



World Food Programme  
Programme Alimentaire Mondial  
Programa Mundial de Alimentos  
برنامج الأغذية العالمي

**Executive Board**  
Annual session  
Rome, 23–26 June 2026

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Distribution: General

Agenda item 7

Date: 24 April 2026

WFP/EB.A/2026/7-H/1

Original: English

Oversight functions

For decision

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

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## Summary report on the evaluation of the country strategic plan for Liberia (2019–2026)

### Executive summary

The evaluation of the WFP country strategic plan for Liberia for 2019–2026 was conducted between August 2024 and April 2025 to inform the design of the next country strategic plan for Liberia. It assessed WFP's strategic positioning, its contribution to strategic outcomes, the sustainability of the results achieved under the country strategic plan, its efficiency in implementation and the factors explaining its performance.

Under the country strategic plan, WFP aimed to transition from the direct implementer of activities to an enabling role, supporting the Government in its efforts to eliminate hunger and increasing the focus on school feeding, emergency response and capacity strengthening. Common services were reintroduced in 2020 to support the response to the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic.

During the period under evaluation, WFP's work in Liberia was responsive to national priorities and emerging needs and crises, prioritizing long-term resilience complemented by short-term emergency response and appropriately focusing on the organization's comparative advantages in Liberia, particularly in home-grown school feeding and logistics. However, limited integration at the humanitarian–development–peace nexus and between school feeding and agricultural resilience programming, constrained strategic potential.

Home-grown school feeding was a strong strategic asset through which WFP contributed to inclusive food system development and improved education and nutrition outcomes for children. The shift to purchasing from cooperatives offered a scalable and sustainable model for procurement, boosting the productivity and resilience of farmers. Effectiveness, however, was constrained by cooperative capacity and unpredictable distribution planning. Government budget

*In line with WFP's 2022 evaluation policy (WFP/EB.1/2022/4-C), the editing of this report has been limited in order to respect the integrity and independence of evaluation findings. As a result, some of the language in it may not be fully consistent with WFP's standard terminology or editorial practices. Please direct any requests for clarification to the Director of Evaluation.*

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#### Focal points:

Ms A.-C. Luzot

Director of Evaluation

email: [anneclaire.luzot@wfp.org](mailto:anneclaire.luzot@wfp.org)

Ms. M. Selim

Evaluation Officer

email: [mona.selim@wfp.org](mailto:mona.selim@wfp.org)

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commitments and policy revisions increased the potential for sustainability, but institutional capacity remains limited and opportunities for system strengthening were underutilized.

WFP's crisis response operations in Liberia contributed to improved rates of acceptable food consumption, but progress was hindered by operational challenges related to logistics, targeting and coordination. In the health sector, WFP played a key enabling role by addressing structural issues and contributing to health system performance. Its interventions addressed systemic gaps in forecasting, storage, inventory maintenance and delivery, although gaps remain in cold chains, data systems and transport.

Progress on cross-cutting priorities under the country strategic plan was uneven, with priority given to facilitating equal participation for women and girls and to including some environmental considerations. Gaps remained in efforts to address differential needs and structural barriers, monitor environmental outcomes, and strengthen accountability to affected people, undermining the effectiveness and accountability of WFP programming.

WFP prioritized strategic partnerships with the Government and collaborated effectively with other United Nations entities and cooperating partners to extend its reach to vulnerable populations and provide targeted support in relevant areas. However, these partnerships remained largely operational and were underutilized as strategic enablers.

Persistent resource and staffing constraints, coupled with fragmented and unpredictable donor funding, affected the planning, quality, timeliness and scale of delivery. Improvements have been noted in recent years, but staffing shortages continue to limit responsiveness to known challenges. In some cases, during the evaluation period WFP made deliberate trade-offs, prioritizing people who face the most significant access barriers and giving precedence to development outcomes over operational efficiency and cost-effectiveness in school feeding and crisis response.

The evaluation made four recommendations: refine and consolidate the home-grown school feeding programming model, improving planning and using support for cooperatives as a means of building integrated smallholder farmer resilience; strengthen WFP's support for national and community capacity, systems and structures in areas where it adds distinct value, including school feeding, crisis response and health supply chains; strengthen strategic programming partnerships and joint resource mobilization and policy development across the education sector, aligning the complementary capacities of partners with WFP's comparative advantage in school feeding in order to enhance education, nutrition and food system outcomes; and strengthen organizational capacity and operational systems to facilitate the achievement of country strategic plan ambitions.

## **Draft decision\***

The Board takes note of the summary report on the evaluation of the country strategic plan for Liberia (2019–2026) (WFP/EB.A/2026/7-H/1) and the management response (WFP/EB.A/2026/7-H/1/Add.1).

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\* 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 country strategic plan (CSP) for Liberia for 2019–2026<sup>1</sup> was conducted between August 2024 and April 2025 to inform the design of the next CSP. It assessed WFP's strategic positioning and contribution to strategic outcomes, the sustainability of the results achieved under the CSP, the efficiency in implementation and the factors explaining WFP's performance. Using a mixed-methods and theory-based approach, it drew on primary and secondary qualitative and quantitative data, including consultations with over 440 key informants and focus group participants.
2. The intended users of the evaluation are the WFP Liberia country office, the Western and Central Africa Regional Office, relevant headquarters divisions, the Executive Board, the Government of Liberia, including its various ministries and agencies collaborating with WFP, the United Nations country team and cooperating partners.

