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Summary evaluation report of the Central African Republic country portfolio (2012–mid-2017)

Executive summary

This country portfolio evaluation covered all WFP operations in the Central African Republic from 2012 until mid-2017.¹ Conducted by WFP's Office of Evaluation and an external evaluation team, it assessed WFP's strategic positioning in the country, the quality of and factors influencing WFP's decision-making, and the performance and results of portfolio activities, to the extent possible given data limitations.

Country context: The Central African Republic is a landlocked country with a population of approximately 4.6 million, approximately 50 percent of whom were in need of assistance in 2017 according to estimates from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. The country currently ranks 188th of 188 countries in the 2016 Human Development Index of the United Nations Development Programme. A United Nations and WFP Level 3 emergency was declared in December 2013 and lasted until May 2015, when it became a WFP Level 2 regional emergency. The Central African Republic has limited infrastructure and high levels of insecurity; United Nations staff are subject to tight movement restrictions and both people and trucks carrying food often require military escort from the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic. During the period evaluated, although the country experienced almost continuous civil conflict, WFP's country portfolio suffered from chronic underfunding.

¹ The evaluation did not cover WFP's assistance to Central African Republic refugees in neighbouring countries as they are assisted by WFP country offices in the host countries.

In line with the Evaluation Policy (2016–2021) (WFP/EB.2/2015/4-A/Rev.1), to respect the integrity and independence of evaluation findings the editing of this report has been limited and as a result some of the language in it may not be fully consistent with the World Food Programme's standard terminology or editorial practices. Please direct any requests for clarification to the Director of Evaluation.

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WFP operations: In June 2017, WFP's country office had approximately 170 staff members, slightly more than half of whom were based in Bangui, with the remainder in five sub-offices mainly in central and western parts of the country. From 2010 to 2012, the value of WFP operations was stable at approximately USD 20 million per year. As a result of political upheaval at the end of 2013, however, from 2014 to 2017 annual operations ranged from USD 50 million to USD 80 million. During the evaluation period, WFP assisted an average of approximately 900,000 beneficiaries a year,² including internally displaced persons and a small number of returnees.

Strategic positioning: The country office did not have a formal strategy during the evaluation period and focused for most of the time on responding to emergency needs with food distributions and school feeding. This reactive approach was appropriate given the widespread violence, mass population displacements, insecurity, poor infrastructure and access, limited capacity of partners and chronic underfunding.

WFP's operations were aligned with the country's United Nations development assistance framework and core national policies. Stakeholders perceived WFP's comparative advantages as being its unique capacities in transport, distribution and food security information. The evaluation commended the country office's efforts to pilot voucher transfers in urban areas in 2015 and to strengthen recovery-oriented activities – food assistance for assets with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and Purchase for Progress – even though funding trends for these activities were not encouraging. The interim country strategic plan (2018–2020) constituted an important step in shifting the balance between WFP's emergency response and its support for early recovery under conditions that remain volatile.

Decision drivers: Sustained need for high volumes of assistance under volatile and unpredictable conditions, combined with increasingly severe funding shortfalls and security and access constraints, drove the decision to prioritize life-saving needs and reach the maximum number of people possible, reducing the size, frequency and duration of distributions.

Conditions seriously impeded systematic collection of data, even on needs and coverage. To the extent feasible, major decisions were supported by data and analysis, but these were limited in scope and reliability and monitoring was fragmented. A lack of analysis of gender dynamics resulted in missed opportunities to address high levels of gender-based violence. While many actors perceived WFP as neutral, there were insufficient data to assess the application of humanitarian principles, accountability to affected populations and capacity building.

On the positive side, consistently good relations with national authorities and partners enhanced cooperation as a key component of decision-making and performance, even in difficult circumstances.

Portfolio results: Despite limited access outside the capital, implementation of planned activities was generally high. The scale of activities was highly dependent on security levels and the capacities of local health and education systems, governance bodies, police and others. Outcomes were difficult to measure owing to limitations on access to sites outside the main cities and a lack of reliable data. Vouchers, which were gradually introduced in 2015, appeared to offer an effective alternative to food distributions when market and security conditions allowed. Emergency school meals were perceived as contributing to a sense of normality and social cohesion, but coverage was limited and the quality of education was hindered by many factors. Other activities – nutrition, food assistance for assets and Purchase for Progress – were valued by stakeholders but were implemented on too small a scale to have meaningful effects. Logistics services were highly commended, but there is room for improvement with regard to efficiency. Efficiency and

² Approximately 1.1 million people per year were assisted in the period 2014–2017, with a peak of 1.6 million in 2014. These figures are derived from standard project reports and exclude any double counting of beneficiaries who received WFP assistance through more than one modality.

effectiveness were reduced by high staff turnover, understaffing and limited capacities, especially in sub-offices.

Recommendations: The evaluation team recommended that WFP support efforts to establish the conditions necessary to achieve peace by working more closely in partnership on the triple nexus of humanitarian, development and peacebuilding work, as recognized in the United Nations development assistance framework plus for 2018–2021; strengthen the donor base and donors' appetite for funding recovery activities; strengthen WFP's strategic role in food security information and its monitoring systems; develop an evidence-based strategy for integrating and monitoring gender issues in programming, including with regard to protection; strengthen the nutrition strategy, including through improved synergies with partners; strengthen capacities in and the rollout of cash-based transfers; further improve the staffing profile; and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of transport into and within the country.

Draft decision*

The Board takes note of the summary evaluation report of the Central African Republic country portfolio (2012–mid-2017) set out in document WFP/EB.A/2018/7-D and the management response set out in document WFP/EB.A/2018/7-D/Add.1 and encourages further action on the recommendations presented in the report, taking into account the considerations raised by the Board during its discussion.

