by this evaluation; use a consultative and coherence-building approach and include a costed and accountable implementation plan.	School-based Programmes Division, with input by the regional bureaux and other relevant units at WFP	February 2023

Guidance and standards for school feeding in humanitarian settings

Recommendation 2: Develop guidance and standards for school feeding and school health and nutrition in humanitarian settings (including for school feeding as a response to shocks) and ensure that the principles and strategic priorities of this guidance are adequately reflected in the revised school feeding policy and strategy.		
Priority: High	Overall lead: School-based Programmes Division	
Sub-recommendations	Who	Timing
2.1 Engage with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Children's Fund, Education Cannot Wait and the World Bank, as well as relevant WFP units, to identify strategic priorities for school feeding in all humanitarian contexts.	School-based Programmes Division	December 2022
2.2 Collaboratively develop guidance for humanitarian contexts based on the strategic priorities identified (see point 2.1 above) and a review of lessons learned (including from COVID-19 and the rollout of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework).	School-based Programmes Division with input by regional bureaux, Programme – Humanitarian and Development Division and Emergencies Operations Division	December 2022
2.3 Ensure that key principles from the guidance are reflected in the revision of the school feeding policy and strategy (see recommendation 1).	School-based Programmes Division and working group	February 2023

Strengthening implementation

Recommendation 3: The regional bureau implementation plans (RBIPs) linked to the 2020–2030 strategy should be prioritized at the corporate level, and WFP should mobilize predictable minimum resources to implement the RBIP action plans.		
Priority: High	Overall lead: Assistant Executive Director, Programme and Policy Development Department	
Sub-recommendations	Who	Timing
3.1 Ensure the continued provision of dedicated predictable minimum multi-year resources for delivering the RBIPs.	Assistant Executive Director, Programme and Policy Development Department and Assistant Executive Director, Resources Management Department	November 2021
3.2 Establish or reinforce regional school feeding working groups to strengthen school feeding planning and implementation as part of CSPs.	Regional bureaux with support by School-based Programmes Division and Country Capacity Strengthening Unit	July 2021
3.3 Integrate gender and equity considerations into the RBIPs and use multi-country strategic reflection exercises to develop gender-transformative approaches.	Regional bureaux	December 2022
3.4 Ensure RBIP priorities are reflected in the revision of the policy and strategy, including in the costed implementation plan (see recommendation 1).	School-based Programmes Division	December 2022

Recommendation 4: Significantly strengthen WFP capacity to support the transition to full national ownership of school feeding programmes in priority countries and to add value in countries where transition processes have been completed.		
Priority: High	Overall lead: School-based Programmes Division	
Sub-recommendations/specific actions	Who	Timing
4.1 Review WFP's experience of supporting school feeding transition processes (drawing lessons from United Nations agencies with established upstream engagement roles). Work towards better approaches (including updated SABER guidance) for assessing government commitment in transition contexts.	School-based Programmes Division with regional bureau engagement	December 2021
4.2 Continue to strengthen regional and global learning mechanisms, advocating upstream work and promoting evidence-based standards of operational performance.	School-based Programmes Division and	December 2022 (link to RBIPs)

Recommendation 4: Significantly strengthen WFP capacity to support the transition to full national ownership of school feeding programmes in priority countries and to add value in countries where transition processes have been completed.		
	regional bureaux	
4.3 Identify capacity, skill and resource needs for transition and post-transition contexts. Ensure that the revised school feeding policy and strategy and updated RBIPs address these needs (also see recommendation 7).	School-based Programmes Division with senior management	February 2023
4.4 Develop guidance and tools for engagement with governments in the transition to sustainable national ownership.	School-Based Programmes Division	July 2022

Strengthening gender and other cross-cutting dimensions of school feeding

Recommendation 5: Pay greater attention to gender transformation and equity in school feeding and in the SHN agenda by focusing on these issues in regional and country planning, implementation and reporting.		
Priority: High	Overall lead: School-based Programmes Division	
Sub-recommendations	Who	Timing
5.1 Work with internal and external stakeholders to develop guidance on how to integrate gender and equity into the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of school feeding and SHN in CSPs, ensuring coherence with WFP's gender policy and disability road map.	School-based Programmes Division, Gender Office, Programme – Humanitarian and Development Division with support from regional bureaux and country offices as relevant	April 2022
5.2 Establish a seed funding mechanism for innovative multi-year country office work in gender transformation, equity and disability inclusion.	School-based Programmes Division and Gender Office	January 2022
5.3 Ensure gender transformation, equity and disability inclusion are part of the revised school feeding monitoring framework and annually review lesson learning on gender transformation, equity and disability from monitoring and evaluations (see recommendation 8).	School-based Programmes Division with support from Corporate Planning and Performance Division, Research, Assessment and Monitoring Division, Office of Evaluation country offices, regional bureaux	November 2021 with annual updates

Partnerships and resource mobilization

Recommendation 6: Develop a resource mobilization plan that complements WFP corporate resource mobilization efforts (globally and through CSPs). The plan should seek predictable multi-year funding for WFP's upstream school feeding work as well as its direct delivery of school feeding programmes, and it should encourage resource mobilization from country governments and other sources, including international financial institutions, in support of nationally implemented school feeding programmes.		
Priority: High	Overall lead: School-based Programmes Division and Partnerships and Advocacy Department	
Sub-recommendations	Who	Timing
6.1 Develop a multi-year resource mobilization plan for the school feeding strategy that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> takes account of various school feeding contexts; and includes a funding case that highlights the returns on various investments in school feeding (including upstream work). The funding case should be disseminated to Executive Board members and regularly updated. 	School-based Programmes Division and Partnerships and Advocacy Department, in consultation with other headquarters divisions, regional bureaux	December 2021
6.2 Support relevant country offices in mobilizing resources for national government programmes.	Regional bureaux with School-based Programmes Division and Partnerships and Advocacy Department	From January 2022 onwards

Human resource capacity that supports WFP's work across a full range of contexts

Recommendation 7: Scale up human resource capacity for the school feeding agenda, especially at the country level, in line with the ambitions of the school feeding strategy and the forthcoming people policy, in order to ensure that WFP can play the envisioned roles in different contexts and stages of transition.		
Priority: High	Overall lead: Human Resources Division	
Sub-recommendations	Who	Timing
7.1 Conduct a workforce planning exercise based on in-depth analysis of the skills and capacity needed at the country level to fulfil the ambitions of the school feeding strategy and comparing the results with WFP staffing profiles. Develop a capacity strengthening plan to address the operational and enabling needs identified.	Human Resources Division with support from School-based Programmes Division, Country Capacity Strengthening Unit, regional bureaux and the Brazil Centre of Excellence Against Hunger	November 2022

Recommendation 7: Scale up human resource capacity for the school feeding agenda, especially at the country level, in line with the ambitions of the school feeding strategy and the forthcoming people policy, in order to ensure that WFP can play the envisioned roles in different contexts and stages of transition.		
7.2 Engage with country offices to review country office organigrams to enable the right level of engagement in high level technical and policy dialogue and strengthen coordination between cross-sectoral teams to support the school-feeding agenda.	Regional bureaux with support from Human Resources Division and School-based Programmes Division	Continuous; complete pilots by July 2022
7.3 Establish a roster of technical, advocacy and governance/public finance management experts that can be drawn on as needed.	School-based Programmes Division, Brazil Centre of Excellence Against Hunger, Country Capacity Strengthening Unit	November 2022

Monitoring, evaluation and learning

Recommendation 8: Strengthen school feeding monitoring, evaluation and learning in a balanced way that supports accountability, strategic decision making, global learning and advocacy; respects increasing decentralization within WFP; and ensures that the demands placed on country office monitoring systems are realistic.		
Priority: High	Overall lead: Corporate Planning and Performance Division	
Sub-recommendations	Who	Timing
8.1 Strengthen corporate reporting on school feeding by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> reviewing corporate indicators to make them more relevant for school feeding reports without increasing the reporting burden on country offices; developing better ways to identify school feeding operations within corporate activities as a follow-up to the “resources to results” initiative; and strengthening WFP reporting on operational effectiveness and efficiency (in order to be able to answer basic questions such as how many children WFP has fed on how many days in a year and at what cost per meal). 	Corporate Planning and Performance Division and School-based Programmes Division with support from Country Capacity Strengthening Unit	November 2021, feeding into the redesign of the CRF for the WFP strategic plan for 2022–2026

Recommendation 8: Strengthen school feeding monitoring, evaluation and learning in a balanced way that supports accountability, strategic decision making, global learning and advocacy; respects increasing decentralization within WFP; and ensures that the demands placed on country office monitoring systems are realistic.		
8.2 Strengthen country-level monitoring and evaluation plans, for school feeding with particular attention to improving process monitoring, using and supporting national monitoring systems, and using carefully selected decentralized evaluations to demonstrate the effectiveness (or otherwise) of school feeding and SHN operations.	Regional bureaux with support from School-based Programmes Division and with country offices as part of CSP processes	Ongoing, reflect in CSPs published from July 2021
8.3 Continue to pursue a high-level research and evaluation agenda as envisaged in the 2020–2030 strategy; include joint work on addressing metrics for capacity strengthening and influencing such as the enhanced SABER school health and nutrition indicators.	School-based Programmes Division with support from Office of Evaluation	Ongoing, feeding into revision of strategy and policy by November 2022

Disclaimer

54. The designations employed, maps and the presentation of the material in this document do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the United Nations World Food Programme concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area, or of its authorities, or concerning the delineation of its frontiers or boundaries.

Acronyms

CRF	corporate results framework
CSP	country strategic plan
MIC	middle-income country
RBIP	regional bureau implementation plan
SABER	Systems Approach for Better Education Results
SBP	School-Based Programmes Division
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SHN	school health and nutrition