### Context

3. Liberia is one of the world's least developed countries, facing profound challenges exacerbated by a history of civil conflicts from 1989 to 2003. Health crises (Ebola virus disease outbreaks and the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic), currency depreciation and high inflation, especially affecting food prices, have hampered post-war recovery. Approximately 50.9 percent of people live below the national poverty line and around 63 percent face multidimensional poverty.<sup>2</sup> There are also wide gaps between urban and rural areas in terms of income, livelihoods and services.
4. The number of counties of Liberia facing crisis level food insecurity increased between 2020 and 2023. Liberia has a score of 31.9 in the 2024 Global Hunger Index, and hunger in Liberia is thus categorized as "serious". Key drivers of food insecurity include low local agricultural productivity, high dependence on imported staple foods (especially rice), limited nutritional diversity of local production, and extreme poverty. Despite progress in some nutrition indicators, malnutrition remains a major concern across the country, with an estimated 38.9 percent of the population undernourished in 2023.<sup>3</sup>
5. Liberia's agriculture sector contributes over one third of the country's gross domestic product and employs 87 percent of the working-age population.<sup>4</sup> However, it is characterized by subsistence production and low productivity, owing notably to a lack of fertilizers and irrigation, poor seeds and breeding stock, and inadequate access to credit, machinery and infrastructure for transport, storage and marketing.
6. Climate change and environmental challenges, including water scarcity, flooding due to increased intensity of rainfall, coastal erosion and sea-level rise, have exacerbated food insecurity and agricultural and economic challenges.
7. Liberia's health infrastructure was severely strained and weakened by outbreaks of Ebola virus disease and COVID-19. Historically, the public health system has faced challenges in the supply and distribution of drugs and commodities, particularly in remote areas.

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<sup>1</sup> This is the summary report on the evaluation. The full report and all related documents are available on the WFP website: <https://www.wfp.org/publications/evaluation-liberia-wfp-country-strategic-plan-2019-2026>.

<sup>2</sup> World Bank. [Liberia country page](#).

<sup>3</sup> United States Agency for International Development. [Food Security Factsheet 2022](#) (not available online).

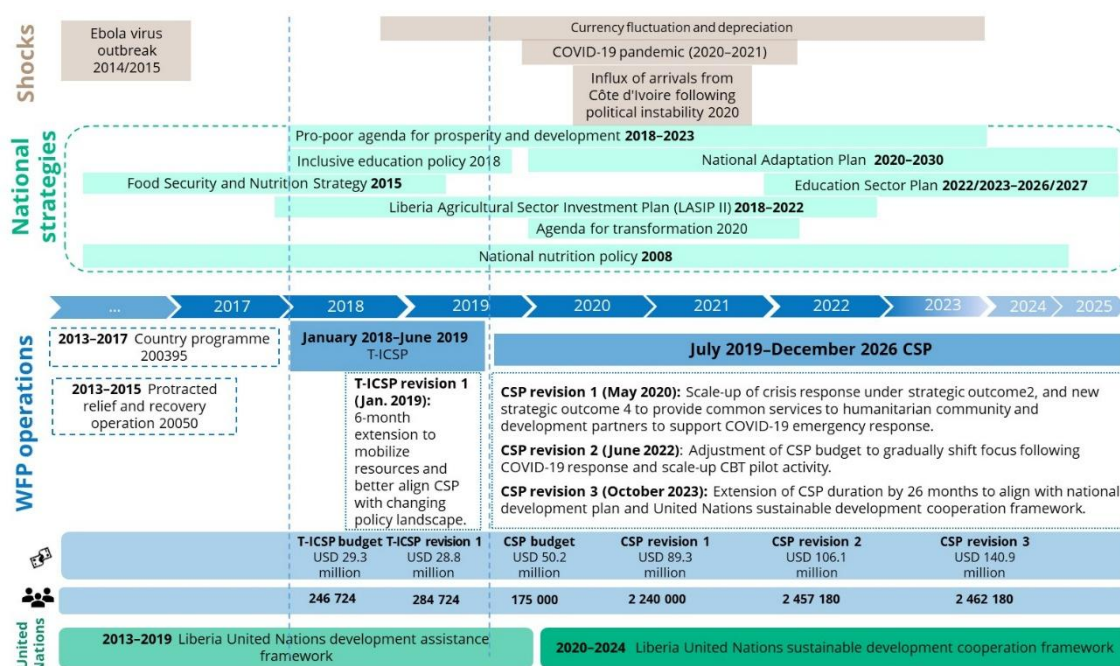
<sup>4</sup> Comprehensive food security and nutrition survey, as cited in WFP. 2024. [Liberia Annual Country Report 2023 – Country Strategic Plan 2019–2026](#).

8. A high proportion of children in Liberia are not in formal schooling, with 67 percent of boys and girls enrolled in primary school.<sup>5</sup> In 2020, the proportion of boys and girls enrolled in school was almost equal (0.99), but there is a widening gap as education progresses, with 9 percent of girls and young women and 15 percent of boys and young men enrolled in tertiary education.<sup>6</sup> Only 21 percent of primary and secondary children receive food through school feeding activities.<sup>7</sup>
9. In 2021 Liberia ranked 164th of 191 countries on the Gender Inequality Index, with women facing discrimination in many areas of social and economic life. Women make up 80 percent of the agricultural labour force, but only 22.6 percent of the women working in agriculture have incomes, increasing their vulnerability to economic stress and gender-based violence.<sup>8</sup>
10. Liberia's economy is heavily reliant on foreign aid and remittances (which accounted for 18.5 percent of its gross domestic product in 2023),<sup>9</sup> leaving the country vulnerable to fluctuations in international support. Its largest contributors include China, France, Germany, Japan, the United States of America, and the Susan Thompson Buffett Foundation.

### Overview of the country strategic plan

11. The CSP for Liberia for 2019–2026 is focused on school feeding, emergency response and national and subnational capacity strengthening. Common services were reintroduced through a budget revision in May 2020 to support the COVID-19 pandemic response. Figure 1 provides an overview of WFP operations, national policies, contextual events and key elements of the CSP as it evolved.

**Figure 1: Timeline and evolution of the Liberia country strategic plan**



Abbreviations: CBT = cash-based transfer; and T-ICSP = transitional interim country strategic plan.

<sup>5</sup> World Bank. [School enrollment, primary \(% gross\) – Liberia](#).

<sup>6</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. 2024. [Liberia: Education Country Brief](#).

<sup>7</sup> Global Child Nutrition Foundation. 2024. [Global Survey of School Meal Programmes: Republic of Liberia – School Meal Coverage \(2022–2023\)](#).