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

Introduction

Evaluation features

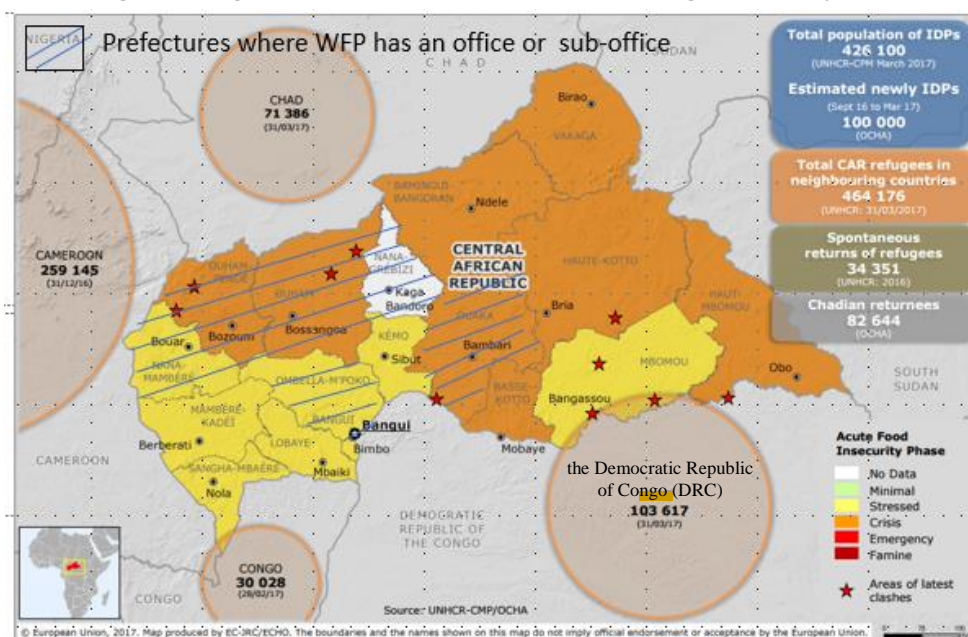
1. This country portfolio evaluation covers all of WFP's operations in the Central African Republic between 2012 and mid-2017.³ It assessed WFP's strategic positioning, the quality of and factors influencing decision-making, and the performance and results of portfolio activities as a whole. The relevance of the interim country strategic plan (ICSP) for 2018-2020 was assessed. The evaluation also provides evidence to inform preparation of the country strategic plan.
2. This was the first evaluation of WFP's work in the Central African Republic for more than a decade. It was conducted by WFP's Office of Evaluation and an external evaluation team, with field work in July 2017. The team augmented the available data and document reviews with interviews with stakeholders including WFP staff, donors, beneficiaries and partners. The main limitations on the evaluation were insecurity in the field, which limited the availability of data and the number and locations of sites visited by the evaluation team, and a lack of institutional memory of events and conditions in 2012 and 2013.

Context

3. The Central African Republic is a landlocked country bordering Cameroon, Chad, Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan and the Sudan (figure 1) and affected by political and economic events in those countries. Its population is estimated to be between 4.6 and 4.9 million. Despite having substantial natural resources, the country was ranked last of the 188 countries in the United Nations Development Programme 2016 Human Development Index.
4. More than three quarters of the population relies on agriculture, but output remains low. Continuous insecurity and population displacements have deprived many farmers of their livelihoods. The current humanitarian crisis is both one of the worst in the world – proportional to population – and one of the least well known.

³ The evaluation did not cover WFP's assistance to Central African refugees in neighbouring countries because they are assisted by WFP country offices in those countries.

Map: WFP's presence in the Central African Republic, May 2017



Sources: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), European Union, and WFP for prefectures with WFP offices or sub-offices.

- The country's political, economic and social situation has steadily deteriorated since the early 1990s. During the period evaluated, the country was almost continuously in a state of civil conflict. In 2013, the Government was overthrown and most health facilities, schools and agencies – including WFP offices – were looted. The United Nations and WFP declared a Level 3 emergency in December 2013, which lasted until May 2015 when it became a WFP Level 2 regional emergency. After a brief period of hope for recovery in 2016, the situation deteriorated again in 2017. Government presence was limited to areas around the capital, Bangui and some pockets beyond. Multiple armed groups, supporting themselves through trafficking and looting, controlled more than half of the territory despite the presence, since 2014, of 12,000 soldiers of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA). Infrastructure is limited or in poor condition, complicating movement within the country.
- Table 1 shows the situation in the Central African Republic throughout the evaluation period. In October 2016, an estimated 48 percent of households were food-insecure, compared with 28 percent in 2013. In 2012, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimated the stunting rate to be 40.7 percent.

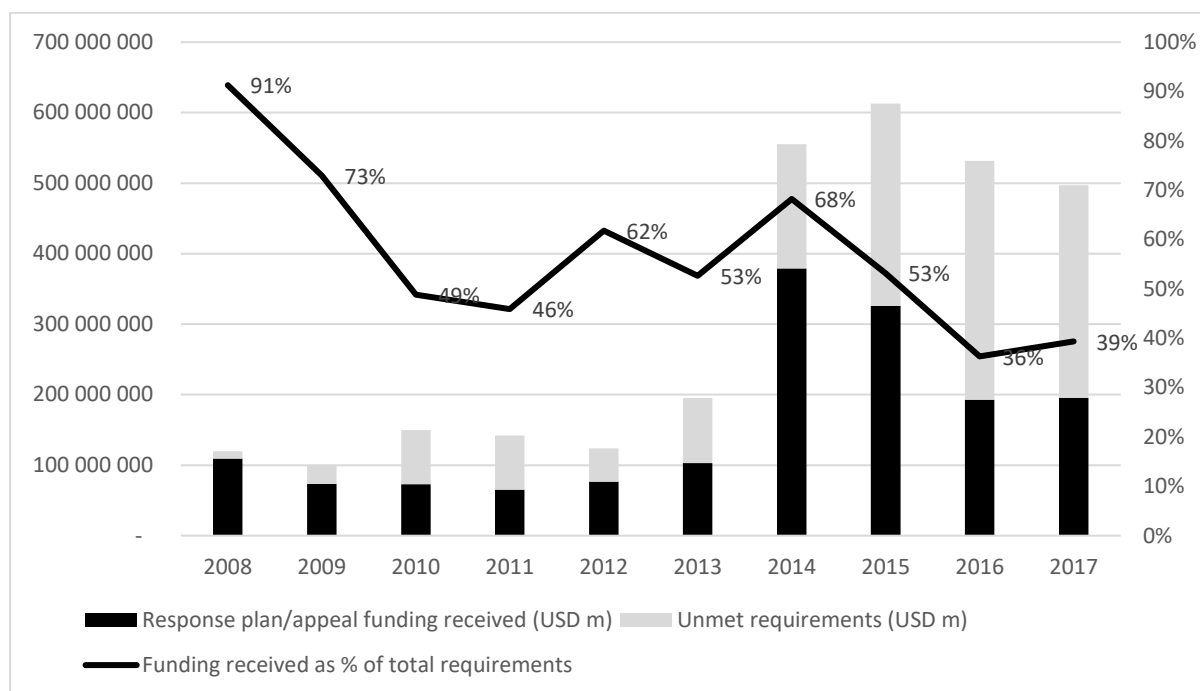
TABLE 1: TRENDS IN SOCIO-ECONOMIC INDICATORS IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC, 2012–MID-2017						
Indicator (source)	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Human Development Index (UNDP)	0.370 (180th of 186 countries)	0.345 (185th of 187 countries)	0.347 (187th of 188 countries)	0.352 (188th of 188 countries)		
Gender Inequality Index (UNDP)	0.654 (142nd out of 152 countries)	0.654 (144 th out of 152 countries)	0.655 (147 th out of 155 countries)	0.648 (149 th out of 159 countries)		
Population in need of humanitarian aid (OCHA)*		2.3 million	2.5 million	2.7 million	2.3 million	2.4 million
Refugees abroad (OCHA)		235 067	423 717	456 714	461 652	481 600
Internally displaced persons (OCHA)		601 746	825 000	469 307	420 681	592 300
Food-insecure households – moderate/severe – (EFSA Sept. 2015; national food security assessment Oct. 2016)		28%	28%	50%	48%	
Global acute malnutrition (national survey; nutrition cluster)	7.8%		6.6%		16.7%	
Primary net school enrolment (UNICEF 2012; WFP standard project report 2015)	Global: 78.4% of boys 59.5% of girls			WFP-assisted schools:** 96.6% of boys 76.2% girls		
Gross national income per capita (World Bank Atlas method)	USD 500	USD 330	USD 340	USD 360	USD 370	
Under-5 mortality rate/ 1 000 live births (WHO)	141.3	137.7	133.6	128.8	123.6	
Life expectancy at birth (World Bank; WHO)	49.1 years	49.8 years	50.7 years	50.9 years for boys 54.1 years for girls	51 years for boys 54 years for girls	

* According to UNDP, 76 percent of the population lives on less than USD 1.90/capita/day.

** No data on other schools are available.

EFSA = emergency food security assessment; OCHA = United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs; UNDP = United Nations Development Programme; UNICEF = United Nations Children's Fund; WHO = World Health Organization.

7. Despite the high levels of humanitarian need, operations in the country have suffered from chronic underfunding. Figure 1 shows the decreasing levels of funding for OCHA appeals over time. In 2017, the humanitarian appeal was only 39 percent funded.

Figure 1: Funding received compared to OCHA appeals, 2012–2017

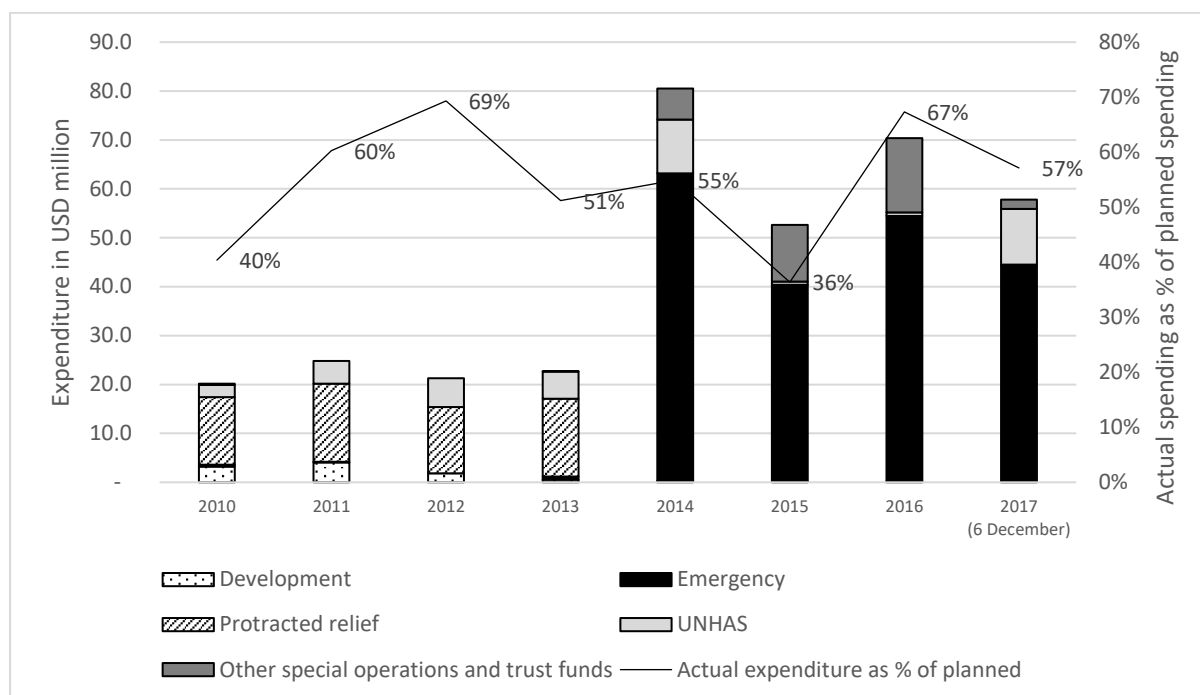
Source: OCHA March 2018: <https://fts.unocha.org/appeals/651/summary>.

WFP portfolio

8. In 2017, the country office had a total of approximately 170 staff members, of whom more than half were based in the capital, Bangui, with the remainder in five sub-offices⁴ mainly in central and western parts of the country.
9. Figure 2 shows that until 2013, the budget for WFP's planned operations in the Central African Republic was stable at approximately USD 20 million per year. As a result of the political events unfolding at the end of 2013, however, operation budgets increased to more than USD 80 million in 2014 and have oscillated between USD 50 million and USD 70 million per year since then.⁵ The evaluation period can be divided into three sub-periods: "development with growing tensions" from 2012 to December 2013; "emergency" from January 2014 to May 2015; and "attempts at recovery" since May 2015.
10. Although WFP was implementing Level 3 and Level 2 emergency responses throughout the evaluation period, its operations in the Central African Republic were chronically underfunded, as shown in figure 2.

⁴ Bambari, Bossangoa, Bouar, Kanga Bandoro and Paoua.

⁵ According to data from WFP management systems. These figures do not include indirect support costs or certain accounting adjustments.

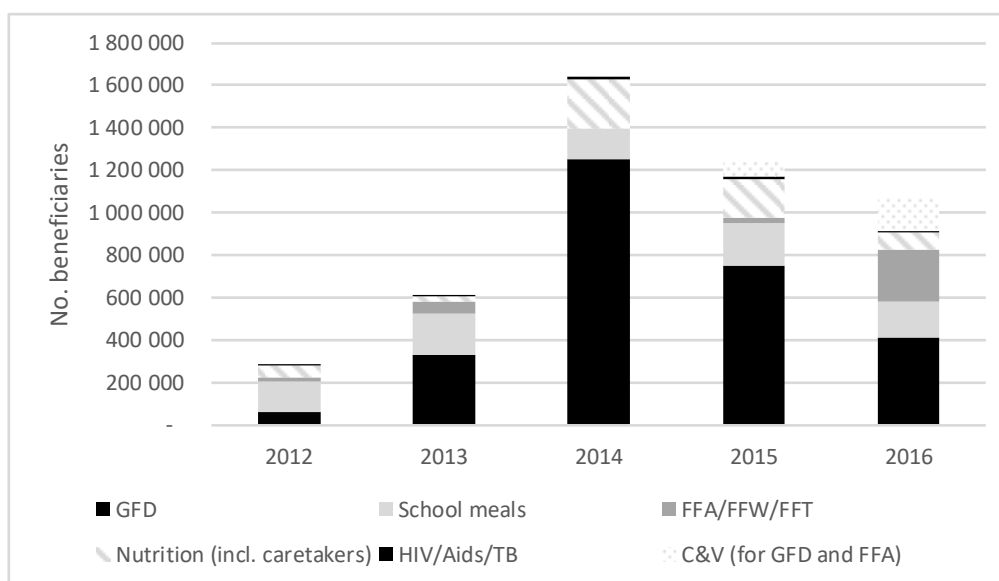
Figure 2: Levels of expenditure, by programme category, 2012–2017

Source: WFP management systems. Figures do not include indirect support costs and some accounting adjustments.

Components of the portfolio and operations

11. From January 2012 to June 2017, the country portfolio included 18 operations: one country programme, one protracted relief and recovery operation, one single-country emergency operation (EMOP), three immediate-response EMOPs, one regional EMOP, nine special operations, one project funded from WFP's immediate response account and one trust fund project addressing HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis. The total funding required was slightly more than USD 869 million (2012–2016), of which WFP received USD 555.3 million – 64 percent.⁶
12. WFP's beneficiaries included people in need of assistance in their normal places of residence, internally displaced persons, refugees and, from 2016, returnees.
13. As figure 3 shows, WFP implemented several activities during the evaluation period: general food distributions via in-kind and cash-based transfers; school meals; nutrition activities; food assistance for assets (FFA) activities; and Purchase for Progress (P4P) activities. In addition, 11 special operations were implemented at a total cost of USD 76 million, providing humanitarian air services and logistics and emergency telecommunications support.

⁶ This figure includes the entire value of EMOP 200799, "Critical support to populations affected by the ongoing crisis in Central African Republic and its regional impact", and not just the value of operations within the Central African Republic.

Figure 3: Number of beneficiaries per activity, 2012–2016

Sources: Standard project reports for 2012–2016. Figures include double counting of beneficiaries receiving assistance through more than one modality.

C&V = cash and vouchers; FFA = food assistance for assets activities; FFT = food assistance for training activities; FFW = food assistance for work activities; GFD = general food distribution.

14. As well as cooperating with ministries and United Nations agencies, WFP also worked with international and local non-governmental organizations as cooperating partners, some of which have since left the areas where WFP operates – or even the country – after repeated looting of assets and security threats.
15. The United States of America has consistently been the main donor, accounting for 43 percent of contributions, followed by the United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund and the European Union.

Evaluation findings

WFP's strategic alignment and positioning

16. The country office did not have a formal country strategy during the period evaluated, but WFP succeeded in aligning its operations with the shifts in country needs and with core national policies.
17. Memorandums of Understanding were signed in early 2017 with most of the relevant government ministries – those responsible for the economy, planning and international cooperation, agriculture, education and health. No formal agreement has yet been signed with the Ministry of Social Affairs and National Reconciliation, which coordinates responses to the current crises, including assistance to internally displaced persons.
18. WFP was much appreciated by all stakeholders: it played a proactive role in the United Nations country team and the clusters, leading the logistics and emergency telecommunications clusters and co-leading the food security cluster. WFP was found to respond well to needs and played an important role with other United Nations partners and the Government in defining national strategies such as those included in the interim strategic frameworks for 2014–2017, the national recovery and peacebuilding plan for 2017–2021, the United Nations Development Assistance Framework plus for 2018–2021 (UNDAF+) and the humanitarian response plan for 2017–2019.

19. WFP's core comparative advantage was considered to be its unique capacity to ensure road transport of food assistance and to provide air transport to members of the international community through its operation of the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS). Where conditions allowed, WFP also provided crucial assistance for early recovery through school meals, FFA and P4P activities.
20. Overall, cooperation with other United Nations agencies, donors, national authorities and partners was adequate. WFP was generally perceived as neutral. Some weaknesses were noted in the coordination of nutrition activities with UNICEF, which resulted from the different strategic approaches of the two agencies. The evaluation identified additional opportunities for cooperating with the civil affairs department of MINUSCA on working with communities, the World Bank on scaling up the use of vouchers and the European Union's Bekou Trust Fund on P4P activities.
21. The strategic objectives of the ICSP for 2018–2020 were found to be consistent with projected needs in the country. The objectives include providing emergency humanitarian assistance, which represents 56.9 percent of the ICSP budget; supporting the national zero hunger strategy – Strategic Development Goal (SDG) 2; enhancing partnerships – SDG 17; and strengthening the Government's capacities with a view to the establishment of a social protection system and a system for managing food security and nutrition. The strategic objectives are also in line with the objectives of WFP's strategic plan for 2017–2021 and of the national recovery and peacebuilding plan. The pace of transferring responsibilities to the Government will depend on coordination arrangements, the Government's capacities and the security situation.
22. Recently, through the UNDAF+, all United Nations entities operating in the Central African Republic have formally recognized the importance of the triple nexus of humanitarian, development and peacebuilding work. Re-establishing the rule of law and state authority throughout the country is a core priority of the Government, as security and an end to the sense of impunity of criminals and armed bands are key conditions for enabling comprehensive, effective and efficient humanitarian and development interventions. The nexus is not explicitly embedded in the vision articulated in the ICSP, however.

Factors influencing WFP's decision making

23. The drivers of programming decisions were mostly related to the overwhelming need for urgent assistance, exacerbated by severe operational constraints: the volatile situation; frequent population displacements; lack of security for staff and partners; poor roads and infrastructure; difficult and expensive logistics, resulting in delays and shortages; lack of access to all but about a third of the country's territory, mainly in the south and some other enclaves, and the frequent need for military escorts even in accessible areas;⁷ the rapid turnover of qualified international staff; and the limited capacity of the Government and partners.
24. Decision making was also affected by consistent funding shortages, which forced the country team to prioritize emergency assistance over other interventions. The evaluation found that WFP acted appropriately in deciding to reach as many people as possible even though it meant reducing rations and/or the frequency or duration of distributions, according to local conditions.

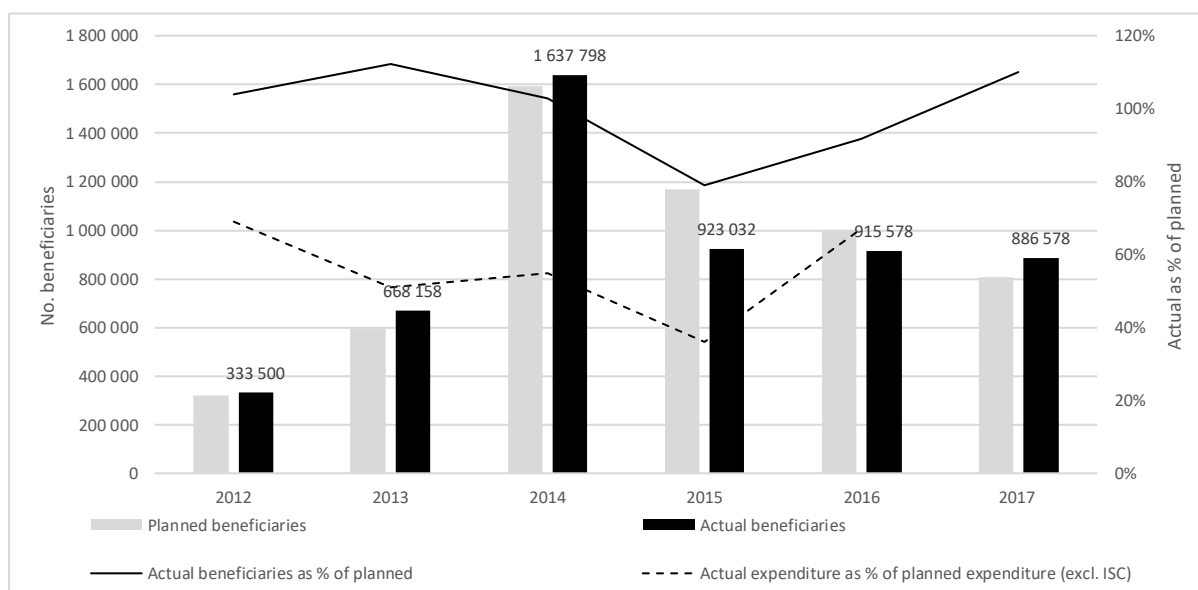
⁷ Military escorts were mandatory in southeastern and northeastern parts of the country.

25. In the absence of a formal strategy, programming decisions were made for each operation based on analysis of the situation, the policies of United Nations entities and/or the Government, WFP's strategic objectives, the SDGs, the capacities of the Government and other major actors, the risks and the lessons learned.
26. Consistently good relations with national authorities and partners were seen as a positive factor that enhanced cooperation as a key component of decision making, even in difficult circumstances.
27. To the extent feasible in the Central African Republic, major programming and operational decisions were supported by data collection and analysis, but these were of limited scope and reliability. WFP is a major actor in providing food security information, for which there is great demand from humanitarian and development partners. Despite annual *crop and food security assessment missions with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Government*, emergency food security assessments when required, and Integrated Food Security Phase Classification analysis led by FAO in 2014 and 2016, data collection was fragmented, undermining data accuracy and completeness. Aggregation of data collected at the local level may be misleading as many displaced persons took refuge in accessible cities where they could easily be identified – and registered and prioritized – while many rural areas were inaccessible, making it more difficult to obtain information.
28. *Mobile vulnerability analysis and mapping* was introduced in 2016 and may strengthen data collection, but because of staffing and security constraints post-distribution monitoring by sub-offices often did not meet planning targets.
29. On the other hand, risk management, which in the Central African Republic was below WFP's corporate standards until 2013, was significantly improved with assistance from the regional bureau and now includes a regularly updated risk register.

Portfolio performance and results

30. Between 2012 and mid-2017, WFP delivered assistance – through in-kind food distributions, food vouchers, school meals and nutrition interventions – to a large proportion of the identified vulnerable people in the Central African Republic. In 2014, at the peak of the emergency, WFP provided food assistance to 1.6 million people – more than one third of the country's total population of 4.6 million. The scale up in the size of operations from the end of 2013 onwards was remarkable.
31. The number of actual beneficiaries as a proportion of the number planned was never less than 80 percent during the period evaluated; in four of the six years analysed, the number of beneficiaries reached was higher than the number planned. Figure 4 shows the high levels of actual versus planned beneficiaries, which were achieved despite chronic underfunding and made possible only by reductions in the size of rations and the frequency and duration of assistance.

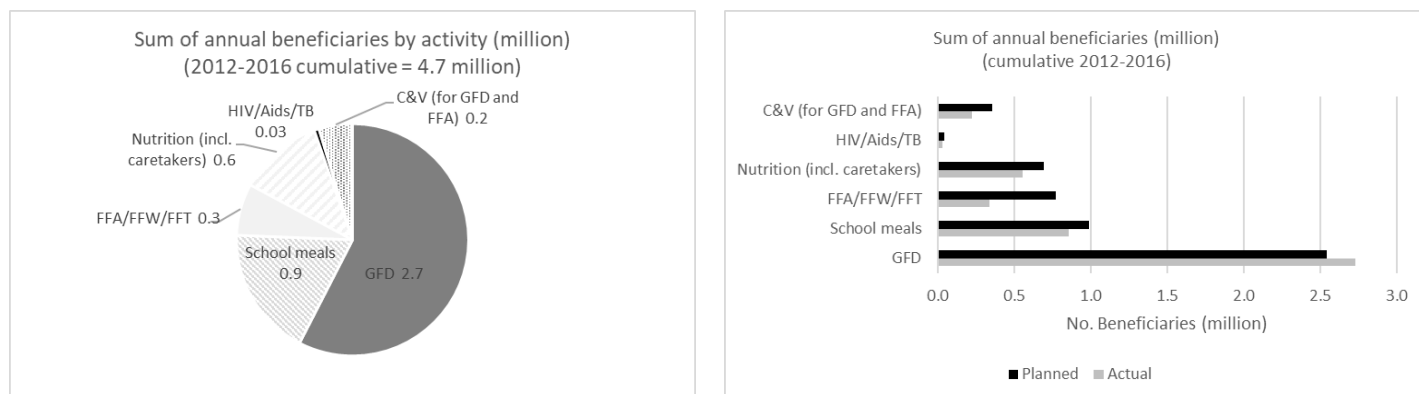
Figure 4: Planned versus actual numbers of beneficiaries, 2012–2017



Sources: Standard project reports for 2012–2017. Figures exclude double counting of beneficiaries receiving assistance through more than one modality.

32. The evaluation team was not able to draw conclusions on the outcomes of interventions. The following paragraphs report on outputs by activity, summarized in figure 5, and on overall efficiency.

Figure 5: Total beneficiaries per year, by activity, 2012–2016 (million)



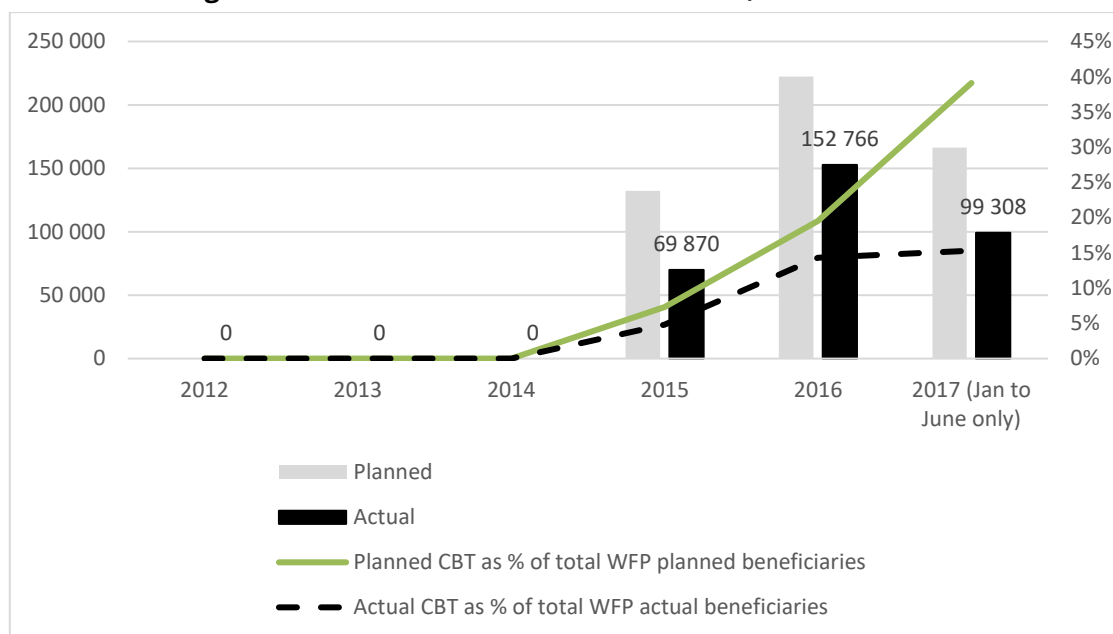
Source: Standard project reports for 2012–2016. Figures include double counting of beneficiaries receiving assistance through more than one modality.

C&V = cash and vouchers; GFD = general food distributions; FFA = food assistance for assets activities; FFT = food assistance for training activities; FFW = food assistance for work activities.

33. *General food assistance – in-kind and vouchers:* During the evaluation period, 144,052 mt of food assistance was distributed to beneficiaries. Vouchers were introduced in 2015 through a pilot project, and their use was gradually scaled up in areas where market functioning and the capacity of cooperating partners allowed. The total transfer value of vouchers reached USD 3.2 million in 2016; figure 6 gives an overview of the overall historical trend. Partners and beneficiaries were generally favourable to the use of vouchers in these areas because of their flexibility. Assessment of cost effectiveness was limited, however.

Comparisons between in-kind and cash-based transfers gave different results depending on the location, and analysis was not performed systematically or sufficiently frequently.

Figure 6: Cash-based transfer beneficiaries, 2012–mid-2017



Sources: Standard project reports for 2012–2016 and the monitoring and evaluation report of June 2017.

34. *Other modalities:* In 2016, nearly half of all households in the Central African Republic were food-insecure. FFA and P4P activities, which aimed to foster agricultural recovery, were limited and negatively affected by continuing violence. There were only 50,457 FFA participants in 2016, and only 1,100 mt of food was purchased through P4P activities in the first half of 2017.
35. *School meals* contributed to some return to normalcy and to reconciliation and social cohesion, which are core national policies. The quality of education was affected by looting, overpopulated classes and the lack of teachers. In 2012 and 2017, 20–25 percent of school pupils were receiving WFP school meals, but targeting was driven by the accessibility of schools rather than by needs.
36. *Nutrition:* WFP provided blanket supplementary feeding – especially in 2014 at the peak of the emergency – targeted supplementary feeding, complementary feeding and food by prescription. Interventions focused on treating moderate acute malnutrition and preventing acute malnutrition and were adapted to changing needs over time. Interventions did not, however, tackle the much more widespread chronic malnutrition in a country where according to UNICEF figures stunting reached 40.7 percent in 2012. The number, duration and quality of nutrition interventions were negatively affected by volatile security conditions, chronic underfunding, delays, and low capacity on the part of local health facilities. Planned coverage was modest compared with the estimated numbers of malnutrition, HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis cases.
37. The evaluation found a need for improved collaboration on nutrition between WFP and UNICEF in order to address the differences in strategy between the two agencies.
38. Important synergies were achieved between general food distributions and supplementary feeding activities and between FFA activities related to seed protection and P4P activities through which purchases from local partners were used for WFP school meals.

39. *Gender*: Figures from standard project reports show that women and girls accounted for at least 50 percent of total beneficiaries during the evaluation period. This finding was quite positive and may lead to WFP's activities having a positive impact on the lives of women and girls. Nonetheless, neither WFP nor its partners performed in-depth analyses of gender issues and their impact on the design and implementation of activities on the ground, making it impossible to assess the portfolio's contribution to gender equality and women's empowerment.
40. *Humanitarian principles, protection and accountability to affected populations*: Given the security conditions in the country, risks relating to the breach of humanitarian principles and protection are high. The evaluation noted that dialogue on protection issues with the Ministry of Social Affairs and National Reconciliation, which is officially responsible for assistance to internally displaced persons, was limited. The EMOP through which all WFP activities have been implemented since 2015 includes two cross-cutting indicators for protection and accountability to affected populations. In 2016 – the last year for which data were available at the time of the evaluation – the indicator for protection⁸ exceeded 80 percent target, but the indicator for accountability to affected populations⁹ reached 68.9 percent, just below the target of 70 percent.
41. Regarding *efficiency*, logistics constituted the dominant cost driver: WFP brought an average of 35,000 mt of food per year into the Central African Republic despite security issues – MINUSCA military escorts were often mandatory – poor infrastructure and administrative hurdles. These challenges were reflected in high land transport, handling and storage and operational costs, which represented between 30 and 50 percent of total food and related costs, against a corporate average of 18–22 percent. The complexity of operating the 1,400 km-long Douala to Bangui corridor also resulted in costly delays. New corporate tools such as the Logistics Execution Support System and the Global Commodity Management Facility helped to reduce lead times and pipeline breaks and generally improve management of the supply chain, but logistics challenges remained. WFP owns a fleet of trucks in the Central African Republic, but truck maintenance facilities and utilization rates require improvement.
42. *UNHAS*: Flights operated by WFP were crucial for the humanitarian community in the country. Between 2013 and 2017, UNHAS carried a total of 87,588 passengers and was involved in 125 medical evacuations and 883 security evacuations.
43. *Logistics and emergency telecommunications clusters*: A wide range of services were provided to the humanitarian community, but the overall approach was at times piecemeal and the decision process slow because of high staff turnover and chronic underfunding. For example, the emergency telecommunications cluster was without a coordinator for many months because of a lack of funding.
44. *Partnerships*: Partnerships with FAO on seed protection and surveys, UNHCR on assistance to refugees, and UNICEF on the “back to school” initiative were particularly strong. WFP was also found to have strong partnerships with the Government. Little evidence was available regarding the impact of capacity strengthening activities, most of which focused on short-term training, with limited longer-term initiatives.

⁸ “Proportion of assisted people who do not experience safety problems travelling to, from and/or at WFP programme sites”.

⁹ “Proportion of assisted people informed about the programme”.

45. *Staffing and capacity:* Just over half of WFP staff in the Central African Republic were working at the main office in Bangui. The rest were in sub-offices, where living conditions are difficult and the level of responsibility in terms of area covered and number of beneficiaries assisted is high. During the evaluation period, the country office had difficulties in attracting and retaining skilled personnel, especially experienced staff for managerial positions. Relatively low staff numbers outside Bangui also affected the levels of monitoring that could be performed and the capacity strengthening activities with local government, partners and civil society. Staff turnover was high, especially during the initial period of the emergency that started at the end of 2013.
46. *Sustainability:* The situation in the Central African Republic worsened again after 2016 and the country is highly dependent on funding from the international community to provide assistance and basic services to the population. The current food security situation and poor access to basic social services are unlikely to change until peace is restored and state presence substantially reinforced. The ICSP outlines the importance of FFA and P4P activities for recovery, but planned funding levels appear optimistic given that average annual expenditures between 2014 and 2016 were only 70 percent of those planned.

Conclusions

47. In the Central African Republic, a complex, multi-year and unpredictable emergency with low international visibility creates an extremely challenging operational setting for WFP. During the evaluation period, the country office did not have a formal strategy until the development of the ICSP, which was approved in 2017. The reactive approach employed, focusing mainly on responding to emergency needs through food distributions and school feeding, was appropriate. WFP's decision to reach as many people as possible, albeit with reductions in rations and/or the frequency or duration of distributions, was rational.
48. WFP operated in a manner that was consistent with government policies and priorities and collaborated well with other actors under the UNDAF+ as part of the United Nations country team. WFP's main comparative advantages were its unique capacities in transport and distribution.
49. From 2015, WFP began to expand the range of activities and modalities beyond traditional in-kind assistance, using cash-based transfers whenever market and security conditions allowed.
50. In 2017, the ICSP constituted an important step in recalibrating the balance between emergency response and support for early national recovery, fostering greater effectiveness under circumstances that remain volatile. Under the ICSP, FFA and P4P activities were strengthened, but funding levels remained low. While implicitly recognizing the nexus of humanitarian and development work, the ICSP did not explore the indirect role that WFP could also have in supporting the re-establishment of peace by working at the triple nexus of humanitarian, development and peacebuilding work, which is at the centre of the UNDAF+.
51. Conditions in the country seriously impeded systematic data collection. To the extent feasible, major decisions were supported by data and analysis, but the data and analysis were of limited scope and reliability. In addition to high levels of need and funding shortfalls, security and access were major decision drivers.

52. Despite limited access to sites outside the main cities and a shortage of reliable data, improved and more systematic data gathering and analysis and monitoring are essential to strengthening the quality of WFP's strategy and operations, especially in newer areas of work such as cash-based-transfers, capacity strengthening and nutrition.
53. A lack of analysis of gender dynamics resulted in missed opportunities to address the high levels of gender-based violence.
54. Despite the challenges, WFP's overall output was high, especially in general food distribution, which reached over one third of the population at the peak of the emergency in 2014. The scale of activities was highly dependent on security levels, local capacities – health systems, education, governance bodies, the police, and others – and funding.
55. Outcomes were difficult to measure, however, because of data limitations. Vouchers, which were gradually introduced from 2015, appeared to offer an effective alternative when market and security conditions allowed. Emergency school meals were perceived as contributing to a sense of normalcy and social cohesion, but coverage was limited and the quality of education hindered by many factors. Other activities – nutrition, FFA and P4P – were valued by stakeholders but were implemented on too small a scale to have meaningful effects.
56. Logistics costs and security issues are main determinants of efficiency in the Central African Republic. WFP's logistics services were highly commended, but efficiency gains could be made by reducing delays along the main transport corridor into the country and improving the management of WFP's truck fleet. Efficiency and effectiveness could also be improved by addressing the high turnover in and low capacities of staff, especially in sub-offices.

Recommendations

No.	Rationale	Recommendation	Responsibility and timing
Strategic thrust 1: Supporting the conditions for peace			
1	<p>WFP's timely delivery of humanitarian assistance is significantly affected by the lack of peace, with security issues in the country affecting the transport and delivery of assistance. Security is also one of the main factors limiting opportunities for agriculture and contributing to the high proportion of people in need throughout the country.</p> <p>The UNDAF+ explicitly recognizes the importance of the triple nexus of humanitarian, development and peacebuilding work, but the indirect role of WFP in supporting the re-establishment of peace through its assistance activities has not yet been formally explored.</p>	<p>WFP should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) support, particularly through FFA activities and/or the vouchers modality, the work of partners directly involved in the re-establishment of peace – UNICEF, United Nations Development Programme, the civil affairs department of MINUSCA, etc.); b) contribute to the mapping of national institutional capacities in order to improve the focus and effectiveness of its own capacity strengthening activities, leveraging the experience and knowledge available from headquarters and the regional bureau; c) ensure the systematic involvement of line ministries and national actors in the design and monitoring of its projects; d) enhance synergies with relevant civil society and other actors, including in education; e) ensure that its partners are fully aware and regularly reminded of the importance of adhering to the humanitarian principles that underpin all humanitarian assistance; and f) whenever possible, work with FAO and the International Fund for Agricultural Development on institutionalizing partnerships for both programming and fundraising, particularly in the areas of agricultural resilience and gender equality. 	<p>Country office, supported by regional bureau and headquarters.</p> <p>Timing: 2018–2020</p>

No.	Rationale	Recommendation	Responsibility and timing
Strategic thrust 2: Responding to the zero hunger challenge			
Funding			
2	The country office has experienced recurring funding shortfalls, particularly for recovery-related activities, which are included under strategic outcome 3 of the ICSP and are part of the Government's strategy for assisting the sustainable reintegration of internally displaced persons and refugees.	WFP should examine the donor landscape with a view to assessing the range of donors and donors' appetite for funding WFP's recovery activities in the Central African Republic. WFP should also review its articulation of linkages between the triple nexus and its FFA and P4P activities in order to ensure that existing and potential donors are able to make informed decisions on funding allocations.	Country office, supported by regional bureau and headquarters. Timing: 2018-2020
Food security information and monitoring			
3	There is a lack of systematic evidence on which to base food security programming.	WFP should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) optimize its strategic role in food security by enhancing the use of existing tools and taking the lead in assisting the Government in developing a national food security information strategy and ensuring government ownership of a "sentinel surveillance" network of sites to be used to gather relevant information; b) continue to strengthen monitoring systems, centrally in the country office and in sub-offices; c) prepare a formal strategic monitoring plan with clear coverage targets, systematically taking into account the various levels of security and access limitations that exist in the country by planning various frequencies and modalities of monitoring, such as the use of third-party monitoring and remote monitoring via telephones and tablets; and d) use the strategic monitoring plan to track and monitor accountability to affected populations effectively. 	Country office, supported by regional bureau. Timing: 2018-2020

No.	Rationale	Recommendation	Responsibility and timing
Gender			
4	There is a lack of analysis of the role and impact of gender dynamics in the design and implementation of WFP's assistance activities. Such analysis is particularly important in a country with high levels of gender-based violence.	WFP should develop an evidence-based operational strategy for integrating gender into programming. In particular it should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) ensure that programming is based on specific gender analysis; b) improve and monitor the protection of women, girls and other vulnerable groups; c) prioritize women's access to productive assets and financial services and their control over property; and d) strengthen partnerships with the Government, international agencies and entities led by women. 	Country office. Timing: 2018–2020
Nutrition			
5	Except in 2013, the actual number of nutrition beneficiaries was relatively close to the number originally planned. The overall number of beneficiaries is declining, however, despite very high levels of need throughout the country.	WFP should strengthen nutrition approaches. In particular, it should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) enhance coherence between WFP and UNICEF moderate acute malnutrition and severe acute malnutrition targeting, respectively, to ensure maximum synergies between the two programmes; b) identify an appropriate strategy for working with the Ministry of Health and Population; and c) consider a developmental approach to addressing chronic malnutrition, when feasible. 	Country office, supported by regional bureau and headquarters. Timing: 2018–2020
Vouchers			
6	Vouchers were introduced in 2015 and were identified as a viable and valuable alternative to in-kind modalities in some contexts. Despite ambitious planning regarding the number of cash-based transfer beneficiaries, however, implementation was slow and context and market analyses were not always carried out either at the start or during the implementation of activities.	WFP should expand its programming capacity and scale up the voucher modality by carrying out: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) more systematic market studies; b) more comparative analyses of the various modalities used in interventions; and c) better analysis of the factors affecting people's choices and preferences. 	Country office, supported by regional bureau. Timing: 2018–2020

No.	Rationale	Recommendation	Responsibility and timing
Strategic thrust 3: Efficient and effective delivery			
Human resources			
7	The country office experienced high staff turnover, especially during the emergency period, and had difficulties in staffing its sub-offices to a level that would enable it to deliver efficiently and effectively.	WFP should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) commission and publish a staffing review based on the staff needed to deliver results under the new ICSP; and b) widen efforts to improve living conditions, security and incentives at sub-offices in order to help attract good-quality staff to the field offices closer to beneficiaries. 	Country office, supported by regional bureau. Timing: 2018–2019
Logistics			
8	Transport into and within the Central African Republic was found to be difficult, slow and expensive, despite WFP having its own fleet of trucks.	WFP should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) work to improve management of the Douala–Bangui corridor, which is under the responsibility of the Cameroon country office, with the regional bureau playing a technical advisory role; b) advocate with national authorities, through senior management, for problem-free transit; c) allocate adequate funding to truck maintenance facilities; and d) optimize the use of its fleet of trucks. 	Regional bureau for management of the Douala–Bangui corridor; country office, supported by regional bureau, for the other points. Timing: 2018–2019

Acronyms used in the document

C&V	cash and vouchers
EMOP	emergency operation
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FFA	food assistance for assets
GFD	general food distribution
ICSP	interim country strategic plan
MINUSCA	Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
P4P	Purchase for Progress
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UNDAF+	United Nations development assistance framework plus for 2018–2021
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHAS	United Nations Humanitarian Air Service
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
WHO	World Health Organization