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Summary report on the evaluation of the country strategic plan for China (2017–2021)

Executive summary

An evaluation of the country strategic plan for China for 2017–2021 was conducted between August 2020 and December 2020 and covered the WFP China office's strategy, activities, systems and partnerships for the period from 2017 to 2020. Taking a utilization-focused and consultative approach, the evaluation served the dual purpose of accountability and learning and is expected to inform the preparation of the new country strategic plan for China.

Country strategic plan activities have generated meaningful results under most strategic outcomes. The domestic programme consists of four nationally relevant pilot demonstration projects in counties with high poverty incidence. Projects on preschool nutrition contributed to more varied diets for young children and improved nutritional health awareness, although there are concerns with regard to sustainability when project subsidies are withdrawn. Agricultural projects helped poor smallholder farmers participate in the kiwifruit value chain and promoted the cultivation of zinc-enriched potatoes but were at too early a stage to enable full assessment of their impact on farmers' livelihoods. Activities aiming to strengthen vulnerable communities' capacity to withstand and respond to shocks caused by natural disasters were not implemented owing to lack of budget and the prioritization of activities in other areas. Domestic projects followed a participatory approach and their activities were adapted to the cultural customs of various ethnic groups. Project design was gender-sensitive and encouraged the participation of women but sometimes reinforced traditional gender roles.

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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While work on disaster preparedness and response presents an opportunity for collaboration between WFP and the Government of China, capacity strengthening in this area was limited because of the Government's already high capacity and the time needed to build relationships with relevant partners.

The WFP-China Centre of Excellence for Rural Transformation through South-South cooperation built a network of Chinese experts and mobilized them in demand-driven – but not always sufficiently context-specific – learning events benefiting about 70 countries. The centre of excellence has mobilized diverse experts, including a gender empowerment expert. The participation of women in learning events was encouraged but remained relatively low.

WFP headquarters and the WFP China office expanded existing partnerships and developed new ones with public institutions and private enterprises, mostly in the technology sector. The China office continued to raise funds for WFP international programmes, mostly from the Government of China and the Chinese public, and for domestic pilot projects, mostly from the private sector.

Overall, synergies among activities under various strategic outcomes were not well exploited. More could be done in measuring results and capturing and disseminating lessons from pilot projects, for both the upscaling of good practices in China and the sharing of experiences internationally through South-South cooperation. Improved measurement and dissemination of results would also help to establish credibility and trust with current and potential financing partners.

The WFP-China partnership was funded by a variety of donors but with limited funding predictability and strong earmarking, which led to some imbalances in funding for the country strategic plan. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs provided stable resources for both the operation of the WFP China office and the activities of the centre of excellence, and thus had a strong influence on the choice of initiatives and experts. Despite substantial efforts, progress has been slow in formalizing the financing partnership to facilitate WFP's access to China's international development funding. The WFP China office requires additional expertise in order to grasp the opportunities to expand the domestic programme and increase its policy influence.

In conclusion, under this first country strategic plan WFP and China have demonstrated the potential for strong strategic engagement in joining their expertise to find appropriate global solutions for hunger and improved food systems. The China office supported by WFP headquarters has been very successful in operationalizing the plan and building long-term partnerships with public institutions and the private sector in China. Going forward, more emphasis will be required on gathering evidence of the results of domestic pilot projects that demonstrates the added value for China of engagement with WFP on domestic issues and promotes the upscaling of those projects in China and their possible dissemination abroad through South-South cooperation. Technical advice provided through the centre of excellence could be better adapted to the specific situations of recipient countries. The current financial model for the country strategic plan needs to be stabilized through a more strategic funding approach for the plan's priorities. Mutually satisfactory procedures for providing WFP with access to official development assistance funding from China still need to be confirmed.

The evaluation makes two strategic and two operational recommendations. First, WFP should strengthen its strategic engagement with the Government of China on shared priorities and areas of expertise as entry points for maximizing the global impact of the WFP-China partnership. Second, WFP should continue to identify effective ways of working with internal and external stakeholder groups in China. On the operational side WFP should further strengthen processes in its domestic programme and the centre of excellence for capturing, sharing and communicating results and enhancing learning. WFP should also develop a clear plan for securing China's long-term contributions to WFP.

Draft decision*

The Board takes note of the summary report on the evaluation of the country strategic plan for China (2017–2021) (WFP/EB.2/2021/6-C/Rev.1) and management response (WFP/EB.2/2021/6-C/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. The evaluation of the WFP country strategic plan (CSP) for China covered the period from 2017 to 2020. It assessed WFP's strategic positioning and role in China, WFP's contributions to CSP strategic outcomes, efficiency and the factors that explain WFP's performance and the extent to which WFP made the strategic shift expected from the CSP. The evaluation served the dual objective of enhancing accountability and learning and informing strategic decision making for the development of the next CSP. Commissioned by WFP's independent Office of Evaluation, the evaluation was conducted by an external team from August to December 2020, with fieldwork conducted by national consultants in China between 9 November and 8 December 2020.
2. The evaluation used a mixed method, gender-sensitive approach, which included a desk review of secondary data; 103 key informant interviews with WFP staff in Rome and China, the Government of China, other national partners – including from the private sector – and international partners; and discussions and direct observations with farmer community members and in preschools. As a result of restrictions on international travel due to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, the international evaluation team could not travel to China and conducted interviews remotely; national consultants were allowed to travel in China. Many interviews were followed up by email communications that deepened and clarified the information collected. To assess the quality of support provided by WFP's China office through the WFP-China Centre of Excellence for Rural Transformation through South–South cooperation and the mobilization of funding from China, the evaluation conducted an online survey of a sample of 13 WFP country offices.

Context

3. China's population of 1.395 billion people¹ is the largest in the world and grew by 0.5 percent in 2018.² Over the last 20 years, China has experienced substantial progress in poverty reduction and social development. Its per capita gross domestic product for 2018 was estimated at USD 9,015.³ In 2017, as an upper-middle-income country, China's Human Development Index of 0.758 made it 85th out of 189 countries.⁴ Its achievement of the 2015 Millennium Development Goal target of halving the proportion of its people suffering from hunger accounted for two-thirds of the reduction in global hunger.
4. Challenges remain in reducing residual poverty and inequality and extending successful national programmes to marginalized communities. In 2018, there were still 30.5 million people in China living below the national poverty line.⁵ China's Gini index of 38.5 reflects high inequality in the distribution of social gains among wealth groups.⁶ Rural poverty and its consequences for food security and nutrition are largely concentrated in specific population groups in remote and mountainous areas. China currently faces a triple burden of malnutrition from undernourishment (or hunger), hidden hunger and obesity/overweight

¹ China Statistics Press. 2019. *China Statistical Yearbook 2019*.

² World Bank. [Population growth \(annual percentage\) – China](#).

³ China Statistics Press. 2019. *China Statistical Yearbook 2019*.

⁴ United Nations Development Programme. 2019. *Human Development Report 2019*.

⁵ WFP. August 2018. [WFP China Country Brief](#).

⁶ World Bank data – most recent value for 2016. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI?locations=CN-XT>.

- which are disproportionately concentrated in poor rural regions and among vulnerable groups such as children, rural households headed by single women and elderly people.⁷
5. Through its 13th five-year plan for economic and social development (covering 2016–2020),⁸ the Government of China led a major national effort to eliminate absolute poverty and substantially reduce relative poverty by the end of 2020. The Government is committed to ensuring that gender equality and women’s empowerment are addressed through efforts to uncover prevailing social and economic drivers of gender inequality.⁹ China is becoming a major development partner and provider of support through South–South and triangular cooperation, drawing on its economic and development experience to help developing countries tackle their challenges in food security, nutrition improvement and poverty reduction.¹⁰

WFP country strategic plan

6. WFP has been operating in China since 1979. In March 2016, WFP and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs signed a memorandum of understanding to strengthen the WFP-China partnership to promote the achievement of zero hunger and rural development globally. The China CSP for 2017–2021 was designed as a strategic framework under the memorandum of understanding. Within this framework, the WFP China office supports efforts to ensure domestic food security and nutrition (referred to as the “domestic programme”) while also functioning as the WFP Centre of Excellence for Rural Transformation through South–South Cooperation and as a WFP global office that raises funds and forges partnerships in support of work to achieve global food security and nutrition targets. The strategic outcomes of the CSP are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Strategic outcomes of the China country strategic plan (2017–2021)

Strategic outcome 1: Malnutrition rates among children in targeted “poverty counties” reduced in line with national norms by 2020.
Strategic outcome 2: Year-round livelihoods among smallholder farmers in frequent need of food assistance in areas such as Anhui, Gansu, Guangxi, Hainan and Hunan provinces enhanced.
Strategic outcome 3: Populations regularly affected by natural disasters in Anhui, Gansu and Guangxi provinces and other poor disaster-prone areas better able to withstand and respond to shocks all year round.
Strategic outcome 4: Selected developing countries assisted in enhancing food security and nutrition in line with their prioritized targets under Sustainable Development Goal 2 by 2030.
Strategic outcome 5: Work to enhance food security and nutrition in targeted “poverty counties” and selected developing countries supported year-round by increased private-sector resources and public–private partnerships.

7. The CSP’s needs-based plan estimated needs at USD 31.25 million. Of the USD 16.97 million (54.31 percent) received by March 2021, 71.3 percent was provided by the Government of China and the rest by Chinese private sector entities, international corporations and the Chinese public. WFP has engaged in partnerships at the national and global levels with private Chinese companies such as the internet giants Alibaba and Tencent.

⁷ International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs and WFP. February 2015. *China’s food security and nutrition under rapid transformation: Enhanced partnership with WFP*. Draft.

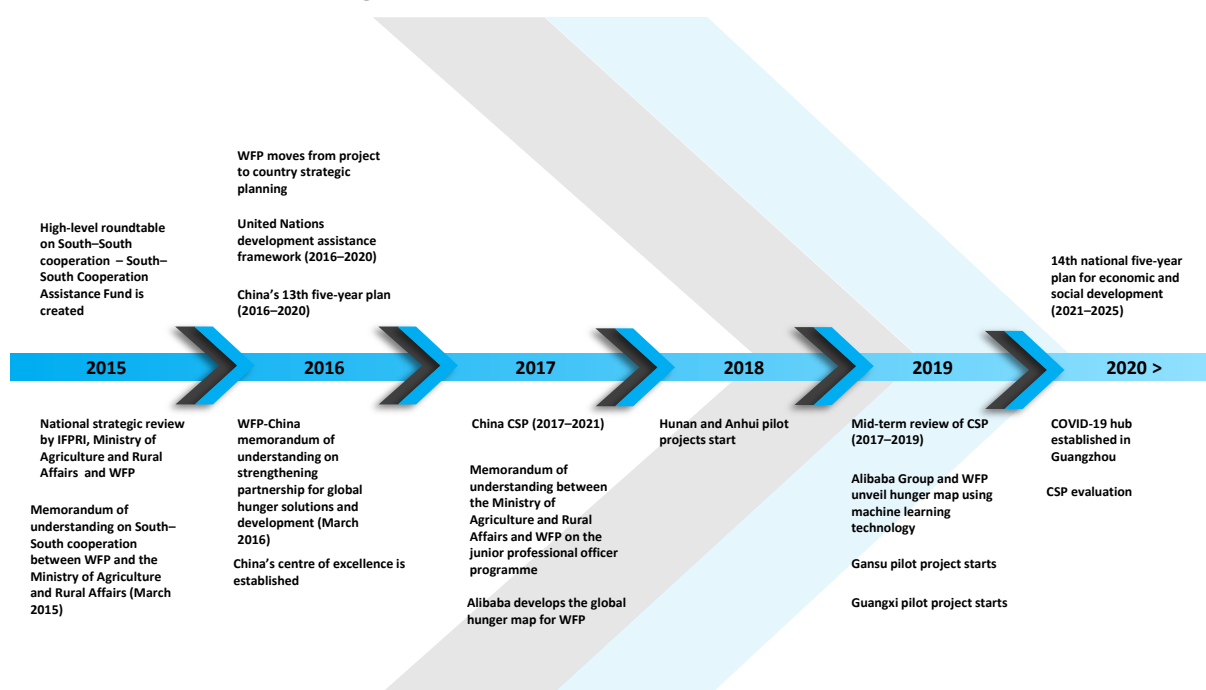
⁸ Available at: <https://policy.asiapacificenergy.org/node/2509>.

⁹ United Nations. 2020. *United Nations Sustainable Development Framework for the People’s Republic of China (2021–2025)*.

¹⁰ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. 2019. *FAO + China: Partnering for sustainable food security*.

8. As of mid-2020, the domestic programme comprised four projects in two sectors: two preschool nutrition programmes in kindergartens and preschools in Hunan Province and Guangxi Autonomous Region; and two smallholder agriculture demonstration projects in Gansu and Anhui provinces. The CSP also includes the operation of a designated centre of excellence focusing on South–South cooperation under strategic outcome 4 and the wide range of partnership activities supported under strategic outcome 5. In addition, the WFP China office also assisted in the creation of a new global humanitarian hub in Guangzhou to support the global COVID-19 emergency response. During the preparation and implementation of the CSP, several major policy initiatives in China influenced the focus of CSP activities (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. China context and WFP activities



Source: Prepared by the evaluation team based on data provided in the terms of reference for the CSP evaluation.

Evaluation findings

To what extent are the strategic position, role and specific contribution of WFP based on country priorities and appropriately aligned with people's needs and the strengths of WFP?

Relevance to national policies, strategies and goals, including national Sustainable Development Goals

9. Close collaboration on CSP design between the Government and WFP headquarters helped ensure alignment with China's overarching development strategy, the five-year plan for 2016–2020. Key areas of alignment include expansion of international cooperation in disaster prevention and mitigation and poverty alleviation; acceleration of the development of agriculture-related e-commerce; promotion of Cloud applications in logistics; and improvement of the ways in which foreign aid is offered.¹¹ The CSP contributes to progress in the focus areas for national action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)¹² by targeting poverty alleviation and promoting sustainable agriculture and resilience initiatives. It is also strongly aligned with China's national poverty

¹¹ Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. 2016. *The 13th Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development of the People's Republic of China (2016–2020)*.

¹² Jiang, X. 2020. *How China is implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. OECD Development Matters.

eradication campaign (which was due to end at the same time as the CSP), including through its focus on fundraising from the Chinese public.

10. The domestic programme is particularly well aligned with the Government's emphasis on reducing childhood stunting, as set out in the national nutrition plan for 2017–2030. That emphasis is evident in strategic outcome 1 of the CSP, which focuses on reducing stunting through the provision of nutritious meals to schoolchildren. The WFP preschool feeding programme complements current Government efforts to supply children with food and micronutrient packages that fill the "gap" in other nutrition interventions for children between 3 and 5 years old and raise the profile of preschool child nutrition on the national agenda. The focus of the two smallholder agriculture demonstration projects under strategic outcome 2 is in line with the Government's poverty reduction and rural transformation objectives, while the innovative zinc-enriched potato project reflects the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs' increased attention to nutritional balance.
11. During the CSP period, direct demand from the main partners for capacity strengthening support in disaster preparedness and response, as proposed under strategic outcome 3, was limited because of the Government's already high capacity in domestic disaster preparedness and response and the time needed to build relationships with relevant partners. Nonetheless, actions under strategic outcome 3 provided a strategic avenue for rapid response when WFP engaged with the Government of China in the COVID-19 pandemic response through the global humanitarian hub in Guangzhou in April 2020. Disaster preparedness still represents an opportunity for collaboration between WFP and the Government of China.
12. The focus of strategic outcome 4 on strengthening agricultural production and marketing in developing countries through South–South and triangular cooperation is clearly aligned with the national priority of contributing to global processes and aid. Early in the CSP period, the WFP China office engaged in extensive dialogue aimed at ensuring that South–South cooperation provided by China was demand-driven. The level of demand from other WFP country offices was assessed with a view to matching that demand with available Chinese expertise. Through the CSP, WFP also sought to take advantage of the emerging role of the China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA). CIDCA established the South–South Cooperation Assistance Fund in 2015 to assist developing countries' implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The fund provides an opportunity for WFP country offices, with support from the WFP China office, to submit development proposals for funding.

Relevance to the needs of the most vulnerable people in China

13. The CSP targets "poverty counties" where food and nutrition deficits have been identified. In addition, the demonstration projects supported by WFP pay close attention to the most vulnerable population groups, including children with poor nutrition outcomes, smallholder farmers living in poverty and women at risk of being left behind because of limited capacity. The most vulnerable households and individuals in these groups are targeted for CSP activities.

Relevance of WFP's strategic positioning with regard to changing conditions, national capacities and needs

14. WFP's strategic positioning has been as a global expert with experience in implementing programmes for reducing food insecurity, improving nutrition and responding to humanitarian crises. The WFP China office has positioned itself as a convener of stakeholder groups, negotiating with potential donors and helping to leverage the technical expertise of other organizations. Nonetheless, WFP's profile in China remains low: WFP's work in humanitarian contexts is well known (and was recently boosted by its receipt

of the Nobel Peace Prize) but given the Government's own strong ability to set policy, respond to disasters and implement widespread development projects, the added value of engaging with WFP on domestic issues needs to be made clearer and supported with sound evidence of results on the ground.

Partnerships and coherence with the United Nations system in China

15. CSP activities were consistent with the United Nations development assistance framework for 2016–2020, including in the area of “enhanced global engagement”, which includes the establishment of the centre of excellence. WFP coordinates with other United Nations agencies, for example in leading the United Nations agriculture and food security thematic group. The three Rome-based agencies are sharing knowledge effectively, but practical alignment and collaboration in practice are very limited despite apparent opportunities. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)¹³ have developed their own dedicated financial facilities for South–South and triangular cooperation activities, funded by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs for FAO and the Ministry of Finance for IFAD. The WFP China office has also been actively engaged in the development of the new United Nations sustainable development cooperation framework (UNSDCF) and, together with the other Rome-based agencies, has been instrumental in raising the profile of nutrition and food security in the UNSDCF.

What are the extent and quality of WFP's specific contributions to country strategic plan strategic outcomes in China?

Delivery of outputs and contribution to country strategic plan strategic outcomes

16. The CSP results framework does not define clear targets for achieved outputs or outcomes. Reporting of results against indicators is largely in qualitative terms. CSP activities have generally generated positive results but on a small scale, as opposed to the highly ambitious beneficiary targets outlined in the CSP document.¹⁴
17. Under strategic outcome 1, in 2019 the preschool nutrition pilot project in Hunan Province provided meals to 2,552 children in 29 preschools. In the first semester of 2020, with the addition of the pilot project in Guangxi Province, a total of 4,062 children received meals in 47 preschools. The provision of nutritious meals for preschool children has contributed to more varied diets. Kindergarten principals, parents and children demonstrated improved health awareness from nutrition education provided through the projects. However, there were concerns that maintaining enhanced levels of dietary diversity in the school meals without project subsidies would not be affordable for the poorest families. The home-grown school feeding model has potential for sustaining the school meals programme through local management and connections to local producers. However, there is no handover plan yet. Although the translation of project achievements into policy is limited, the pilot projects have built a foundation for further action by the Government.
18. Under strategic outcome 2 the kiwi smallholder farmer value chain project in Anhui Province helped 150 targeted households to participate in the kiwifruit value chain by facilitating their access to employment or supporting their own small orchards. The project reportedly improved farmers' skills and self-confidence and promoted the status of women. The pilot project in Gansu supported 850 smallholder farmers in the planting of zinc-enriched potatoes, focusing mainly on transferring cultivation techniques but also on preparing for

¹³ IFAD has a substantial portfolio in smallholder agriculture and value chains and supports women's engagement in agriculture. FAO is engaged in policy-related work.

¹⁴ Strategic outcome 1 targeted 34 million undernourished children, strategic outcome 2 targeted 16 million beneficiaries and strategic outcome 3 aimed to serve 10 million indirect beneficiaries.

the marketing of the produce. The project involved various international, national and provincial technical partners brought together successfully by the WFP China office. The impact of both pilot projects on farmers' livelihoods has still to be demonstrated, and the potential for broad impact is limited by the small scale of the activities.

19. Activities planned under strategic outcome 3 aimed at strengthening vulnerable communities' capacity to withstand and respond to shocks caused by natural disasters were not implemented owing to a lack of funding and the prioritization of other activities. However, in recent years there has been an increasing focus on fundraising for WFP's humanitarian work in other countries and on the multi-stakeholder humanitarian hub established during the COVID-19 global response. There is still potential for strategic outcome 3 activities to be undertaken.
20. Under strategic outcome 4, the centre of excellence built a network of partners that provides access to Chinese experts; mobilized those experts in well-appreciated, demand-driven learning events in which about 70 countries participated; contributed to four WFP South-South and triangular cooperation country pilot projects (with another four under discussion); developed its own preliminary website; and presented the policies of WFP and China at a large number of events in and outside China. Demonstration projects for African and Asian farmers were foreseen but have not been launched owing to limited demand and the need to define appropriate procedures for accessing the South-South Cooperation Assistance Fund.
21. Under strategic outcome 5, WFP headquarters and the WFP China office expanded existing partnerships, in particular with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, and developed new partnerships with public institutions and private enterprises. The latter are mostly in the technology sector, enabling WFP to make use of partners' online fundraising platforms. Most notable is the global multidimensional partnership with the Alibaba Group. The China office continued to raise funds for WFP international programmes, mainly from the Government of China and the Chinese public, and for domestic pilot projects, mainly from the private sector. Contributions from the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs have been relatively modest but consistent over the years, while food aid funding through CIDCA declined sharply after a peak in 2017.
22. Potential synergies among strategic outcomes were not well established. Lessons from the domestic programmes were not effectively used or built on to enhance WFP's performance under all strategic outcomes. The pilot activities have the potential to serve as a "living laboratory" for joint innovation, drawing the expertise of WFP and China together. There are substantial opportunities for replicating such experiences in China and sharing them through South-South cooperation. In addition, findings from the activities under strategic outcome 5 indicate the importance of a domestic programme in China as a basis for establishing credibility and trust with current and potential financing partners.

Contribution to cross-cutting aims, including gender equality and women's empowerment

23. The activities reviewed are development rather than humanitarian operations, and little direct reference was made to the application of humanitarian principles in reporting, other than in the arrangements for ensuring accountability to affected populations. Domestic projects used a participatory approach, with design and management decisions responding to the views of affected communities. Domestic project activities were adapted to the cultural customs of various ethnic groups.
24. Project design was gender-sensitive, encouraging the participation of women, targeting women for specific activities and collecting gender-disaggregated data. Nonetheless, some training reinforced traditional gender roles. The centre of excellence has mobilized diverse experts, including a gender empowerment expert, and the participation of women

in learning events has been encouraged, with women accounting for 19.5 percent of participants to date.

Sustainability of achievements

25. Capacity strengthening is embedded in several strategic outcomes of the CSP and should contribute to the sustainability of results. However, the sustainability of domestic project achievements varies and is not guaranteed. Although all of the domestic projects currently have government matching funds in place, future funding for continuing or expanding project operations is not confirmed. The network of Chinese experts built by the centre of excellence has good potential for sustainability, and several partnerships with government agencies and Chinese companies have been formalized.

To what extent has WFP used its resources efficiently in contributing to country strategic plan outputs and strategic outcomes?

Timeliness

26. In general, the outputs generated through CSP implementation have been delivered within the intended timeframe. CSP implementation was the first stage of strategic engagement with China. In the early stages of the CSP period, time was invested in forging and strengthening operational relationships and preparing for implementation. The domestic projects started gradually and sequentially, and implementation plans have generally been adhered to. Operationalization and formalization of the partnership with CIDCA for funding emergency assistance and South–South and triangular cooperation projects abroad have taken time to mature. WFP’s due diligence processes before formalizing a partnership with a private partner are lengthy and have sometimes affected engagement. The COVID-19 crisis delayed the deployment of experts for South–South and triangular cooperation country pilot projects. Centre of excellence activities swiftly and successfully moved to online delivery.

Coverage and scale-up of interventions

27. The coverage and scale of the operations of the WFP China office are commensurate with current resources. The domestic pilot projects have potential for future scale-up, but there was no clear evidence that this was expected to occur within the period of the CSP as originally intended. Centre of excellence activities cover a large number of highly diverse countries, mostly in Africa but also in Asia and Latin America. Such a global, widely scattered approach is appreciated by partners in China but has made the tailoring of activities to countries’ situations more challenging. In addition, South–South cooperation does not necessarily target the countries in greatest need.

Agility and efficiency

28. Overall, resources were used in line with intended budgets and there was no evidence of inefficiency in the implementation of activities. By having the requesting WFP country office rather than experts from China design South–South cooperation activities, WFP was able to increase agility and reduce costs but the relevance of the technical assistance provided by experts was also sometimes reduced owing to the experts’ limited knowledge of the local setting. Since 2020, the centre of excellence has explored the provision of online learning events, which are considered significantly more cost-efficient, in combination with face-to-face events, which remain necessary.

Consideration of more cost-effective measures

29. Cost-benefit analyses of the domestic pilot projects were not planned but would be helpful to advocacy for their upscaling. A broad search for new partners in China generated only modest financial returns but placed heavy demands on WFP staff. The China office is therefore considering refocusing its private partnership strategy. Stakeholders also

suggested that it might be more cost-effective to work with fewer fundraising platforms through more widely targeted and longer fundraising campaigns.

What factors explain WFP's performance and the extent to which it has made the strategic shift expected under the country strategic plan?

Use of evidence in development of the country strategic plan

30. The CSP is based on findings from a 2016 national food security and nutrition study (the national zero hunger strategic review)¹⁵ conducted with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs and other partners. The report provided new evidence of hunger challenges, particularly in China's poverty counties, and influenced the selection and targeting of domestic pilot projects. It also helped raise national interest in preschool nutrition.

Resource mobilization

31. The WFP–China partnership was funded by a variety of donors (see paragraphs 8 and 22) but faced limited funding predictability and strong earmarking at the activity level, which led to funding imbalances. The preschool nutrition programme received more attention through WFP's international partners and more online donations from the Chinese public than did interventions to promote smallholder agriculture and resilience to natural disasters. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs provided stable resources for operating the WFP China office and implementing centre of excellence activities, although the latter are tied to initiatives that are approved by the ministry and employ experts from organizations under it, leaving the CSP with little opportunity for flexible implementation or responsive to additional identified needs. Substantial efforts were made to organize WFP's access to China's South–South Cooperation Assistance Fund managed by CIDCA, but progress in formalizing the financing partnership has been slow.

Partnerships and collaboration

32. The WFP China office is uniquely positioned in China and has engaged actively in the development of partnerships and collaboration (see paragraphs 16 and 22), demonstrating the importance of a country presence for WFP.

Flexibility in a dynamic operational context

33. The CSP provided an overall framework for operations but in general had little influence on the flexibility of activities. The China office has engaged actively within the development context, both through its own mandate and in collaboration with the United Nations country team. Results achieved to date are largely attributable to the China office's management of relationships and to the resources provided by government partners rather than the CSP itself.

Other factors explaining WFP performance and the extent to which WFP has made the strategic shift expected under the CSP

34. The CSP strategic outcomes were vaguely defined and overly ambitious, and the chain of expected results lacked clarity. The CSP's focus on capacity strengthening was weakened by a lack of clear indicators and targets for monitoring progress.
35. The level and expertise of staff in the WFP China office were a major asset, but to grasp the opportunities for expanding the domestic programme and increasing its policy influence, the China office should be strengthened with additional expertise in policy engagement, media, promotion and communications, nutrition and food systems, gender, emergency management, and monitoring and evaluation. For the China office,

¹⁵ IFPRI, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs and WFP. February 2015. *China's food security and nutrition under rapid transformation: Enhanced partnership with WFP*. Draft.

reporting directly to WFP headquarters in Rome rather than the WFP Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific brings the advantage of having a direct strategic link but also the disadvantage of having less support for operational and human resource procedures and less access to technical expertise than other WFP country offices.

Conclusions

36. Implementation of the first CSP has demonstrated the potential for strong engagement between WFP and China. The CSP is well aligned with Chinese policies and strategies. China recognizes WFP's technical expertise in nutrition and food systems innovation and disaster risk reduction and resilience. It values WFP's mode of engagement, particularly the balance and linkage between domestic and international programming. At the same time, WFP has a relatively low profile in China, and WFP's mobilization of China as a global partner for advocacy under SDG 2 and for financial aid has yet to reach its full potential. So far, the focus of the China office has been more on operationalizing the CSP than on lesson learning and policy engagement.
37. The CSP was the first stage of a strategic engagement with China, and efforts focused on building and carefully managing relationships with a growing number of increasingly diverse stakeholders with the aim of developing the domestic programme, South-South cooperation and fundraising. There was a consistent need to align ways of working in order to achieve mutual understanding and agreement on operational approaches. That required the investment of time and a respectful approach to listening and understanding the priorities and requirements of WFP headquarters in Rome, the China office, public and private partners in China and other WFP country offices. The China office has only recently established regular contacts with various WFP headquarter divisions, but as it reports directly to WFP headquarters in Rome and not to the regional bureau in Bangkok, it does not benefit from WFP's regional communication and capacity building network to the same degree as other WFP country offices.
38. There is great potential for finding appropriate global solutions for zero hunger and improved food systems through the blending of the expertise of WFP and China. Countries participating in centre of excellence activities have a dual interest in learning about China's approaches from the policy to the grassroots levels and in mobilizing proven technology from China to generate locally appropriate solutions. The demand-driven matching process is appreciated but there is room for better adaptation of technical advice to widely diverse country settings. The centre of excellence's internet platform does not reflect its demand-driven approach.
39. Domestic pilot projects were found relevant at the national level and were delivered in the intended timeframe. Their coverage and scale are limited and more could be done in terms of measuring results, cost-benefit analysis and capturing and disseminating lessons, for both the upscaling of good practices in China and the sharing of experiences internationally through South-South cooperation. The local projects also provide an opportunity for stronger WFP engagement with China on gender-transformative approaches, and protection and accountability to affected populations. WFP's contributions at high-profile events, workshops and policy discussions are valued.
40. Capitalization on the results achieved to date is constrained by the incomplete range of staff positions engaged in the China CSP. China office staff members are fully occupied with operations and engagement with current international and domestic stakeholders leaving insufficient time for strategic review and detailed strategic engagement. An organizational alignment review conducted in 2020 recommended a restructuring of the China office's human resources to address these constraints.

41. The emergent nature of funding relationships in China results in a degree of uncertainty regarding the future operations of the China office and the centre of excellence. The current financial model for the China office, its interventions in China and its fundraising capacity are not yet fully stable. At present the implementation of activities relies on earmarked funding rather than a strategic funding approach for CSP priorities. The financial model for China as a donor to WFP's international programmes is also yet to be confirmed. While the overarching objectives of WFP and CIDCA are aligned, their project modalities are not yet mutually compatible. After a first CSP focused on investing in the development of long-term partnerships with public institutions and the private sector, it will be critical to confirm strategic alignment and returns from that initial investment during the next CSP.

Recommendations

42. The evaluation makes two strategic and two operational recommendations, presented in the following table.

Recommendations

	Recommendation	Type (strategic/operational)	Recommendation lead and supporting offices and divisions	Level of prioritization	Deadline for completion
1.	WFP should strengthen its strategic engagement with the Government of China on WFP and China's priorities and areas of expertise as entry points for maximizing the global impact of the WFP–China partnership.	Strategic	WFP China office and centre of excellence with support from the Strategic Partnerships Division (STR), the Public Partnerships and Resourcing Division (PPR), the Communications, Advocacy and Marketing Division (CAM), the Gender Office (GEN) and the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific (RBB)	High	2021 as part of the new CSP
1.1	WFP should further pursue its domestic activities in China, maintaining attention on nutrition and the development of nutrition-related value chains but also sharpening collaboration in the area of disaster risk reduction and resilience.	Strategic	WFP China office and centre of excellence	High	2021
1.2	WFP should strengthen its capacity to engage more fully at the strategic level with China as a donor, promoting global policy dialogue and systems change in food security through a “practice to policy” feedback loop. For this, WFP should broaden the terms of reference of senior staff at headquarters and in the China office to include strategic partnership building with associated performance indicators.	Strategic	WFP China office with support from PPR and STR	Medium	2022
1.3	WFP should intensify efforts to raise its profile in China, especially by promoting its “niche” areas of expertise in nutrition, food systems and humanitarian emergency preparedness and response.	Strategic	WFP China office with support from CAM	Medium	2021–2026

	Recommendation	Type (strategic/operational)	Recommendation lead and supporting offices and divisions	Level of prioritization	Deadline for completion
1.4	WFP should strengthen commitment to gender equality and the empowerment of women in all CSP strategic outcomes through dedicated staff with relevant expertise.	Strategic	WFP China office with support from GEN	Medium	2021–2026
2.	WFP should continue to identify effective ways of working with internal and external stakeholder groups.	Operational	WFP China office with support from STR, PPR, CAM, the Private Partnerships and Fundraising Division (PPF), other headquarters divisions and RBB	High	2021 as part of the new CSP
2.1	The WFP Strategic Partnerships Division should facilitate better access to technical capacity from a broad range of WFP divisions for China office staff, with improved frequency and ease of communication, both for the design of activities in the China CSP and to make expertise available to WFP partners in China.	Operational	STR with support from other headquarters divisions and RBB	High	2021–2026
2.2	The WFP China office should find ways to enhance communication in support of the CSP. It should improve targeted sharing of good practices and understanding of WFP global operations with China counterparts and should apply up-to-date approaches and bilingual tools with internal and external stakeholder groups.	Operational	WFP China office with support from CAM	Medium	2021
2.3	WFP should maintain an up-to-date stakeholder map of all WFP-China stakeholders. Based on the private-sector partnerships and fundraising strategy for 2020–2025, WFP should prepare a country partnership plan, identifying whether partners are strategic or technical partners or donors, with relevant stakeholder management, engagement and communication strategies.	Operational	WFP China office with support from STR, PPR and PPF	Medium	2022

	Recommendation	Type (strategic/operational)	Recommendation lead and supporting offices and divisions	Level of prioritization	Deadline for completion
2.4	WFP should continue to collaborate with the China International Centre for Economic and Technical Exchanges and CIDCA on identifying compatible processes that can be expedited, addressing bottlenecks and sharing information with partner WFP country offices with a view to improving the quality of proposals.	Operational	WFP China office with support from STR and PPR	High	2021
3.	WFP should further strengthen processes in its domestic programme and the centre of excellence for capturing, sharing and communicating results and enhancing learning.	Operational	WFP China office with support from the Research, Assessment and Monitoring Division (RAM), the Programme – Humanitarian and Development Division (PRO), the Technology Division (TEC) and CAM	High	2021–2022
3.1	WFP should enhance the monitoring and evaluation of domestic and centre of excellence activities to promote the upscaling and sharing of experiences nationally and internationally.	Operational	WFP China office and centre of excellence with support from RAM	High	2021–2026
3.2	The WFP-China centre of excellence’s matching process should expand from delivery of solutions that work well in China to facilitation of two-way knowledge exchanges on good practices, with a flexible approach (online and face-to-face) across various capacity levels and thematic areas, responding to countries’ demand for appropriate and affordable innovations.	Operational	WFP China office and centre of excellence with support from PRO	Medium	2022–2026
3.3	WFP should consider further improvement of the China centre of excellence’s knowledge-sharing platform in order to respond to the demand of audiences and reflect the WFP approach to knowledge management in South–South and triangular cooperation and then link the platform to international web search engines for improved access.	Operational	WFP China office and centre of excellence with support from CAM and TEC	Medium	2021–2026

	Recommendation	Type (strategic/operational)	Recommendation lead and supporting offices and divisions	Level of prioritization	Deadline for completion
4.	WFP should develop a clear plan for securing China's long-term contributions to WFP.	Strategic	WFP headquarters and China office	High	2021-2022
4.1	WFP should engage more intensively with the other Rome-based agencies in a joint South-South and triangular cooperation approach regarding China, in terms of both the financing model and the sharing of results.	Strategic	WFP headquarters and China office	Medium	2021-2026
4.2	WFP should consider promoting large-scale South-South and triangular cooperation programmes that are appropriate for financing by China and in line with China's international cooperation priorities. The potential in the long term for grant frameworks or multilateral approaches should be explored.	Strategic	WFP headquarters and China office	High	2022-2026
4.3	WFP should organize annual roundtables for programme reviews with each key government agency focusing on the agency's specific interests and scope of work. The roundtables would be thematic meetings that would be more focused on thematic opportunities and challenges than the multi-stakeholder annual retreats are.	Operational	WFP China office with support from PPR	Medium	2022-2026

Acronyms

CAM	Communications, Advocacy and Marketing Division
CIDCA	China International Development Cooperation Agency
CSP	country strategic plan
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GEN	Gender Office
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
PPF	Private Partnerships and Fundraising Division
PPR	Public Partnerships and Resourcing Division
PRO	Programme – Humanitarian and Development Division
RAM	Research, Assessment and Monitoring Division
RBB	Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
STR	Strategic Partnerships Division
UNSDCF	United Nations sustainable development cooperation framework