<sup>8</sup> United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. 2021. [Issue Paper: Liberia Country Gender Equality Profile](#).

<sup>9</sup> World Bank. [Liberia country page](#).

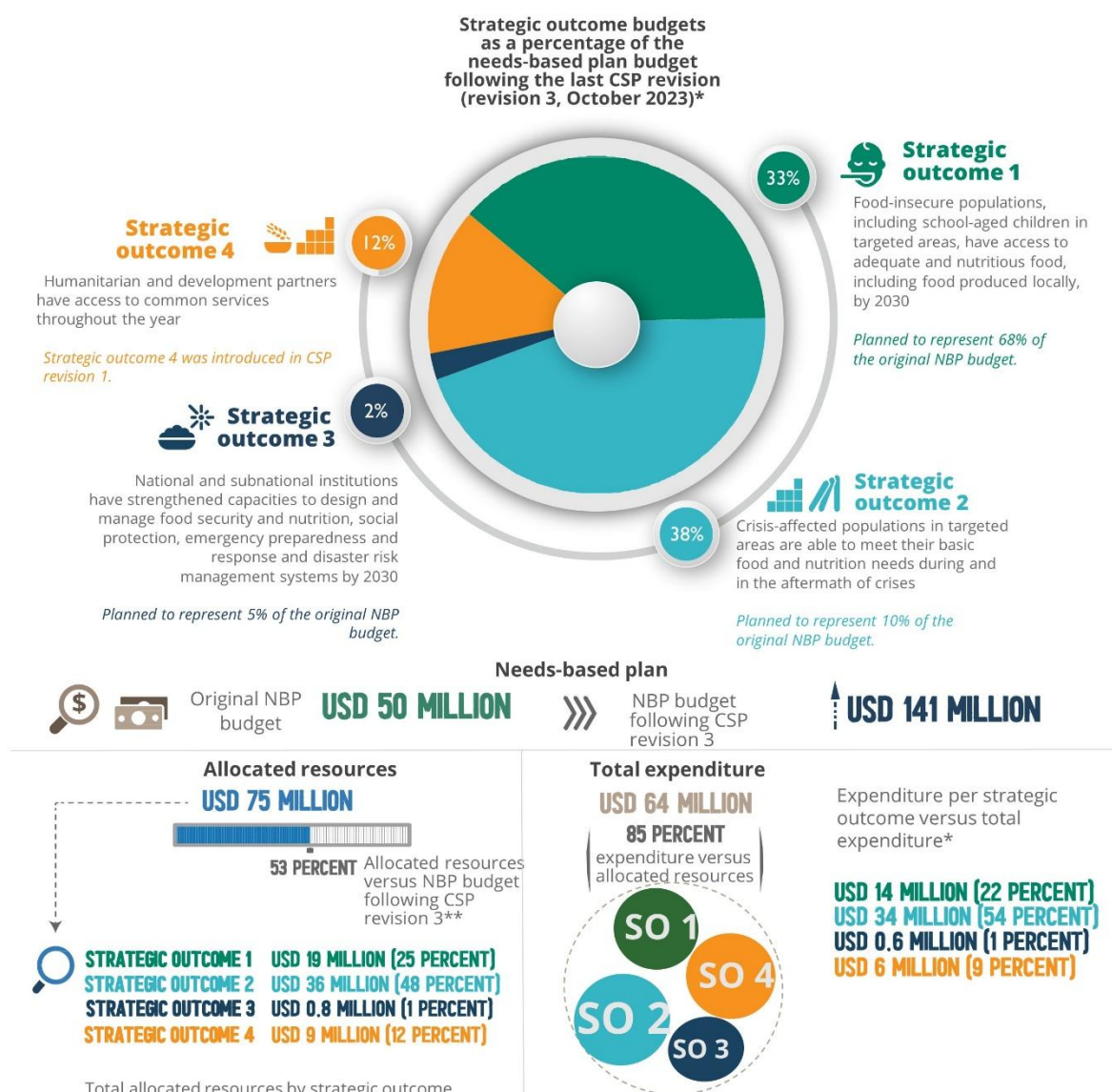
12. Table 1 provides an overview of the CSP's four strategic outcomes. The home-grown school feeding (HGFS) programme (under strategic outcome 1) is considered WFP's flagship programme in Liberia, supporting the Government's plan to reduce poverty and address chronic issues in education, agriculture, nutrition and social protection.

<b>TABLE 1: LIBERIA COUNTRY STRATEGIC PLAN STRATEGIC OUTCOMES, FOCUS AREAS, ACTIVITIES AND MODALITIES</b>		
<b>Strategic outcomes (with focus areas in brackets)</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Modality</b>
1: Food-insecure populations, including school-age children in targeted areas, have access to adequate and nutritious food, including food produced locally, by 2030 (resilience building)	1: Provide an integrated and inclusive school feeding package to food-insecure and nutritionally vulnerable schoolchildren, including take-home rations for adolescent girls, in a way that relies on and stimulates local production (HGFS).	Food Cash-based transfers Country capacity strengthening
2: Crisis-affected populations in targeted areas are able to meet their basic food and nutrition needs during and in the aftermath of crises (crisis response)	2: Provide an integrated emergency food and nutrition assistance package to vulnerable households affected by disasters or other disruptions.	Food Cash-based transfers Country capacity strengthening
3: National and subnational institutions have strengthened capacities to design and manage food security and nutrition, social protection, emergency preparedness and response and disaster risk management systems by 2030 (resilience building)	3: Provide capacity strengthening support to the Government and its partners to strengthen national coordination mechanisms and information management and monitoring systems for food security and nutrition and disaster risk management.	Country capacity strengthening
4: Humanitarian and development partners have access to common services throughout the year (crisis response)	4: Supply chain and information and communication technology services to humanitarian and development partners.	

13. The CSP budget increased from USD 50.2 million to USD 140.9 million through three budget revisions, reflecting the significant expansion of food assistance in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the growth of the cash-based transfer programme under strategic outcomes 1 and 2. Beneficiary numbers increased commensurately, from 175,000 to 2,462,180, with female beneficiaries exceeding male beneficiaries in each year in both planned and actual numbers.
14. As of 31 December 2024, the CSP was funded at 53 percent of the needs-based plan budget. Funding levels spiked during the COVID-19 pandemic, with important contributions from the Government of Liberia, and then slowly increased between 2021 and 2024. Reflecting the focus on school feeding during CSP design, strategic outcome 1 accounted for 68 percent of the needs-based plan budget, with crisis response accounting for 10 percent. The large influx of funding for the COVID-19 pandemic response increased the focus on crisis response, which ultimately attracted almost half of allocated resources (48 percent), with 25 percent of allocated resources dedicated to strategic outcome 1 (see figure 2).

15. At the time of the evaluation, the Government of Liberia was the largest contributor to the CSP, primarily through funding for the COVID-19 household food support programme.<sup>10</sup> Other donors included private donors, the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund, the United States of America, China and Japan.

**Figure 2: Liberia country strategic plan (2019–2026) strategic outcomes, budget, funding and expenditures**



\* The strategic outcome percentages are calculated at the level of total direct operational cost. Direct and indirect support costs are also elements of the total original and revised needs-based plan budgets.  
 \*\* Percentages of allocated resources and expenditures by strategic outcome do not add up to 100 percent because resources were also allocated to and spent on non-strategic outcome purposes, including direct and indirect support costs.

Abbreviations: NBP = needs-based plan; and SO = strategic outcome.

<sup>10</sup> The USD 30 million budget for the COVID-19 household food support programme was funded by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank through a Ministry of Agriculture project. Funds were transferred directly to WFP for implementation.

## Key conclusions and evaluation findings

### Strategic relevance and coherence

WFP grounded the CSP for Liberia in evidence and aligned it with Liberia's national priorities and United Nations system frameworks. The CSP was relevant and coherent, prioritizing long-term resilience complemented by short-term emergency response and leveraging organizational strengths in HGSF, local procurement with integrated post-harvest support, and logistics and supply chains. The strategic potential of these comparative advantages was not fully realized, however, because programmatic links were managed in an ad hoc fashion.

16. The **CSP design drew on credible evidence and consultations**, including national food security and nutrition assessments, notably the 2017 zero hunger strategic review, complemented by consultations with the Government, donors, other United Nations entities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), to define strategic outcomes, thematic areas and priorities. WFP's work aligned with the objectives of the United Nations cooperation frameworks for Liberia of promoting economic sustainability through rural livelihoods and fostering human development through increased access to education and improved social protection. While affected people were not directly consulted, community needs were considered through lessons learned from the transitional interim CSP for Liberia and extensive consultations during the zero hunger strategic review. Targeting was based on a comprehensive food security and nutrition survey, validated with government partners and updated using a 2022 rapid assessment. Community targeting was done with district-level authorities to safeguard operational relevance.
17. **WFP appropriately prioritized counties with high levels of food insecurity.**<sup>11</sup> **There were some gaps**, however, including inclusion and exclusion errors during the COVID-19 pandemic response; these were attributable to the urgency of scale-up, the selection of some unsuitable sites for resilience activities and the lack of a clear strategy for engaging out-of-school children in school feeding interventions. In 2023, the introduction of standard operating procedures strengthened community-driven targeting, improving outreach to vulnerable groups such as young people, households led by women, persons with disabilities and older persons.
18. The **CSP was appropriately focused on WFP's comparative advantages in Liberia, particularly in HGSF and logistics**. WFP was recognized by partners as having global and regional expertise in HGSF and was the only entity implementing an exclusively home-grown model, with a scale and purchasing power that could create stable, high-volume markets for smallholders. WFP was also widely recognized for its operational capacity to manage and deliver logistics support, particularly in emergencies and remote areas. No organization matched WFP's combination of national reach, delivery infrastructure, digital systems and preparedness. Beginning in May 2020, WFP provided essential common services to the Government, other United Nations entities and NGOs, including digital platforms for beneficiary management, warehousing, transportation and broader logistics and supply chain support. In 2022 and 2023, WFP provided the logistics backbone for the national COVID-19 pandemic response, supporting the distribution of personal protective equipment, vaccines and medical equipment. WFP then capitalized on its established supply chain infrastructure and expertise to transition from providing emergency support to strengthening national health supply chains at the request of partners. WFP's management

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<sup>11</sup> Some highly food-insecure counties (such as River Gee and Grand Kru) that were targeted by conventional school feeding until its suspension in 2022 due to limited funding were subsequently covered by other partners.

of Liberia's main health commodity warehouse is the only activity of its type anywhere in the world.

19. **WFP's work in resilience building and school feeding was complemented by a flexible portfolio of crisis response activities, enabling it to shift between changing lives and saving lives.** WFP's ability to reorient to humanitarian response and take-home rations for school feeding during the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated its adaptability. **Integration at the humanitarian-development-peace nexus was limited, however.** For example, while WFP targeted farmers for emergency assistance programmes designed to respond to caterpillar infestations and food price inflation related to the conflict in Ukraine, it failed to include farmers in its resilience programmes, nor did it link beneficiaries targeted under crisis response to resilience programming. Although peacebuilding was not formally included in the CSP, evaluations of two joint projects found that WFP's technical assistance contributed to increasing the participation of young women and men in peacebuilding activities and to improving social cohesion.
20. **While the CSP was designed to create links between agricultural production and the provision of school meals through an integrated approach to HGSF, in practice integration was limited.** This stemmed from several factors, the first in relation to the distance between farmers and schools: in counties where WFP had school feeding programmes, smallholder farmers were connected to HGSF markets through direct purchases in 2022 and 2023, while those operating in other counties were not. Second, WFP shifted to a model of sourcing from cooperatives, which were not required to buy from WFP-supported farmers. These were missed opportunities to create synergies across programme areas for efficiency gains. Greater coherence across smallholder support and school feeding – particularly in post-harvest management, food safety and quality, and market development – could have expanded the local supply base, contributed to better outcomes for farmers and unlocked stronger food system links and multiplier effects.

### **Effectiveness and sustainability: Overall performance and key contributions to strategic outcomes**

#### ***Home-grown school feeding and resilience***

The HGSF model was a strong strategic asset through which WFP contributed to the development of inclusive food systems and improved education and nutrition outcomes for children. Although results were constrained by challenges related to operationalizing the cooperative sourcing model, including limited processing and production capacity, purchasing through cooperatives increased the supply of agricultural commodities at lower operational cost. It offered a scalable and sustainable model for procurement, boosting the productivity and resilience of farmers.

21. **WFP's school feeding programme contributed to overall positive increases in enrolment and attendance,** meeting or exceeding targets for most years; retention levels also remained high, at 90–98 percent. Parents and school officials cited additional positive outcomes, including children's reliable access to a diverse and fortified diet,<sup>12</sup> reduced financial burden on parents and increased learner attention and academic performance. The evaluation noted unintended effects, however, such as that a portion of enrolment growth in WFP schools was due to in-school children moving to government schools from nearby non-government schools that did not have school feeding programmes. Some WFP schools experienced sharp enrolment increases not matched by additional food, teachers or

<sup>12</sup> Feeding days as a percentage of total days generally increased over the CSP, reaching 95 percent (2024), as did the percentage of multi-fortified meal days per year, which ranged from 80 percent to 100 percent.

educational resources. Some parents of out-of-school children indicated that while school meals were an incentive, they were not sufficient to offset school-related costs.

22. **WFP's shift to buying from cooperatives shows promise as a scalable and sustainable procurement model** contributing to increased supply of agricultural commodities and profits, with cooperatives benefiting from price stability, bulk sales and lower transaction costs. It also encouraged better production practices<sup>13</sup> and stronger local value chains that aligned with WFP's resilience objectives, with lower operational cost and greater reach and scalability. However, insufficient cooperative capacity assessments, unpredictable distribution planning and open-ended contracts led to supply shortfalls and delays, undermining cooperatives' ability to aggregate food commodities from farmers, meet food safety and quality standards, and secure financing for investment.
23. **School feeding in Liberia is becoming more institutionally and financially sustainable** as the Government has prioritized HGSF with recent budget commitments and plans to revise the national policy. However, **progress in strengthening systems has been incremental**; school feeding remains largely externally managed, with limited investment in national systems. Opportunities to build capacity in food safety, procurement and policy frameworks – such as collaboration with Liberia's standards authority – remain underutilized. WFP is well positioned to work with the Ministry of Education to review and implement the national school feeding policy, standardize menus and procedures, and strengthen government capacity in planning, budgeting, coordination and monitoring to support long-term sustainability.
24. At the community level, WFP improved implementation through training and equipment for food management committees. Nevertheless, many committees still struggle with stock management, literacy and understanding of entitlements and require continued oversight and support, which undermines sustainability.

WFP's agricultural resilience programming contributed to increased farmer capacity and greater production. The model is limited in its scalability, however, and the sustainability of resilience outcomes was undercut by short project durations and weak organizational and financial capacity among farmers' organizations.

25. Through agricultural resilience programming, WFP combined asset creation with capacity strengthening for smallholders and farmers' organizations, providing agricultural inputs and training and some agricultural equipment. **The rehabilitation of productive assets – particularly inland valley swamps – was effective in supporting production by vulnerable farmers, with evidence of improved yields. However, operational delays, short project durations, poor site selection and rising food prices undermined food security and livelihoods gains**, with many households continuing to rely on negative coping strategies despite increased support and above-average yields.
26. **WFP's approach to strengthening smallholder farmer capacity was designed with sustainability in mind.** Some farmers' organizations saw their production, organization and marketing improve to a point that allowed them to graduate from WFP support. However, the limited scale of relevant activities and lack of organizational capacity, cohesion and governance among farmers' organizations limited the sustainability of these activities and their impact on food system development.
27. WFP technical and financial assistance for policy formulation helped to improve policy coherence and prioritization in relation to post-harvest loss reduction. WFP's collaboration with government partners enhanced data collection and analysis capacity through

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<sup>13</sup> At the time of the evaluation, only some cooperatives were working with networks of smallholders.

instruments such as the comprehensive food security and nutrition survey and price monitoring systems, contributing to better targeting and programme design.

### **Crisis response**

WFP's crisis response in Liberia helped to prevent further deterioration of food security among vulnerable households during the COVID-19 pandemic and contributed to improved rates of acceptable food consumption in subsequent emergencies. However, progress towards intended food security outcomes was hindered by operational challenges related to logistics, targeting and coordination.

28. **During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020–2021, WFP provided several months of emergency food assistance to 2.5 million vulnerable individuals across Liberia.** Acceptable food consumption scores in those years, however, fell far below targets. A shift to cash assistance as an alternative to take-home rations for school feeding during pandemic-related school closures addressed safety concerns posed by people gathering, reduced logistical challenges and allowed broader coverage. Many households used cash assistance for urgent non-food needs, however, which diluted its effect on food security, even while it supported school enrolment.
29. **Operational challenges included delays due to unsuccessful attempts to procure food locally and discussions over rations, poor coordination and communication with stakeholders, and an insufficient number of staff in key functions and in the field.** These challenges undermined the effectiveness, timeliness and efficiency of the pandemic response, leading to reputational risks and tensions at the community level. Country office staffing limitations also constrained oversight of food assistance. There were some reports of interference from local community leaders and manipulation of government distribution lists to favour specific groups, raising oversight concerns that were registered with WFP's Office of the Inspector General.
30. **Post-COVID cash-based transfers and e-voucher food assistance addressing localized crises,** such as flooding, caterpillar infestations and the impact of the conflict in Ukraine, helped vulnerable households to meet food needs and improved food security. They fell short of CSP targets, however, due to implementation challenges, including limited retailer access, inaccurate registration and transfer values that were not adjusted to account for regional cost variations. **Beneficiaries preferred cash over e-vouchers** due to its greater flexibility, including the ability to purchase food from vendors offering better quality, prices or service. Importantly, e-vouchers posed a cost and time burden for vulnerable people, including older persons, persons with disabilities and single mothers, in reaching vendors and transporting heavy food items. Such people often had to rely on others to collect rations, sometimes incurring informal costs or having to share assistance received.
31. **WFP's support for Liberia's national disaster management agency (NDMA) contributed to improvements in the quality and speed of post-crisis assessments in the short-term,** including better data collection tools and digitalization efforts. However, contributions were fragmented and constrained by limited resources and short-term engagement and **outcomes were not sustained after support ceased** in 2021. Operational inefficiency during subsequent post-disaster assessments indicated that gains in efficiency and data quality had not been sustained.

### **Access to common services – health commodity stock management and supply chains**

WFP played a key enabling role in Liberia's health and humanitarian response by leveraging its logistics expertise to support the distribution of critical medical supplies during the national response to the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

32. Beginning in May 2020, **WFP played a key enabling role in Liberia's humanitarian response, leveraging its logistics expertise to support government and humanitarian partners.** Through the provision of digital platforms for inventory management, warehousing, transportation and broader logistics and supply chain support, WFP ensured the timely and equitable distribution of essential medical supplies during the COVID-19 pandemic.
33. **WFP continued to provide effective support to health supply chain coordination platforms in partnership with the Ministry of Health,** expanding its efforts to address structural issues and contributing to health system performance. Its interventions addressed systemic gaps in forecasting, storage and delivery, resulting in more reliable and transparent supply chains, more structured and predictable distribution models and reduced occurrence of supply shortages and product expirations.<sup>14</sup> These improvements enhanced the availability of medicine and contributed to health system performance, although challenges with cold chain infrastructure, data systems and transport logistics remain.
34. **WFP's efforts to strengthen Liberia's health commodity supply chain also improved operational systems and local staff capacity,** as evidenced by increased staffing, training and digital tools. After assuming management of Liberia's Central Medical Store at the request of the Government and development partners, WFP increased the number of local staff by 84 percent, including Liberian pharmacists hired and trained to work in the store. The evaluation found limitations in handover planning, however; capacity strengthening was often implemented in an ad hoc manner rather than through a sustained strategy, limiting its potential to catalyse institutional change and threatening the sustainability of achievements.

### **Cross-cutting priorities**

Progress on cross-cutting priorities under the CSP varied. The CSP emphasized women's and girls' equal participation and included some environmental considerations in programme design. Results in relation to equality and women's empowerment, the monitoring of environmental outcomes and the strengthening of accountability to affected people were limited, reflecting gaps in strategic intent, design and monitoring and undermining the effectiveness and accountability of WFP programming.

35. **WFP consistently prioritized the access and participation of women and girls and other vulnerable groups** in programming, with female beneficiaries representing more than 64 percent of participants in some key activities. **However, most initiatives lacked a systematic analysis of differential needs and barriers such that opportunities to address structural inequalities that contribute to food insecurity were missed.** Progress included greater financial independence for women smallholders, increased female representation in farmers' organization leadership and food management committees, a tripling of women-led cooperatives supplying school meals and reduced burdens on cooks – who are largely women – through the use of eco-stoves. The extent to which some of

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<sup>14</sup> Notably, WFP increased the number of annual distribution cycles from two to four and identified approximately USD 20 million in health commodities during an inventory undertaken with the Government, compared to an initial estimate of USD 2–3 million.

these gains translated into increased decision-making and influence for women varied, and there were unintended negative outcomes for some women cooks who reported that they were not paid and that their workloads had increased.

36. **Environmental considerations were not systematically integrated into programme design.** Some programmatic elements – such as farmer sensitization and training in climate-smart agriculture, sustainable land use, water conservation, crop diversification, local procurement and fuel-efficient stoves – supported environmental objectives. They were not, however, guided by clear targets, nor were environmental outcomes monitored. The absence of data or indicators relating to environmental performance meant that potential trade-offs and sustainability risks were neither identified nor managed.
37. **WFP broadly adhered to humanitarian principles and demonstrated commitment to accountability to affected people, although gaps remained.** WFP promoted humanity and impartiality through its work to alleviate suffering in the most food-insecure counties and to proactively include vulnerable groups based primarily on need. The vast majority of beneficiaries reported no safety concerns, no access barriers and respectful treatment. However, access to information in particular emerged as a key area for improvement. Limited and uneven communication engagement, including the provision of essential details on programming, created gaps in affected people’s knowledge of targeting and selection criteria, entitlements and timelines, leading in some instances to frustration, mistrust and a sense of exclusion. Feedback mechanisms were also often limited. The formalized community feedback mechanism hotline established in 2023 was an important achievement, but general knowledge and use of the hotline varied.
38. **Progress on cross-cutting dimensions was constrained by insufficient staff training and chronic staffing shortages in the country office,** posing reputational risks and undermining the effectiveness of and accountability for WFP programming. This weakened WFP’s ability to ensure quality, adapt to emerging challenges and fully integrate considerations related to the empowerment of women and girls and efforts to advance equality, environmental safeguards and beneficiary engagement.

### Efficiency

While output performance improved modestly over time, overall delivery remained constrained by fragmented and short-term funding and operational and funding delays. WFP intentionally prioritized those facing the greatest access barriers in some elements of its crisis response and sought to advance broader developmental outcomes through the HGSF model, accepting trade-offs with operational efficiency, timeliness and cost-effectiveness.

39. **Operational challenges impeded the timeliness of WFP’s assistance.** The COVID-19 pandemic response was undercut by poor coordination and communication, limited country office staff capacity stemming from prior funding shortages and human resource cuts, insufficient local produce and prolonged discussions with government and United Nations partners over ration content and volume. As a result, what was intended to be a three-month operation lasted more than a year. Technical errors with cash-based transfers also caused payment delays for post-pandemic crisis activities, take-home rations for school feeding and resilience-building food for assets activities for some beneficiaries (15–20 people per round of assistance, with more people generally affected in the first round). External factors, including a lack of retailers, poor network connectivity, difficult terrain and challenges posed by the rainy season, also delayed the implementation of e-voucher and resilience programming.

40. Strategic outcome 4 had the lowest expenditure rate (64 percent) over the period under evaluation due to delayed funding disbursement, a prolonged rainy season, delays in staffing and the need to achieve cost savings in hiring, as well as the need to retain funds as a buffer against possible cost overruns.
41. **Fragmented, short-term donor funding contributed to higher transaction costs and increased administrative burdens and time dedicated to programme planning and donor reporting.** This strained staff capacity at a time when the country office already faced operational delays and capacity limitations. Moreover, the lack of predictable flexible multi-year funding hindered WFP's ability to plan strategically, invest in systems strengthening and implement activities in a timely and efficient manner.
42. **At times WFP deliberately prioritized reaching population groups who face the most significant access barriers and contributing to broader developmental outcomes over operational efficiency, timeliness and cost-efficiency.** Challenges with e-voucher redemption and food delivery were particularly evident in hard-to-reach areas like Gbarpolu and Maryland counties. For example, operational challenges posed by the rainy season contributed to a 54 percent expenditure rate in 2022, with delivery of food to some sites taking over two months.
43. **Significant investment in capacity strengthening and management during the establishment of the HGSF model contributed to a cost per HGSF beneficiary three times higher than the cost of traditional school feeding.** Poor infrastructure also drove the higher cost of locally procured food, while imported rice benefited from economies of scale, efficient logistics and lower production costs, making it more competitively priced despite transportation and customs fees. Cost-efficiency was sacrificed by purchasing local food for HGSF, but this was done to yield greater development outcomes. This is in line with WFP policies such as the local and regional food procurement policy, which posits that higher procurement costs may be justifiable if they lead to the achievement of programmatic objectives.

## Partnerships

WFP prioritized strategic partnerships with the Government that laid the foundations for sustainability, and it collaborated effectively with other United Nations entities and cooperating partners to extend its reach to vulnerable populations and provide targeted sectoral support. However, these partnerships were largely operational and were underutilized as strategic enablers.

44. Over the CSP period, **WFP shifted from primarily implementing operations with NGOs to prioritizing and building partnerships with national and subnational government institutions to build ownership and ensure sustainability.** Implementation, monitoring and reporting for many activities were undertaken jointly. Collaboration with the Government helped to institutionalize national food security assessments and strengthen analytical systems, although recent reductions in support have weakened Liberia's ability to respond to shocks. Sustainability remains challenged by limited institutional capacity and chronic funding gaps, with key programmes such as school feeding and health logistics still heavily dependent on WFP's technical and operational support.
45. **Through collaboration with other United Nations entities WFP has contributed to broader development objectives in Liberia.** WFP's engagement in two United Nations Peacebuilding Fund projects, providing technical assistance and livelihood opportunities, particularly for young people, demonstrated its capacity to address the root causes of conflict and contribute to peacebuilding outcomes, including strengthened livelihoods, increased participation in peacebuilding activities and improved social cohesion. WFP also partnered to strengthen normative frameworks and food security and resilience analysis. Notable

examples include a joint Cadre Harmonisé analysis, a comprehensive food security and nutrition survey and other assessments with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development and other partners, as well as WFP's support for the development of a zero post-harvest loss strategy.

46. **Partnerships with cooperating partners and private sector companies played an important role in extending WFP's reach and achievement of results**, leveraging the geographic coverage, community relationships and specialized expertise of those entities, notably in resilience and emergency response. Cooperating partners played a vital role in community mobilization, targeting and implementation, especially where WFP had limited presence.
47. **WFP has yet to fully activate its convening potential in the education sector**, where its operational footprint, supply chain assets and global school feeding expertise position it well to play a catalytic role in facilitating multi-actor collaboration. WFP is working with FAO and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) on an integrated proposal for school feeding that could improve strategic collaboration and serve as a flagship project and an example of considered collaboration for the wider United Nations family.

### Human and financial resources

WFP operated under significant resource and staffing constraints throughout the period under review. Unpredictable and fragmented donor funding affected planning and limited the quality, timeliness and scale of programme delivery and internal systems, including monitoring systems. Improvements were noted in later years, although staffing shortages continued to undermine responsiveness to known challenges.

48. **While the CSP was strategically relevant, its original scope was overly ambitious relative to the resources available to the country office** in terms of staffing levels, anticipated funding, donor base, availability of long-term funding and other matters. The assumptions underpinning the CSP proved unrealistic in Liberia's operational and funding context. In general, the CSP was under-resourced except for large funding infusions for the COVID-19 pandemic response. The amount needed to fund the country portfolio exceeded USD 140 million, of which only 53.2 percent had been received as of December 2024. Ninety percent of total resources were single-year commitments, requiring short programming cycles and limiting the duration, predictability and effectiveness of resilience-building activities.
49. **The funding situation made it difficult for WFP to maintain the CSP's strategic orientation and limited its ability to meet operational demands.** For example, funding shortfalls led to the suspension and delayed resumption of HGSF activities and constrained WFP's ability to implement capacity-strengthening activities. By contrast, with the highest level of funding relative to the needs-based plan budget, common services provision under strategic outcome 4 had sufficient resources to support implementation, which contributed to strong performance.
50. **Chronic staffing shortfalls and staff turnover – especially in technical and cross-cutting areas – also undermined the consistency, timeliness and quality of implementation across most CSP activities.** Critical functions such as monitoring, budgeting, programming and communications were chronically understaffed, and frequent turnover, including of three country directors between 2019 and 2025, affected continuity and strategic direction. In addition, the country office's ability to raise funds and plan proactively was constrained by staffing limitations (including the lack of a dedicated partnerships and communications position until June 2024) and the lack of a proactive resource mobilization strategy. After decreasing significantly in 2022 (from 77 staff to 48) staffing resources increased, largely

driven by an expansion in supply chain staff with the shift of strategic outcome 4 to the management and distribution of public health commodities. Strategic outcome 4 benefited from dedicated capacity and relatively clear operational models. In contrast, programming in resilience, school feeding and capacity strengthening suffered from fragmented implementation, limited monitoring and constrained ability to resolve operational bottlenecks.

51. **WFP implemented several strategies to mitigate staffing and funding shortfalls, including a leaner staff complement, reprioritization of resources and adaptive delivery models.** The number of programming and policy and field operations staff was reduced from 22 to 13 based on a staffing structure review in 2022. WFP switched school feeding assistance from take-home rations to a one-time cash-based transfer for targeted households in 2022 and scaled up cash-based modalities more broadly for school feeding.
52. **Monitoring systems met minimum requirements but a lack of dedicated monitoring staff and resulting data gaps, particularly early in the CSP term, hindered WFP's ability to track programme implementation and assess contributions to outcomes.** This hindered timely strategic decisions and programming adaptations. The country office strengthened monitoring systems, hiring research, assessment and monitoring staff in 2023 and introducing third-party monitoring in 2024. These measures improved data collection, leading to the identification of key operational issues. In some cases, third-party monitors (TPM) also provided limited operational support. The country office's ability to respond to issues revealed through third-party monitoring remained constrained by insufficient staffing, especially in the field. For example, 2024 data indicated that of 133 issues identified only 25 percent were closed, while no action had begun on 40 percent and 35 percent were in the process of being addressed.

## Recommendations

Recommendation	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
<p><b>Recommendation 1: Refine and consolidate the HGSP programming model, improving planning and using support for cooperatives as a means of building integrated smallholder farmer resilience.</b></p>	Strategic and operational	Country office	Cooperatives, Liberian Standards Authority (LiSA), global headquarters	High	June 2028
<p>1.1 Incentivize agricultural cooperatives – through technical support (in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture) and financial market opportunities – to provide training, inputs, market linkages and other assistance to smallholder farmers within their networks as a scalable model for boosting the productivity and resilience of farmers.</p>			Cooperatives, Ministry of Agriculture		
<p>1.2 Ensure the timely provision of distribution plans to all stakeholders based on a school feeding needs forecasting mechanism and connect specific cooperatives to schools to enable a timely supply of food to schools by cooperatives.</p>			Cooperatives, regional office, headquarters in Rome		
<p>1.3 Implement multi-cycle procurement contracts that specify delivery requirements (including quantities) for cooperatives that consistently meet supply targets and high quality standards.</p>			Headquarters in Rome, cooperatives, LiSA		

Recommendation	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
<b>Recommendation 2: Strengthen WFP’s support for national and community capacity, systems and structures in areas where it adds distinct value, including school feeding, crisis response and health supply chains.</b>	Operational	Country office	Global headquarters, NDMA, Ministry of the Environment, Ministry of Health, TPM	Medium	June 2030
2.1 Enable a gradual and sustainable handover of school feeding by supporting the Government in developing and operationalizing national school feeding policies and standardized procedures while simultaneously strengthening the capacity of food management committees through targeted refresher training, practical tools and frequent joint monitoring with the Ministry of Education and TPM.			Global headquarters, Ministry of Education, TPM		
2.2 Support the NDMA in working to strengthen sustainable rapid assessment capacity for emerging crises, for instance by supplying tablets and training on survey, information systems and database management.			NDMA		
2.3 Support the sustainability of the operations of Liberia’s central medical store by developing and implementing a clear capacity strengthening and transition plan for the future handover of the management of the store and related supply chain roles to national partners, featuring activities such as staff training, job shadowing and post-exit consulting.			Ministry of Health		

Recommendation	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
<p><b>Recommendation 3: Strengthen strategic programming partnerships and joint resource mobilization and policy development across the education sector, aligning the complementary capacities of partners with WFP’s comparative advantage in school feeding in order to enhance education, nutrition and food systems outcomes.</b></p>	Strategic	Country office	FAO, UNICEF, LISA, global headquarters, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Agriculture, United Nations Industrial Development Organization, International Fund for Agricultural Development	Medium	December 2029
<p>3.1 Establish a formal partnership framework to guide collaboration in areas where WFP has limited comparative advantage, such as water, sanitation and hygiene, nutrition-specific programming, agricultural production and food safety and quality systems, allowing WFP to focus on its core strengths in local procurement and school meal provision.</p>			Ministry of Education, Ministry of Agriculture, FAO, UNICEF, LISA, global headquarters		
<p>3.2 Develop a targeted resource mobilization strategy that aligns funding opportunities with WFP’s comparative advantages and partnership priorities, ensuring predictable financing for integrated, multi-year programmes that leverage complementary partner capacities.</p>					

Recommendation	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
<b>Recommendation 4: Strengthen organizational capacity and operational systems to facilitate the achievement of CSP ambitions.</b>	Operational	Country office	Global headquarters, TPM, Ministry of Education	High	June 2030
4.1 Strengthen monitoring systems by responding to issues identified through third-party monitoring.			TPM, Ministry of Education		
4.2 Strengthen internal technical capacity on empowering women and girls and advancing equality and on the environment by ensuring regular training for programme and research, assessment and monitoring staff at the country office and suboffice levels, for example through support from the regional office and headquarters in Rome on empowering women and girls and advancing equality; safeguarding; protection; minimum standards for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse; and expertise on using indicators that can track differential outcomes in monitoring and evaluation systems.			Global headquarters		
4.3 Fully implement the 2024 community engagement strategy so that affected people receive continuous information and engagement as part of programming and are thus informed and empowered.			Global headquarters		

**Acronyms**

COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
CSP	country strategic plan
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
HGSF	home-grown school feeding
LISA	Liberian Standards Authority
NDMA	national disaster management agency
NGO	non-governmental organization
TPM	third-party monitors
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund