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Summary report on the evaluation of the country strategic plan for Cuba (2021–2024)

Executive summary

The evaluation of the Cuba country strategic plan for 2021–2024 was conducted between March 2023 and January 2024 to serve the dual purpose of accountability and learning, with a view to informing the design of the next country strategic plan.

WFP is recognized as a trusted partner of the Government in Cuba, particularly in the areas of risk management, emergency response, food security, nutrition support and, lately, social protection strengthening. Its proactive and collaborative approach within inter-agency groups and the implementation of integrated projects have been instrumental to its strategic positioning. The country strategic plan was relevant to the country's development challenges and coherent with the United Nations sustainable development cooperation framework, focusing on the Sustainable Development Goals related to zero hunger and partnerships.

Through ongoing dialogue with the Government of Cuba and leveraging its technical expertise, WFP adjusted and adapted its planning processes to meet the growing needs of the country. This flexibility and agility further solidified WFP's position as a key player in supporting national efforts in Cuba. However, data gaps hampered the identification of the most socioeconomically vulnerable people and WFP's ability to monitor the results of its interventions.

Through coordinated efforts with various authorities and the United Nations country team, WFP was effective in its emergency response in Cuba, ensuring that people facing multiple hazards had access to food during disasters; there is nevertheless room for improving inter-agency complementarity in the area of emergency response.

In line with WFP evaluation policy (2022) (WFP/EB.1/2022/4-C), 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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Nutrition initiatives focused on enhancing the nutrition status of targeted population groups by promoting diverse and nutritious diets; challenges exist, however, particularly with regard to import limitations on food supplements, which affected the depth of WFP coverage.

WFP resilience-focused activities showed positive results, with a change in attitudes towards healthy eating and increased production and sale of agricultural products achieved through the short food supply chain scheme, a model linking agricultural producers to the national safety nets system. Challenges were encountered, however, in efforts to scale up the model and contribute to the implementation of the food and nutrition security law.

Through capacity strengthening, WFP played a crucial role in emergency preparedness and coordination and in supporting national efforts to address challenges related to poverty and quality of life.

WFP took significant steps to mainstream gender considerations in its interventions, but while efforts were made to prioritize equitable access to food and promote economic empowerment, transformational changes have yet to be achieved. Gaps also exist in addressing the needs of young people and in relation to the environment.

WFP demonstrated commendable promptness in emergency response thanks to the pre-positioning of food and non-food items. However, significant delays caused by exogenous factors – including the availability of maritime transport and project approval processes – hindered the full implementation of the country strategic plan.

WFP successfully achieved economies of scale through the short food supply chain model, leading to improved efficiency and opportunities to scale up the approach. Collaboration with government entities and the United Nations country team was vital in overcoming implementation challenges and showcasing the importance of strategic solutions to ensuring efficiency and effectiveness in WFP operations in Cuba.

Key factors contributing to WFP's performance in Cuba included solid partnerships with the Government (including its scientific development institutions) and United Nations entities along with the presence of skilled and highly committed personnel who enabled efficient implementation, coordination and support, particularly during crises.

On the other hand, operations were hampered by challenges in resource mobilization, delays in administrative and logistics processes, limited access to data needed to improve targeting and accurately measure intervention results, and significant staff turnover among WFP counterparts.

Addressing these gaps will be crucial to strengthening WFP's positioning in terms of long-term development issues and enhancing inter-agency coordination in project design and implementation, along with the retention of talent.

The evaluation made five recommendations in relation to advocacy for improving the evidence base, the coherence of United Nations partnerships, strategic communication, programme sustainability and human resource management.

Draft decision*

The Board takes note of the summary report on the evaluation of the country strategic plan for Cuba (2021–2024) (WFP/EB.2/2024/6-C/2) and the management response (WFP/EB.2/2024/6-C/2/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 Cuba country strategic plan (CSP) for 2021–2024 was commissioned by the WFP Office of Evaluation. It serves both accountability and learning purposes and will inform the design of the next CSP for Cuba.
2. The evaluation covered the activities implemented by WFP under Cuba's 2019 transitional interim CSP and the 2020 interim CSP in addition to activities under the CSP for 2021–2024 up until July 2023, when data collection ended. It was conducted between March 2023 and January 2024 by an independent external team using a theory-based, mixed-methods approach.
3. The main intended users of the evaluation are the WFP country office in Cuba, the Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean, technical divisions at headquarters in Rome, the WFP Executive Board, the Government of Cuba, partner United Nations entities and donors. Other potential users include representatives of civil society and the beneficiaries of WFP interventions.

Context

4. Cuba is home to 11.1 million people, 22 percent of whom are over 60 years of age. Life expectancy is 78 years (80 years for women and 76 years for men).¹
5. Economic challenges linked to the economic embargo of Cuba intensified as a result of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and the conflict in Ukraine.^{2,3} Gross domestic product per capita, growing at 2–4 percent annually from 2015 to 2018, dropped 10.8 percent in 2020 and recovered by 1.3 percent in 2021 and 2 percent in 2022.^{4,5}
6. The Government of Cuba allocates over 50 percent of its budget to social protection, health and education, and the country boasts a literacy rate of 99.8 percent and high enrolment rates in primary and secondary education.⁶
7. As a disaster-prone country, Cuba focuses on disaster risk reduction and management in line with the Sendai Framework.⁷ The current national economic and social development plan, which runs until 2030, integrates environmental strategies and disaster plans. Natural disasters such as Hurricane Ian in 2022 inflict significant damage.⁸
8. Agricultural challenges include lack of inputs, obsolete technology and insufficient food production, which combine to create high import dependency.⁹ Efforts are being made to increase cultivated land through cooperatives – which contribute 80 percent of national

¹ Cuba National Statistics and Information Office. 2022. *Anuario Estadístico de Cuba 2021*.

² J. L. Rodríguez. 2023. *La coyuntura internacional y la economía cubana en 2022. Perspectivas de 2023 (I) - El Economista de Cuba*.

³ Government of Cuba. 2021. *Informe Nacional Voluntario Cuba 2021*.

⁴ Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. 2021. *Estudio Económico de América Latina y el Caribe 2021 – Cuba*.

⁵ A. Terrero. 2022. *Otro año gris en la economía cubana*.

⁶ Government of Cuba. 2021. *Informe Nacional Voluntario Cuba 2021*.












⁷ National Defence Council. 2010. *Directiva No. 1/2010 del Presidente del Consejo de Defensa Nacional para la Reducción de Desastres*.

⁸ Diario de Cuba. 2022. *Presagios de más hambre deja el huracán Ian en Cuba: más de 21.000 hectáreas de cultivos afectadas*; United Nations Children's Fund. 2022. *Huracán Ian: UNICEF Cuba preparado para apoyar respuesta del país en la atención a niños, niñas, adolescentes y familias*; R. Alonso Falcón and L. Fariñas Acosta. 2022. *¿Cuáles son las afectaciones en la agricultura tras el impacto del huracán Ian y las medidas de recuperación?*

⁹ Government of Cuba. 2021. *Informe Nacional Voluntario Cuba 2021*.

agricultural production and manage 41 percent of cultivated land – and increase the participation of private actors, which manage 32 percent of cultivated land.¹⁰

9. Cuba enacted a law on food sovereignty and nutrition security in 2022 to strengthen food autonomy and educate people on nutrition while addressing gender issues and generational effects.¹¹ Despite efforts to improve their impact, national food programmes provide only 40 percent of the recommended energy intake,¹² leading Cuban families to resort to unsubsidized markets characterized by high prices and irregular supply. In terms of the quality of nutrition, the country struggles with child obesity and overweight, micronutrient deficiencies – particularly anaemia in rural areas,¹³ low rates of exclusive breastfeeding and suboptimal weaning practices.
10. The United Nations sustainable development cooperation framework for Cuba for 2020–2024 underscores the United Nations commitment to Cuba. Aligned with the goals of the country's national economic and social development plan, the framework addresses cross-cutting themes like youth, gender equality, risk management and local development.¹⁴

TABLE 1: SOCIOECONOMIC INDICATORS			
	Indicator	Value	Year
	Population (millions) (1)	11.1	2021
	Life expectancy at birth (years) (1)	78.45	2021
	Population (% female) (1)	50.4	2021
	Percentage of urban population (% of total population) (1)	77	2021
	Human development index (rank) (2)	83	2022
	Multidimensional poverty (rank) (3)	16 of 111	2023
	Gender Inequality Index (% and rank) (4)	74.6 39 of 156	2021
	Investment in social protection, health and education (% of GDP) (3)	20	2021
	Literacy rate (%) (3)	99.8	2021
	Primary school enrolment (% of girls) (1)	48.8	2021
	Land cultivated by cooperatives and private actors (as % of total land cultivated, combined %, % by cooperatives, % by private actors) (5)	73 (41 cooperatives and 32 private sector)	2021

Sources: (1) Cuba National Statistics Office. 2022. *Anuario Estadístico de Cuba 2021*; (2) United Nations Development Programme. 2022. *Human Development Report 2021/2022. Uncertain Times, Unsettled Lives: Shaping our Future in a Transforming World*; (3) Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative. *The Global Multidimensional Poverty Index*; (4) World Economic Forum. 2021. *Global Gender Gap Report 2021*; (5) Government of Cuba. 2021. *Informe Nacional Voluntario Cuba 2021*.

¹⁰ “Cuba country strategic plan (2021–2024)” (WFP/EB.A/2021/8-A/1).

¹¹ M. Resende. 2022. *Perspectivas y desafíos de la transformación de los sistemas alimentarios en Cuba*.

¹² “Cuba country strategic plan (2021–2024)” (WFP/EB.A/2021/8-A/1); Inter Press Service en Cuba. 2018. *Dinámica de gastos básicos en Cuba (primera parte)*.

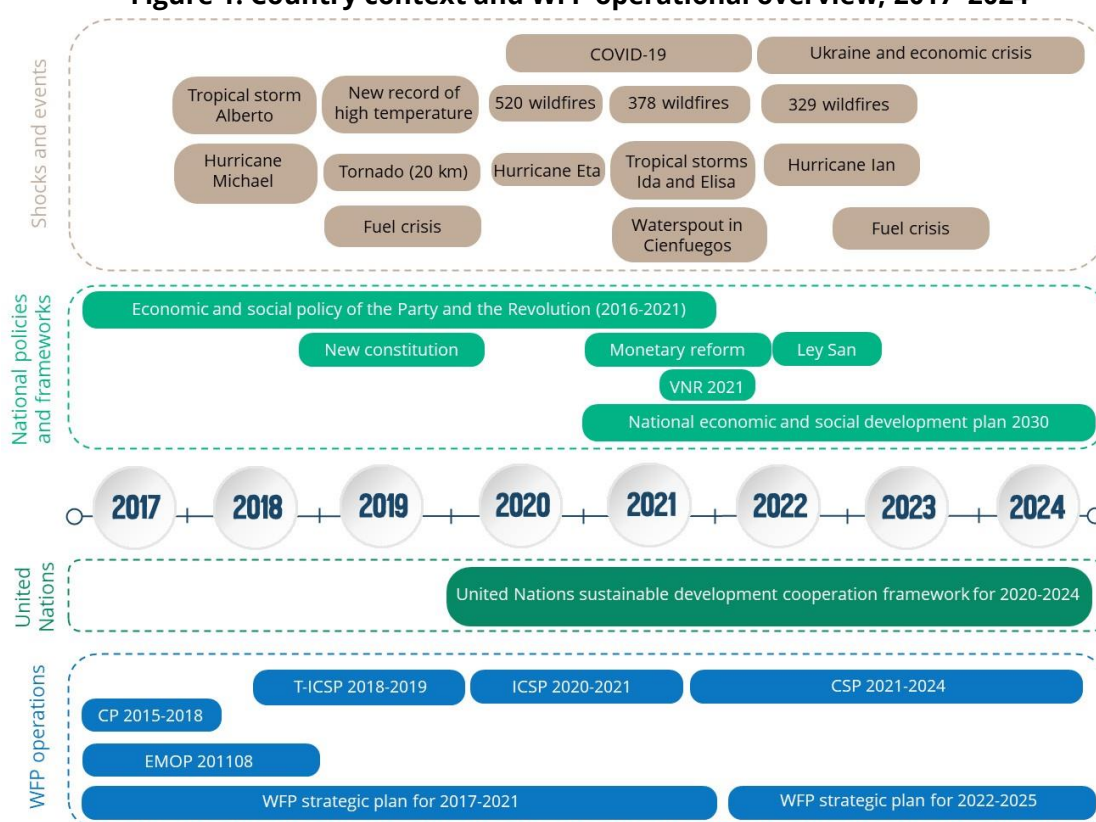
¹³ Government of Cuba. 2021. *Informe Nacional Voluntario Cuba 2021*.

¹⁴ United Nations Cuba. 2020. *Marco de Cooperación de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo Sostenible: Cuba 2020–2024*.

Country strategic plan

11. The CSP focused on increasing the resilience of local food systems to ensure that they can meet demand from social protection programmes; improving capacity in disaster management and emergency preparedness and response; increasing knowledge of nutrition and healthy diets; and supporting the national logistics system. WFP interventions included unconditional food transfers, malnutrition prevention, technical assistance for smallholder farmers and institutional capacity strengthening.
12. Natural hazards, COVID-19 and the Cuban economic situation represented important challenges for the implementation of the CSP. To address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic recession on food insecurity, between July 2021 and September 2023 WFP increased its needs-based plan from USD 28.7 million to USD 75.1 million through three budget revisions that increased the number of planned beneficiaries from 1.6 million to 2.7 million.

Figure 1: Country context and WFP operational overview, 2017–2024



Source: Office of Evaluation based on the full report on the evaluation of Cuba's country strategic plans for 2018 through July 2023.

Abbreviations: CP = country programme; EMOP = emergency operation; ICSP = interim CSP; Ley San = food and nutrition security law; T-ICSP = transitional ICSP; VNR = voluntary national report.

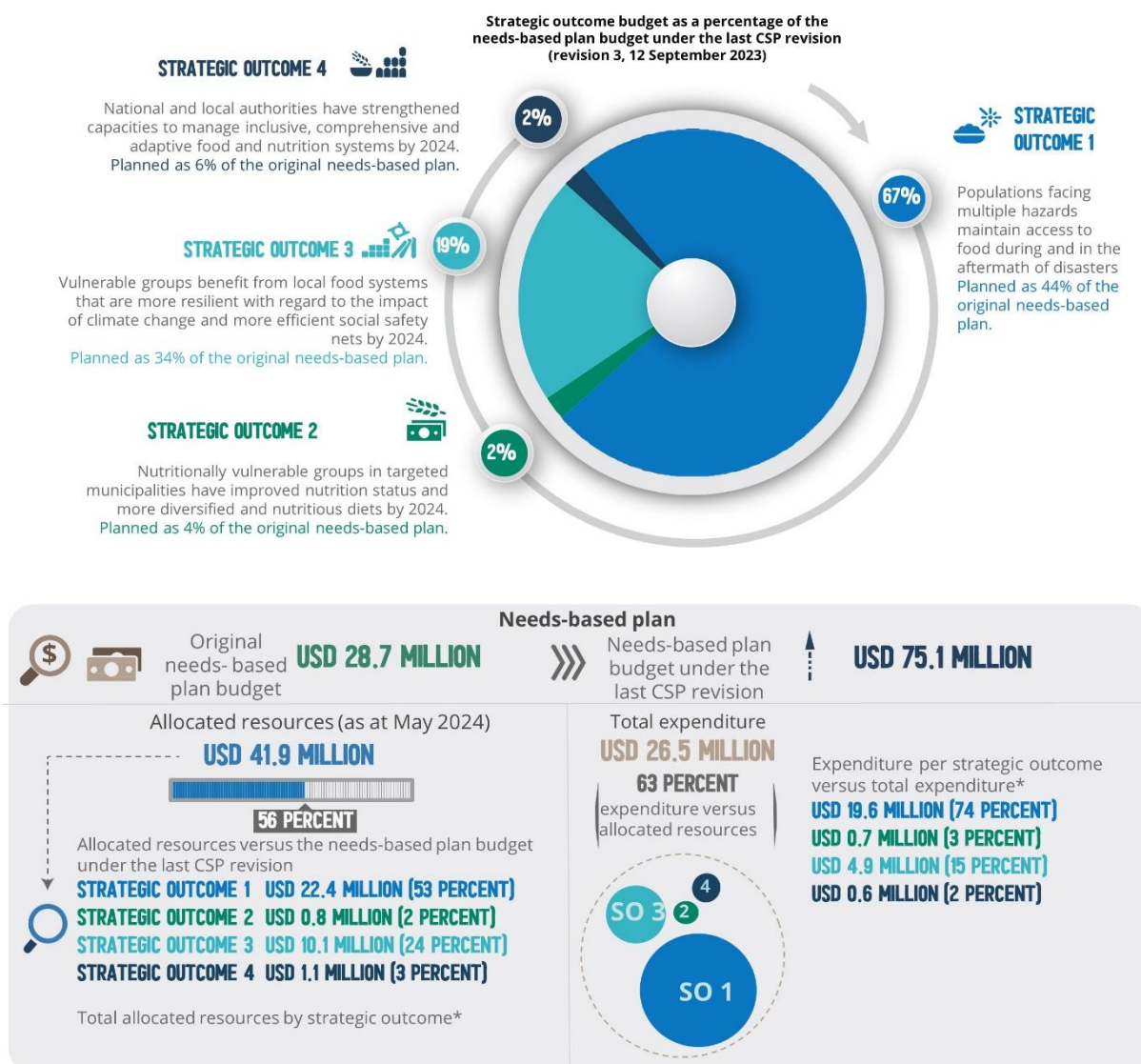
13. As of August 2023 – the end of data collection – funding for the CSP for 2021–2024 was 60 percent of the amount called for in the needs-based plan.¹⁵ The Russian Federation was the largest bilateral donor, accounting for 39 percent of the total resources allocated, followed by the Republic of Korea with 13 percent.
14. Allocated resources were spread unevenly among strategic outcomes, with crisis response (strategic outcome 1) and resilience (strategic outcome 3) absorbing 77 percent of funds as

¹⁵ As of May 2024, the CSP was funded at 56 percent (lower than in August 2023 due to the increase in the needs-based plan budget introduced by the September 2023 CSP revision).

of May 2024, whereas nutrition (strategic outcome 2) and capacity strengthening (strategic outcome 4) only accounted for 5 percent (see figure 2). At the same time overall expenditure was 63 percent of allocated resources, with higher expenditure rates observed for strategic outcomes 1 and 2 (88 and 87 percent of the allocated resources for each strategic outcome, respectively), compared to 60 percent for strategic outcome 4 and 41 percent for strategic outcome 3.

- As of July 2024, the country office was planning to extend the CSP to 31 December 2025 (an extension of one year),¹⁶ to align with the one-year extension of the United Nations sustainable development cooperation framework. No change was planned in its strategic orientation.

Figure 2: Cuba country strategic plan (2021–2024) strategic outcomes, budget, funding and expenditures



Source: Office of Evaluation, based on the full evaluation report.

Note: Figures represented correspond to budget revision 3, approved in September 2023 after the completion of the evaluation report. The analysis in the evaluation uses data from the second budget revision, approved in October 2022. Allocated resources by strategic outcome do not take into account direct and indirect support costs that are not specific to strategic outcomes.

¹⁶ Cuba country strategic plan budget revision 4; review process ongoing as of July 2024.

Evaluation findings

To what extent is the country strategic plan evidence-based and strategically oriented to meet the needs of the most vulnerable individuals?

Relevance and coherence

16. The CSP was aligned with national development challenges and government policies and strategies, and WFP's capacity for continuous consultation with the Government ensured the relevance of WFP's actions in a dynamic and complex operating environment.
17. The CSP was coherent with the strategies of the United Nations country team. It was aligned with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2 (on zero hunger) and SDG 17 (on partnerships), with links to other SDGs related to health, education, sustainable production, gender equality, climate action and decent work.
18. The CSP's theory of change – reconstructed for the purposes of this evaluation – reflects a coherent logic among CSP activities, outputs and outcomes. WFP interventions were designed to reach the most vulnerable people in specific locations, with particular focus on older people, pregnant women and school-age children.

Strategic positioning in an evolving environment

19. WFP is a preferred partner of the Government, supporting national efforts in risk management and emergency response, food security and nutrition, areas in which it is able to draw on its comparative advantages. WFP's proactive and collaborative approach in inter-agency groups and the implementation of integrated projects helped to position it as a key strategic partner and technical advisor to government institutions.
20. WFP was able to respond flexibly to evolving needs in a complex and dynamic environment thanks to continued open dialogue with the Government and the technical expertise of the country office team and field staff. Adjustments made over time involved a variety of activities in response to growing needs, which contributed to WFP's reputation as a flexible and agile partner of the Government.
21. WFP faces challenges as it seeks to strengthen its positioning with regard to long-term development issues in Cuba and foster a debate within the United Nations system about the harmonization of inter-agency efforts in project design and implementation.

Evidence base

22. WFP activity under the Cuba CSP is based on needs determined by the Government. In working to meet those needs, WFP used meteorological information systems to determine the emergency-prone areas where it could achieve greatest impact. On the other hand, data gaps hampered efforts to identify the most socioeconomically vulnerable people and monitor the results of interventions.

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

Contributions to strategic outcomes

23. This section presents key achievements by strategic outcome. Findings in relation to institutional capacity strengthening (strategic outcome 4) are included under the other strategic outcomes given the cross-cutting nature of that work.¹⁷

¹⁷ Besides its capacity strengthening work under each strategic outcome WFP supported the Government with the design of tools for measuring socioeconomic vulnerability in the context of economic deterioration.

24. **Emergency response (strategic outcome 1).** Work under strategic outcome 1 aimed to ensure that populations facing multiple hazards maintained access to food during and after disasters. The beneficiary coverage target of 70 percent was systematically achieved for the provision of food and non-food items¹⁸ in response to the various emergencies that the country faced during CSP implementation. Efforts were coordinated with the central Government, civil defence, provincial and municipal authorities and the United Nations country team, although there was room for improving inter-agency complementarity. WFP's emergency response work also encompassed its role as coordinator of the United Nations emergency technical team.
25. At the request of the Cuban Government, WFP sought to strengthen institutional emergency preparedness and response capacity. Activities focused on cross-sectoral learning, technical assistance and non-food item support, with the main partners being the civil defence authorities and the meteorological institute.
26. Among key positive results the evaluation observed a 35 percent reduction in the price of meals served in the family care system sites that received food donations; the establishment and maintenance of five mobile units pre-positioned for use by the civil defence authorities and the United Nations as emergency situation rooms; and improvements in systems for sharing meteorological information, reducing the vulnerability of producers involved in the short food supply chain model.
27. **Nutrition (strategic outcome 2).** Activities under strategic outcome 2 were designed to improve the nutrition status of the target population by promoting more diversified and nutritious diets, as requested by the Government. WFP donated supplements such as micronutrient powder, Super Cereal and milk powder for pregnant and breastfeeding women and children aged 6–23 months, as well as older adults.
28. The distribution of supplements was accompanied by a communication strategy with educational materials and messages to families disseminated through local media on the availability, conservation and use of micronutrient powder at home and its benefits for children's nutrition. In parallel, in collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), WFP facilitated training under the Government's mother and childcare programme and community talks by health promoters.
29. To strengthen institutional capacity on nutrition, WFP helped to develop the capacity of the national food and nutrition surveillance system, including by supporting data processing on the prevalence of anaemia, which in turn informed the design of communication strategies to encourage behaviour change.
30. The output indicators for strategic outcome 2 tracked the degree to which activities in the operational plan were implemented; they showed a high level of success in terms of the number of beneficiaries reached (breadth of coverage). On the other hand, the volume of food distributed was less than planned, partly due to limitations on the import of food supplements.
31. Outcome monitoring was limited to the coverage of the nutrition activity, and there was a marked gap in understanding the effects of the intervention on nutrition status and anaemia rates, due to WFP's limited access to government nutrition monitoring data. Information gathered by WFP monitors, however, indicated that beneficiaries had positive views on the acceptance and use of nutritious supplements.

¹⁸ WFP provides the food and non-food items to the Government, which is in charge of implementing the distributions to the affected population.

32. **Resilience (strategic outcome 3).** Under strategic outcome 3, WFP implemented the short food supply chain model in Villa Clara and in the eastern provinces. The approach aimed to increase food production by agricultural producer cooperatives through the provision of technical assistance, equipment and support for their supply of fresh vegetables to the national social safety net system, especially educational institutions and family care sites, with the intermediation of local authorities.
33. While WFP efforts focused on the supply side – strengthening producers’ cooperatives by introducing crop monitoring and innovative insurance modalities to reduce the impact of disasters and climate change and providing technical assistance, support activities and equipment – they also addressed the demand side at the school level through education campaigns on healthy diets run in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and actively involving teachers, students and families. Schools were also provided with cooking equipment and kitchen staff training.
34. In terms of institutional capacity strengthening, WFP provided technical assistance to national counterparts at various levels, contributing to improved capacity to conduct needs assessments for schools and farmer cooperatives, identify productive capacity, link producers to the social protection network and monitor the nutrition status of children.
35. Key results observed under strategic outcome 3 included the following:
 - on the supply side, an increase in the production, value and volume of agricultural product sales; reduced vulnerability of agricultural producers to climate thanks to better-informed decision-making; an increase in participants’ awareness of environmental protection; and the promotion of urban agriculture through organoponic crops.
 - on the demand side, a change in attitudes towards the consumption of vegetables thanks to communication campaigns on healthy eating incorporated into school curricula by teachers, parents and children and the use of demonstration gardens as a learning mechanism. At family care system sites, the availability of vegetables from local producers helped to diversify the meals offered to older people.
36. From an institutional perspective, significant contributions were evident in the integration of efforts and inter-institutional coordination among the agricultural, education and health sectors and the social protection network. Local authorities adopted the tools, guides and lessons learned by WFP to operate the short food supply chain model. The evaluation found that the project had the potential to strengthen public policies on food and nutrition security.

Cross-cutting aims

37. The WFP country office in Cuba adhered to the organization's global approach on gender, seeking greater gender equality and women's empowerment. To that end it prioritized equitable access to food and sought to eliminate the root causes of inequality and promote the economic empowerment of women and girls. At the same time it systematically mainstreamed gender in its emergency preparedness and response activities. Gender-specific results of the CSP included continued progress in increasing women's representation on project management committees and a transformation of power dynamics brought about through the short food supply chain model. However, COVID-19 disruption slowed efforts to integrate gender considerations in WFP operations, and the challenge ahead is to resume the mainstreaming of gender equality across communities and authorities to address urgent issues and seize opportunities for transformational change.

38. WFP has upheld the humanitarian principles of humanity and impartiality by targeting and assisting vulnerable groups during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and in the aftermath of natural disasters.
39. In terms of social inclusion WFP prioritized food security and nutrition for older people and people living with HIV/AIDS. However, the evaluation found little systematic attention to, or visibility of, the needs of young people in WFP programming.
40. Sub-office monitoring staff used feedback mechanisms when visiting project partners, which brought WFP closer to its beneficiaries. The team from the WFP country office used similar approaches during its field missions to warehouses, educational establishments, producers' cooperatives and family care system sites. However, there is a lack of a systematic feedback system that would allow beneficiaries to directly communicate in case of difficulties and permit WFP to follow up on complaints, claims or suggestions.
41. CSP implementation maintained a focus on environmental issues, as WFP monitors the effects of climate change and promotes the early adoption of effective adaptation strategies. There is evidence of the promotion of mini-industries, small reservoirs and the use of natural fertilizers, as well as the distribution of environmentally friendly equipment (e.g. solar panels) in partnership and with the advice of national scientific institutions. Such initiatives were intended to complement the main activities under strategic outcome 3, in a context of general scarcity of fuel and equipment. However, there are opportunities to improve environmental awareness and education even further through dialogue with the national government, local authorities and producers, among others, to tackle persistent issues in relation to waste management, water conservation and other areas.
42. Regarding the sustainability of WFP interventions, there is evidence of ownership by national counterparts of approaches, technology and tools for risk management and emergency preparedness, nutrition status monitoring, the pre-positioning of food and non-food items and links between producers and social protection networks. In addition, the interventions mobilized local funds and succeeded in changing the perspective of producers and school-level participants with respect to healthy nutrition. However, there are opportunities to improve the generation of evidence in relation to the effects of the short food supply chain model to promote its replicability and sustainability.
43. The coherence and complementarity between humanitarian and development objectives are manifested in the implementation of the CSP throughout the responses to short-term emergencies (hurricanes and the COVID-19 pandemic) as well as in the projects tackling long-term emergencies like drought, through measures designed to develop resilient productive capacity such as the short food supply chain model.

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

44. Overall, WFP has provided emergency response in Cuba in a timely manner, demonstrating the importance of pre-positioning food and non-food items. However, exogenous factors related to the availability of maritime transport for imports of key equipment, as well as project approval processes by the Government, have delayed the implementation of other components of the CSP, increasing costs and impeding WFP's ability to meet implementation deadlines agreed with donors.
45. WFP has managed to generate economies of scale, especially in linking the short food supply chain model to the social safety net system. The efficiency of WFP implementation improved over time as the project progressed, showing its potential to be scaled up, as evidenced by the extension of the model from schools to family care system sites in Villa Clara.

46. Moreover, linking the short food supply chain model and the generation of meteorological information (under strategic outcome 1) improved efficiency by enabling producer cooperatives to take more informed decisions, thereby reducing vulnerability and the risk of losses.
47. Over the CSP period the country office found ways to overcome implementation challenges efficiently. In particular, in light of unfavourable currency exchange rates, WFP strategically shifted to purchasing food and non-food items for pre-positioning (as well as internal equipment) from suppliers outside Cuba to mitigate elevated costs. In this regard, WFP collaborated with government entities and the United Nations country team to streamline import procedures while also negotiating flexibility with donors with regard to sourcing origins to cushion the impact of the Ukraine crisis on the supply chain.
48. WFP responded in a timely way to rising needs, in response to government requests (especially in emergency preparedness and response and service provision), gradually broadening its thematic coverage to fill gaps in national counterparts' work. However, this came with a cost in terms of the depth of its interventions and the recurrent adjustment of plans. While the meteorological information systems supported the geographical targeting of areas experiencing rapid and slow-onset emergencies, the limited availability of socioeconomic information prevented rigorous verification that the most vulnerable people were reached.

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

Partnerships

49. WFP's solid partnership with the Government ensures the viability of the implementation of the CSP. The Government's receptiveness and trust allowed WFP to apply its methods, tools and equipment and to ensure its presence in the field. WFP's relationship with provincial and municipal authorities was strengthened in terms of the definition of priorities, and activity coordination and monitoring. The high level of education of national counterparts facilitated productive dialogue and the ownership of training content.
50. WFP also enhanced its partnership with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UNICEF in the domains of emergency response, risk management, malnutrition and agricultural value chains. However, challenges remain in operational coordination with these organizations and others within the United Nations system in Cuba.
51. WFP's connection with the academic and scientific communities has been of particular importance in the development of a behaviour change communication strategy, including campaigns to promote dietary diversity. Scientific collaboration with national institutions led to relevant research on agricultural production.
52. Looking ahead, retirement waves and national counterpart staff turnover in the academic and scientific sectors may undermine WFP's visibility and the continuity of technical dialogue with partners.

Funding

53. WFP faced significant resource mobilization challenges with regard to demonstrating the need for international support and cooperation in a middle-income country and showcasing the effects of WFP interventions in a context where WFP has limited access to national statistics and monitoring data on food and nutrition security.
54. Moreover, delays in project approval and import processes led to agreed implementation deadlines being missed – an additional challenge to sustaining a flexible and effective relationship with donors.

55. Factors facilitating funding included WFP's use, for the short food supply chain model, of a resource mobilization strategy that linked resources from a variety of donors; the organization also acted as the facilitator of an inter-agency coordination process together with national counterparts and other United Nations entities.
56. Overall, joint projects proved to be an efficient mechanism for obtaining resources, as evidenced by WFP's successful collaboration with the International Fund for Agricultural Development and UNDP.

Monitoring

57. There are gaps in quantitative indicators (baselines and follow-up) because direct monitoring is undertaken by government counterparts; however, WFP personnel in the field used participatory approaches to activity monitoring and facilitated cross-sectoral and cross-institutional dialogue at the decentralized level, which also allowed WFP to support other entities effectively during times of crisis.
58. During the COVID-19 pandemic, monitoring activities were severely curtailed by restrictions on movement. WFP nevertheless managed to maintain its connection with government counterparts and beneficiaries and used remote monitoring to ensure the continuity of its interventions.

Human resources

59. Among the factors contributing to the success of the CSP, the country office benefits from a highly skilled and flexible team that has demonstrated high levels of commitment and a strong sense of belonging and remained stable for several years.
60. Until the first semester of 2023, the team lacked nutrition experts, which hindered WFP's positioning in that domain. The retention of qualified junior staff remains a challenge and, at the time of the evaluation, the country office was developing a strategy to manage retirement waves.

Conclusions

61. WFP's Cuba country office implemented a CSP relevant to the food and nutrition security needs of the population and aligned with the policies and objectives of the Government of Cuba.
62. WFP was effective in pursuing its strategic objectives in Cuba, addressing both humanitarian and development needs and helping to strengthen the links between agricultural producers and beneficiaries of the social protection system.
63. Although WFP achieved sustainable gains in terms of counterpart ownership of interventions, it fell short of ensuring the long-term sustainability of the short food supply chain model, which would benefit from better evidence of its impact. Overall, the CSP complied with humanitarian principles and adopted gender- and environment-sensitive approaches, although more effort is needed to achieve transformative results in these areas.
64. Efficiency in the execution of the CSP was impeded by multidimensional challenges facing the country office, which increased costs. WFP should seek to identify the right balance of interventions to meet needs, reflecting on the potential to achieve greater depth through a more focused approach.
65. WFP is a preferred partner of the Government of Cuba and maintained a solid relationship with it at the national and local levels throughout the implementation of the CSP. WFP is also recognized and well positioned with its peers in the United Nations country team, with a strong role in emergency response and a growing role in development issues, including in food system strengthening and links to national safety nets.

66. Advocacy with the Government, in conjunction with other United Nations entities, is needed to more efficiently manage administrative and logistical issues affecting WFP performance. Moreover, WFP faces limitations in access to the national statistics and data that it needs to measure the effects of its interventions, although this is partially offset by the presence in the field of its monitoring personnel, who provide testimonial evidence of operational results.
67. WFP's collaboration with scientific institutions contributed to the development of innovative meteorological information initiatives aimed at enhancing resilience, gender equality and women's empowerment. WFP benefitted from effective partnerships with other United Nations entities, including FAO, UNDP and UNICEF, particularly in risk management and emergency preparedness, food systems and behaviour change communication. Nevertheless, there are opportunities to enhance the complementarity of various agencies' interventions, including by exploiting WFP's active participation in round tables and working groups.
68. Among other key success factors, WFP in Cuba benefits from a recognized, capable and experienced workforce. Staff retention is an emerging challenge that deserves further reflection in terms of talent management and staff motivation.

Recommendations

Recommendation	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Supporting entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
<p>1. Strengthen advocacy with the Government on critical issues related to the availability of information, exchange rates, project approval and implementation processes, and imports, in conjunction with other United Nations entities in Cuba.</p> <p>1.1. Seek to obtain faster access to updated quantitative contextual information (statistics) related to the context of WFP operations, taking advantage of WFP's positioning with the Government and strengthening partnerships with the academic community and other members of the United Nations country team.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Engage in discussions with high-level decision makers in the Government; ➤ highlight the cost of not having up-to-date information, especially for resource mobilization; ➤ explain why WFP requires the information, linking it to the support requested by the Government <p>1.2. Address critical issues that affect operations (delays in approvals and procedures, exchange rates), taking advantage of WFP's positioning with the Government and strengthening alliances with other members of the United Nations country team:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ engage in discussions with high-level decision makers in the Government; ➤ clearly identify the issues and their implications; ➤ participate in inter-agency coordination for joint processes (e.g. for imports). 	Strategic	Country office management	Regional bureau	High	June 2024

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<p>2. Enhance programmatic harmonization and complementarity with other United Nations entities in Cuba, taking advantage of WFP's positioning and field presence.</p> <p>2.1. Increase engagement based on mutual learning and knowledge management and prioritize dialogue. With the Office of the United Nations resident coordinator, advocate for the establishment of inter-agency learning spaces and the elimination of bottlenecks in inter-agency work.</p> <p>2.2. Deepen the work of inter-agency round tables to apply a more holistic approach to food security; explicitly flag and work to eliminate bottlenecks in the work of the United Nations emergency technical team; strengthen WFP's participation in the gender round table.</p> <p>2.3. Through the food security round table, promote topics that support the implementation of the food and nutrition security law, such as the roll-out of the short food supply chain model to the social protection network and cash-based transfers for producers.</p>	Strategic	Country office management	Regional bureau	Medium	December 2024

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<p>3. Implement a more strategic communication plan.</p> <p>3.1. Develop a strategy covering internal and external communication (encompassing key messages and consideration of the purpose, intended audience, timing and frequency of communications).</p> <p>3.2. Complement social and behaviour change communication with outcome monitoring: design and implement social and behaviour change communication metrics; seek regional bureau support for monitoring approaches and tools.</p> <p>3.3. Take a systematic approach to gathering and disseminating lessons learned from programming, including by, e.g., introducing a formal process that ensures that information flows regularly and lessons are documented as projects are implemented; setting up learning processes; creating a biannual newsletter or other periodical to disseminate lessons.</p>	Strategic	Country office management	Regional bureau	High	December 2024

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<p>4. Prioritize CSP activities, leaving space for long-term capacity strengthening activities and cross-cutting objectives.</p> <p>4.1. Provide technical assistance on the social protection road map in partnership with the other members of the United Nations country team in Cuba, including for the design of socioeconomic targeting, operational design, follow-up on the application of targeting criteria and support with the targeting process.</p> <p>4.2. Consolidate the short food supply chain model and scale it up to the social protection network: systematize and disseminate lessons learned; continue advocating for a sustainable cash-based transfer scheme for producers; advocate for the nation-wide scale-up of the short food supply chain model.</p> <p>4.3. Complement capacity strengthening activities under strategic outcome 4 with mechanisms to increase the sustainability of results. For example, systematize and document the content of technical assistance; introduce processes to ensure the continuity of capacity strengthening for counterpart staff in the event of personnel changes.</p> <p>4.4. Take advantage of opportunities to mainstream gender equality and women's empowerment, youth participation, environmental conservation and nutrition-sensitive approaches: advocate, and establish agreements with the Government to enhance the mainstreaming of cross-cutting objectives; adopt mechanisms and tools for incorporating cross-cutting objectives in workshops, communication spaces with parents, teachers, students and beneficiaries of community kitchens, and communication materials and messages.</p>	Strategic	Country office management	Regional bureau	Medium	December 2024

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<p>5. Develop and implement a country office talent retention strategy.</p> <p>5.1. Develop a tailor-made retention plan based on approaches such as opening and formalizing spaces for dialogue to identify country office staffing needs; developing a staff motivation plan and agreeing on support mechanisms; and considering possible regional exchanges that allow for professional development.</p> <p>5.2. Systematize and disseminate good practices and lessons learned in the execution of tasks and document stories for knowledge-sharing, including with regard to good practices in team relationships; good practices for advocacy with the Government; good practices for field monitoring; case studies on challenges and how they were faced.</p>	Strategic	Country office management	Regional bureau	High	June 2024

Acronyms

COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
CSP	country strategic plan
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund