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Summary report on the evaluation of the Mali country portfolio (2013–2017)

Executive summary

The country portfolio evaluation covered all WFP operations in Mali from 2013 through December 2017. 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.

Country context. Mali is a landlocked country with a population of approximately 18.9 million people. Despite experiencing strong economic growth, it ranks 175th of 188 countries in the 2016 Human Development Index of the United Nations Development Programme. A WFP Level 2 emergency was declared in January 2012, initially because of a drought and later because of political unrest, which affected mainly the north and centre of the country. In June 2018, a Level 3 corporate emergency covering the entire Sahel was declared because of a new drought and the ongoing security problems.

WFP operations. Until the emergency was declared in 2012, the value of WFP's portfolio was less than USD 20 million per year: it is now about USD 60 million, having peaked at almost USD 140 million in 2014. During the evaluation period, WFP assisted an average of approximately 1.3 million beneficiaries per year through in-kind food and cash-based assistance, school feeding, nutrition activities, food assistance for assets and Purchase for Progress. WFP's country portfolio suffered from chronic underfunding. In 2017, the country office had approximately 180 staff members, slightly more than half of whom were based in Bamako, with the remainder in five sub-offices.

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.

Focal points:

Ms A. Cook
Director of Evaluation
tel.: 066513-2030

Ms E. Figus
Evaluation Officer
tel.: 066513-2065

Strategic positioning. Despite the lack of a formal strategy during the evaluation period and some initial difficulties in the scale-up, WFP provided a coherent response to country needs, initially through an emergency operation and since 2015 through a protracted relief and recovery operation that integrated the ongoing emergency response. Stakeholders perceived WFP's comparative advantages as its capacity to manage supply chains and distribute cash-based transfers at scale. WFP's operations were well aligned with national policies and priorities, the United Nations development assistance framework and the framework of the Global Alliance for Resilience Initiative; collaboration with the other United Nations agencies was strong.

Decision drivers. The main driver of decision-making by WFP was the assessment of humanitarian needs. The level of funding and the priorities of donors also played important roles, directly affecting the level of assistance by region and the activities and modalities selected.

Portfolio results. Despite chronic underfunding, WFP was able to assist more than 80 percent of planned beneficiaries. The evaluation team also found three areas for improvement in the design of the WFP response: geographic coverage; the extent to which causes and not symptoms of needs were addressed; and the choice of activities and modalities. From 2014, reductions in funding led to decreases in school feeding and nutrition activities, creating a risk of reversing the positive results achieved. While some of these activities are being taken over by the Government or other organizations, there is currently no clear strategy for dealing with the implications of reduced funding, which is likely to continue.

No weaknesses were identified in supply chains except for pipeline breaks caused by funding shortages. Because of increased local purchases and a move towards cash-based transfers, the overall efficiency of WFP's operations appears to have increased. The approach to incorporating gender issues into project design and following up on humanitarian principles and protection could be improved.

Recommendations. The evaluation team recommended that WFP strengthen its understanding of the root causes of needs; reconsider the geographic distribution of its assistance; prepare a realistic strategy for the hand-over of its school feeding and nutrition activities; improve contextual analysis tools in order to facilitate the pre-identification and management of the implications of changes in activities or modalities; strengthen the implementation and monitoring of food assistance for assets activities; develop an evidence-based strategy for integrating gender considerations into programming; strengthen the feedback mechanism for humanitarian principles and protection; and leverage new technologies with a view to increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of needs assessment and cash-based transfers.

Draft decision*

The Board takes note of the summary evaluation report of the Mali country portfolio (2013–2017) set out in document WFP/EB.2/2018/7-C and the management response WFP/EB.2/2018/7-C/Add.1 and encourages further action on the recommendations, taking into account the considerations raised by the Board during its discussion.

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

Introduction

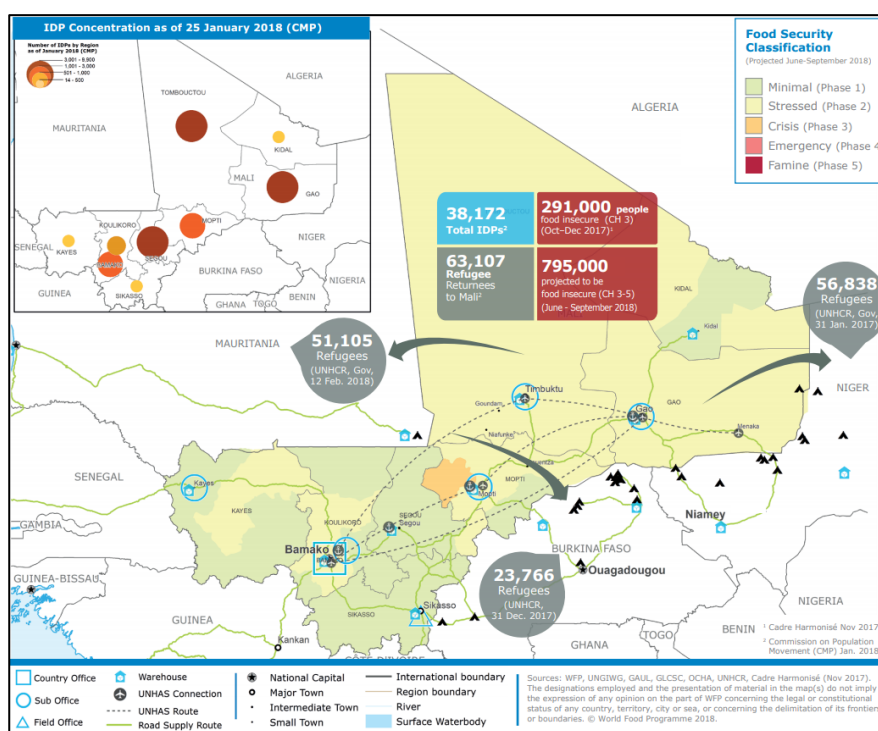
Evaluation features

1. The country portfolio evaluation covered all of WFP's operations in Mali between 2013 and 2017.¹ It assessed WFP's strategic positioning, the quality of and factors influencing decision-making, and the performance and results of all WFP activities. The evidence gathered will inform the preparation of the country strategic plan.
2. The evaluation was conducted by WFP's Office of Evaluation and an external evaluation team. During fieldwork in Mali in November 2017 interviews were held with 115 stakeholders including representatives of WFP, the Government, donors, beneficiaries and implementation partners. The main limitations to the evaluation mission were insecurity in the field, which limited the distances travelled outside the main towns;² the changes in WFP's data reporting formats over the years; and, to a lesser extent, a lack of institutional memory of 2013 and 2014.

Context

3. Mali is a landlocked country with an estimated population of 18.9 million people, of whom almost 48 percent are less than 15 years of age, 60 percent live in rural areas and 52 percent work in agriculture. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimates that the adult literacy rate was 33.4 percent in 2015. The main agricultural regions are in the south, where more than 90 percent of the population lives. According to recent climate vulnerability assessments, Mali is highly affected by climate change, with the northern regions of Timbuktu, Gao and Kidal being the most vulnerable.

The humanitarian situation in Mali, 2018



Source: WFP. 2018. Emergency Dashboard – Mali, February 2018.

<https://www.wfp.org/dashboards/mali>.

CH = Cadre Harmonisé.

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

² The evaluation team visited Mopti, Kayes, Koulikoro, Gao, Timbuktu, Ségou and Sikasso.

4. Annual economic growth for the past five years has been relatively high at more than 5 percent per year. Because of an even higher increase in population and continuing security issues, however, in 2015 (the latest year for which data are available), Mali still ranked 175th of 188 countries in the Human Development Index and 155th of 156 in the Gender Inequality Index.

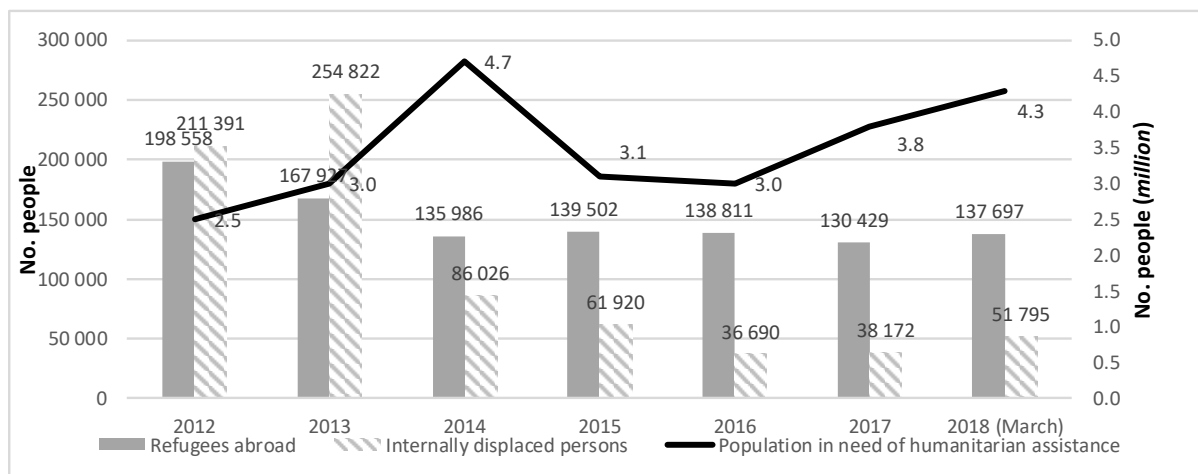
Indicator (source)	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Population (INSTAT and UNDESA)	16 807 000	17 309 000	17 819 000	18 343 000	19 054 000
Gross national income per capita (World Bank Atlas method) (USD)	760	790	760	750	n.a.
Life expectancy at birth (World Bank)	56.5 years	57 years	57.5 years	58 years	n.a.
Human Development Index score (UNDP)	0.430	0.438	0.442	n.a.	n.a.
Gender Inequality Index score (UNDP)	n.a.	0.686	0.689	n.a.	n.a.
Food-insecure households (moderately and severely food-insecure) (ENSAN Sept. 2014–Sept. 2017)	n.a.	24.0%	24.0%	25.0%	25.6%
Global acute malnutrition (SMART surveys, not all of which covered all regions)	8.6%	13.3%	12.4%	10.7%	10.7%
Under-5 mortality rate/1,000 live births (UN IGME)	122.1	118.3	114.2	110.6	n.a.

ENSAN = national food security and nutrition survey; INSTAT = National Institute of Statistics; SMART = standardized monitoring and assessment of relief and transitions; UNDESA= United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs; UNDP = United Nations Development Programme; UN IGME = United Nations Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation

5. During the evaluation period, the country faced political unrest resulting from two major events in 2012: the ousting of the president, followed by elections; and the loss of control of the northern cities of Timbuktu, Kidal and Gao, which were occupied by allies of Al-Qaeda, but were recaptured in 2013. In 2015 a peace agreement was signed between the Government and various non-state armed groups and some major socio-economic indicators started to improve. From 2016, however, the positive trends started to reverse, as shown in table 1 and figure 1. After falling to 3.1 million in 2015, the number of people in

need of humanitarian assistance reached 4.3 million³ – very close to the 4.7 million people in need at the peak of the emergency in 2014. The situation remains tense: insecurity is still affecting the north and increasingly the Mopti area and the Koulikoro and Kayes regions in the centre, along the border with Mauritania. As these are regions with relatively high population densities, the insecurity is leading to a rapid increase in the number of people needing assistance. Lack of sufficient rains in 2018 is also partly to blame. One in four people is food-insecure.

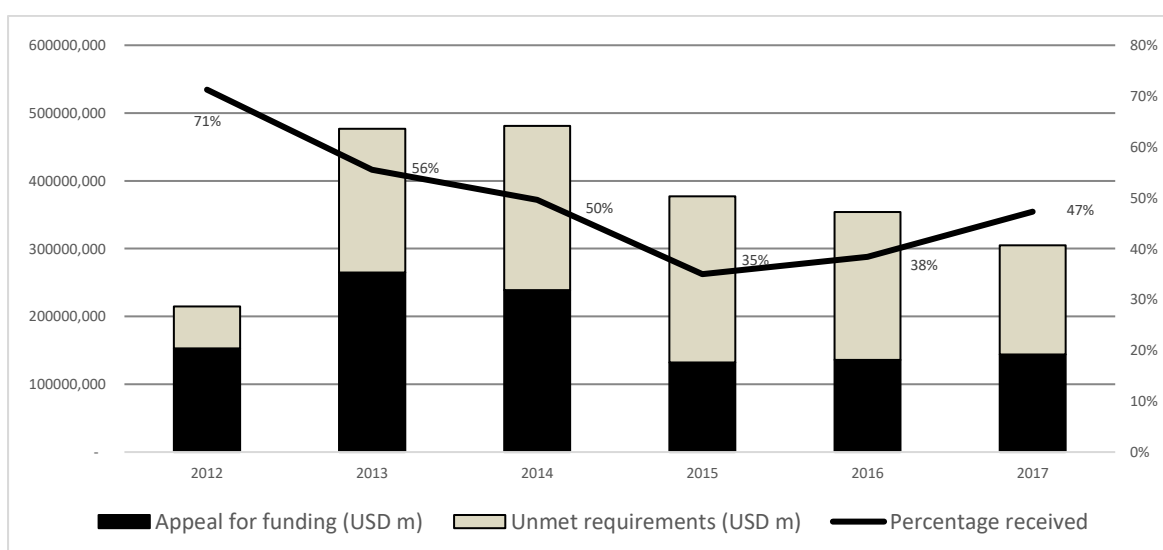
Figure 1: Humanitarian needs in Mali, 2012–2018



Source: OCHA.

- Changes also occurred at the regional level: while the north still accounted for more than half of the people in Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) phases 3–5 and only one fifth of the population, in 2018, far greater increases in the numbers of people in high IPC phases were expected in the south and centre than in the north (see table 2).
- Despite the high levels of humanitarian need, figure 2 shows that OCHA humanitarian appeals were chronically underfunded: receiving an average of only 46 percent of needs over the evaluation period, with a low of 35 percent in 2015.

Figure 2: Funding received compared with OCHA appeals, 2012–2017



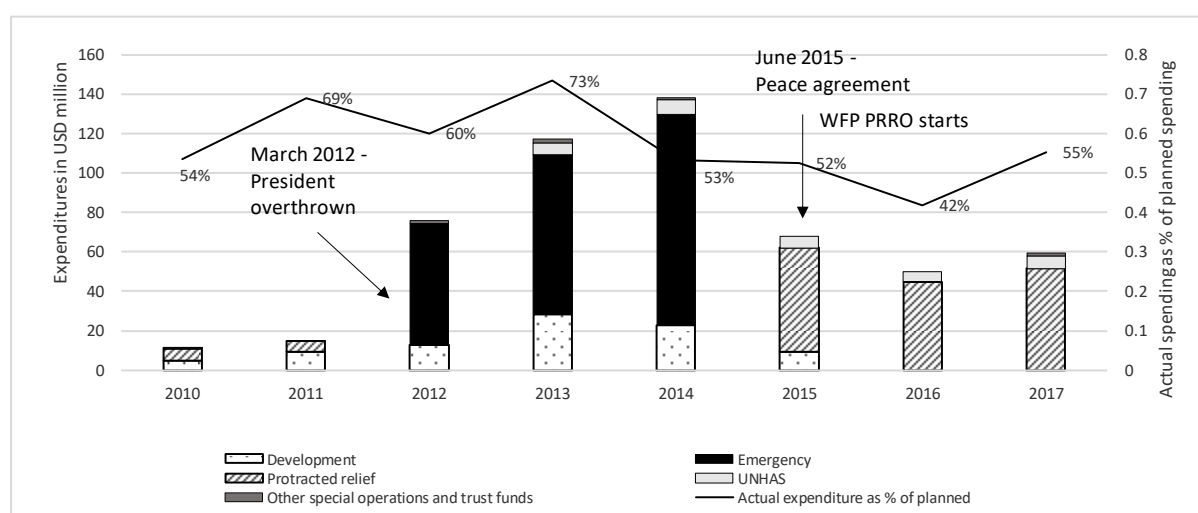
Source: OCHA June 2018. <https://fts.unocha.org/appeals/638/summary>.

³ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). 2018. *Global Humanitarian Overview*. <https://interactive.unocha.org/publication/globalhumanitarianoverview/>.

WFP portfolio

8. Mali has been affected by a WFP Level 2 regional emergency since January 2012, caused by drought and, after March 2012, by the emergency resulting from political unrest. In June 2018, following a new drought and facing ongoing security problems, WFP declared a Level 3 corporate emergency in the entire Sahel, including Mali.
9. Before 2012, the WFP portfolio consisted mainly of development and protracted relief-related activities with some special operations (see figure 3). Annual expenditure was less than USD 20 million. With the start of the 2012 emergency, WFP activities increased dramatically, reaching a peak in 2014 when expenditure was almost seven times as much as in the previous year. Expenditure sharply decreased after 2015 and from 2015 to 2017, average expenditure was close to USD 60 million per year – lower than it had been, but still three times as much as in 2011.

Figure 3: Mali country office expenditure levels by programme category, 2010–2017



Source: WFP management system. Values do not include indirect support costs and some accounting adjustments.

10. In spite of the Level 2 emergency, WFP received only 51 percent of its total funding request for 2014–2017: USD 425 million of USD 829 million.
11. In 2017, the country office had approximately 180 staff members, of whom more than half were based in Bamako with the rest in five sub-offices in the north, centre, south and west of the country.

Components of the portfolio and operations

12. From January 2013 to December 2017, the country portfolio comprised seven operations.⁴ WFP responded to the emergency in the north and centre of Mali through emergency operation 200525 (2013–2014). It also extended the country programme that had started in 2008 until the end of 2014 in order to continue its activities in the south and west of the country. From 2015 all the activities in the country were combined in a protracted relief and recovery operation (PRRO), with a strong shift in focus towards the conflict zones of the north and centre.

⁴ One country programme – development project 105830 in 2008–2014; emergency operation 200525 in 2013–2014; PRRO 200719 in 2015–2017; and four special operations – three providing humanitarian air services (special operations 200521, 200802 and 201047) in 2013–March 2018, and one providing logistics and telecommunications support (special operation 200534) in 2013–2014. In addition to these seven operations, a special operation for funding the food security cluster in 2014 was approved but did not receive funding, and all the food stocks for a planned regional emergency operation were transferred to the national emergency operation in the first quarter of 2013.

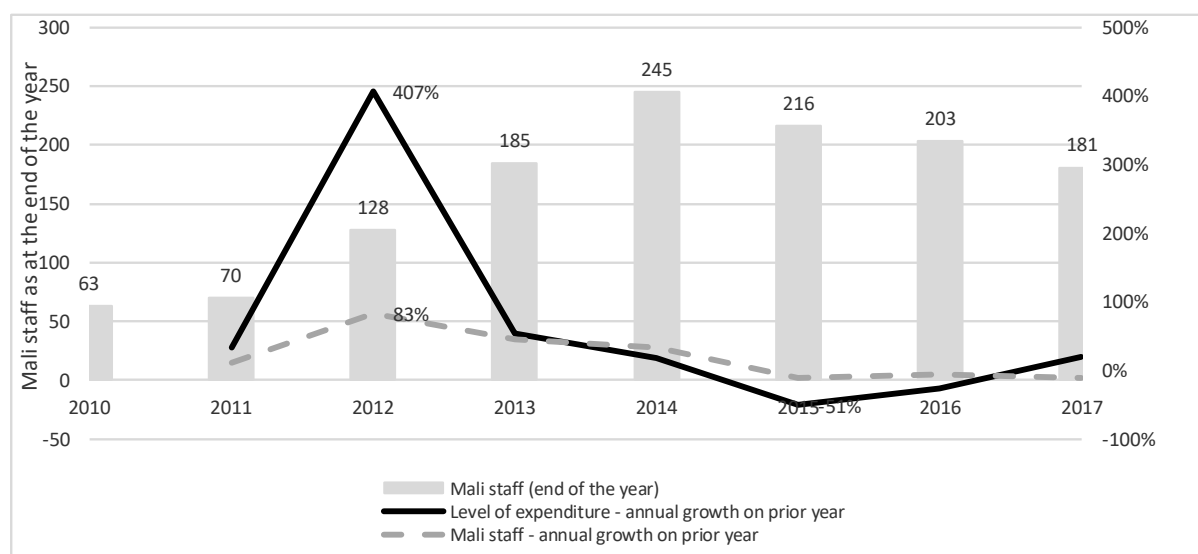
13. WFP provided assistance, including to internally displaced persons and returnees, through a wide range of activities such as support to small farmers through the Purchase for Progress pilot (see the section on Evaluation findings for more details).
14. WFP worked with a wide range of partners including the Government at the central and decentralized levels, United Nations agencies and national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs).
15. Three donors accounted for more than half of the funding: the United States of America for 31 percent, the European Union for 14 percent and Canada for 11 percent. Germany and the Republic of Korea increased their combined share from 6 percent in 2015 to 16 percent in 2017.

Evaluation findings

WFP's strategic alignment and positioning

16. The country office prepared a formal country strategy in 2012 covering the period from 2013 to 2017. The document became obsolete before coming into effect, however, as the country office had not anticipated the political crisis that unfolded in 2012. This also partly explains why the country office was not well prepared to respond to the emergency. As figure 4 shows, there was a delay between the increase in volumes of activities and the increase in staffing levels: it took approximately 12 months for all the required staff and processes to be fully in place. Nonetheless, the office responded to the emergency and since 2015 has adapted its activities in order to provide support beyond emergency response through a PRRO.

Figure 4: Country office staffing and expenditure trends, 2010–2017



Source: WFP data.

17. Overall, WFP activities and approaches were well aligned with national policies and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2 for zero hunger and 17 on partnerships. Memoranda of understanding were signed with most of the relevant government ministries, and government officials in a wide range of areas expressed their appreciation of collaboration with WFP, which contributed to the implementation of national policies. The

transitional interim country strategic plan for 2018⁵ was also found to be in line with SDGs 2 and 17 and to reflect the country's current needs.

18. WFP was also very much appreciated by stakeholders involved in the response to the humanitarian crisis, especially for its role in the logistics and emergency telecommunications clusters,⁶ its joint coordination of the food security cluster and its participation in the nutrition and protection clusters.
19. WFP contributed to the formulation of the United Nations development assistance framework (UNDAF) for 2015–2019, including the UNDAF's section on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, and provided important inputs to formulation of the national priorities of the Global Alliance for Resilience. WFP created close partnerships with other United Nations agencies, donors and national authorities. It worked with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) on a resilience project funded by the Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development of the European Commission and worked closely with UNICEF on nutrition.
20. WFP's core comparative advantages were perceived as its organizational capacity to deliver at scale in the procurement and distribution of food and in cash-based transfers, and to remain neutral despite difficult conditions.

Factors influencing WFP's decision-making

21. The core documents that influenced WFP's decision-making processes were the needs assessment prepared through the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel and referred to as the "*Cadre Harmonisé*". The Government of Mali has been carrying out these assessments twice a year since 2014 with support from WFP. The aim is to assess the food and nutrition security situation in the country and the results are used by the Government in preparing the national response plan. The second factor that influenced targeting and decision-making was WFP's dialogue with the Government at the centralized and decentralized levels, especially through the food security cluster.
22. The third factor influencing decision-making were donors through the overall funding levels achieved and through their preferences, in terms of both regions to be assisted (see table 2) and activities to be implemented. Reduced funding since 2014 led to decreases in school feeding and treatment of malnutrition activities despite persistent needs, but also, and more positively, changes in donor preferences, led to the recent decision to increase food assistance for assets activities.

⁵ The objectives of the plan are to meet the basic food and nutrition requirements of crisis-affected people, including in post-crisis situations; to contribute to the reduction of malnutrition in line with national targets; and to enhance resilience in line with the national priorities of the Global Alliance for Resilience Initiative.

⁶ Both clusters were active only from April 2012 to October 2014.

TABLE 2: WFP BENEFICIARIES AND NUMBERS OF PEOPLE IN IPC PHASES 3-5 BY REGION, 2014-2018						
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2014-2017
IPC phases 3-5 caseload by region*						
North	995 697	295 990	226 136	333 069	371 206	1 850 892
Centre	497 758	61 044	144 009	131 656	321 067	834 467
South	426 605	52 819	53 102	69 653	102 469	602 179
Total	1 920 060	409 853	423 247	534 378	794 743	3 287 538
IPC phases 3-5 caseload by region*						
North	52%	72%	53%	62%	47%	56%
Centre	26%	15%	34%	25%	40%	25%
South	22%	13%	13%	13%	13%	18%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
WFP beneficiaries						
North	70%	67%	75%	79%	n/a	72%
Centre	16%	17%	12%	9%	n/a	14%
South	14%	16%	12%	12%	n/a	14%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	n/a	100%

Sources: WFP data by region and calculations based on the national response plan for 2014-2017 and ENSAN of November 2017.

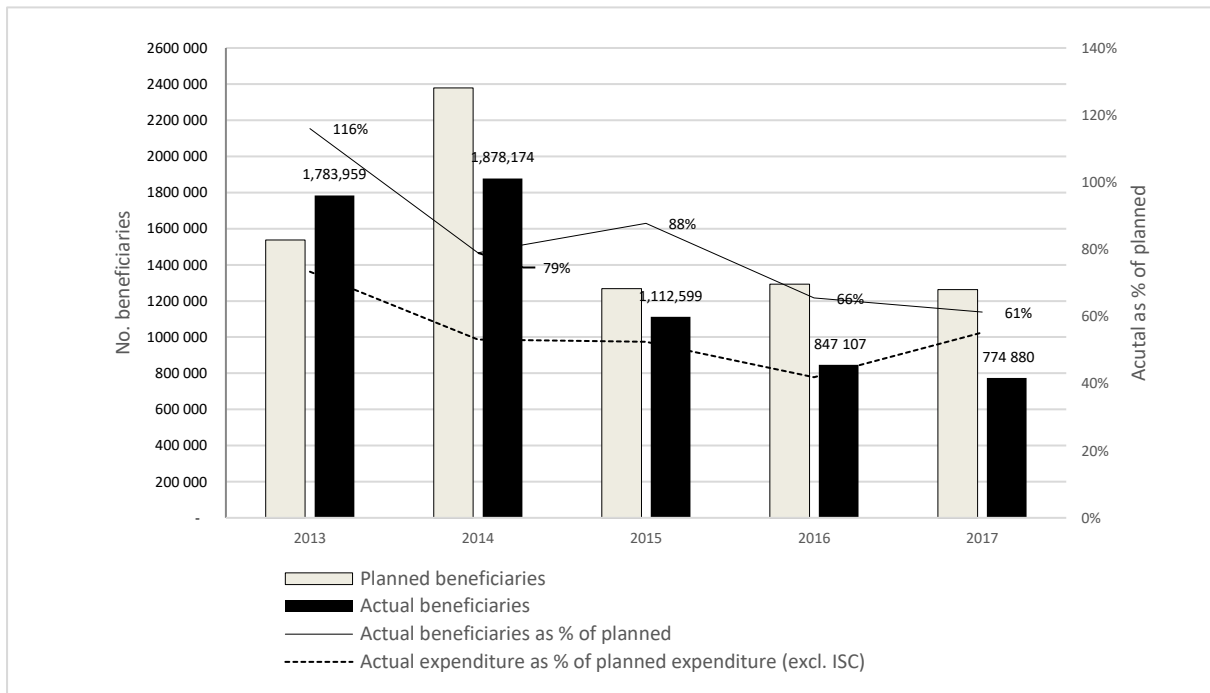
* "North" covers Mopti, Gao, Kidale and Tombouctou regions; "Centre" covers Bamako, Koulikoro and Ségou regions; and "South" covers Kayes and Sikasso regions. Data for 2015 do not cover the region of Bamako.

23. The last factor influencing decision-making was security, which determined the areas that could be reached and how often. As WFP staff had only limited access to conflict areas, monitoring of activities was carried out through third parties.⁷ On the positive side, however, insecurity also pushed WFP to experiment more with mobile cash-based transfers, which it distributed to pastoral people, for example.

Portfolio performance and results

24. Between 2013 and 2017, WFP assisted approximately 6.4 million beneficiaries, equivalent to an average of 1.3 million per year with a peak of 1.9 million in 2014 at the height of the emergency. The number of beneficiaries subsequently decreased and stood at 775,000 in 2017. A total of 283,326 mt of in-kind food was distributed for all activities during the evaluation period, representing 64 percent of planned quantities.
25. Despite average funding levels of 51 percent, the proportion of actual to planned beneficiaries was relatively high, averaging 83 percent, although the difference between planned and actual numbers is increasing (see figure 5). The evaluation team understands that the high proportion of beneficiaries reached was a result of a combination of cost efficiencies arising from the increases in in-country procurement and in cash-based transfers, which have lower implementation costs than in-kind distributions, and reductions in the duration and level of assistance per beneficiary.

⁷ Evidence gathered from partners and the country office suggests that the current arrangement is quite effective.

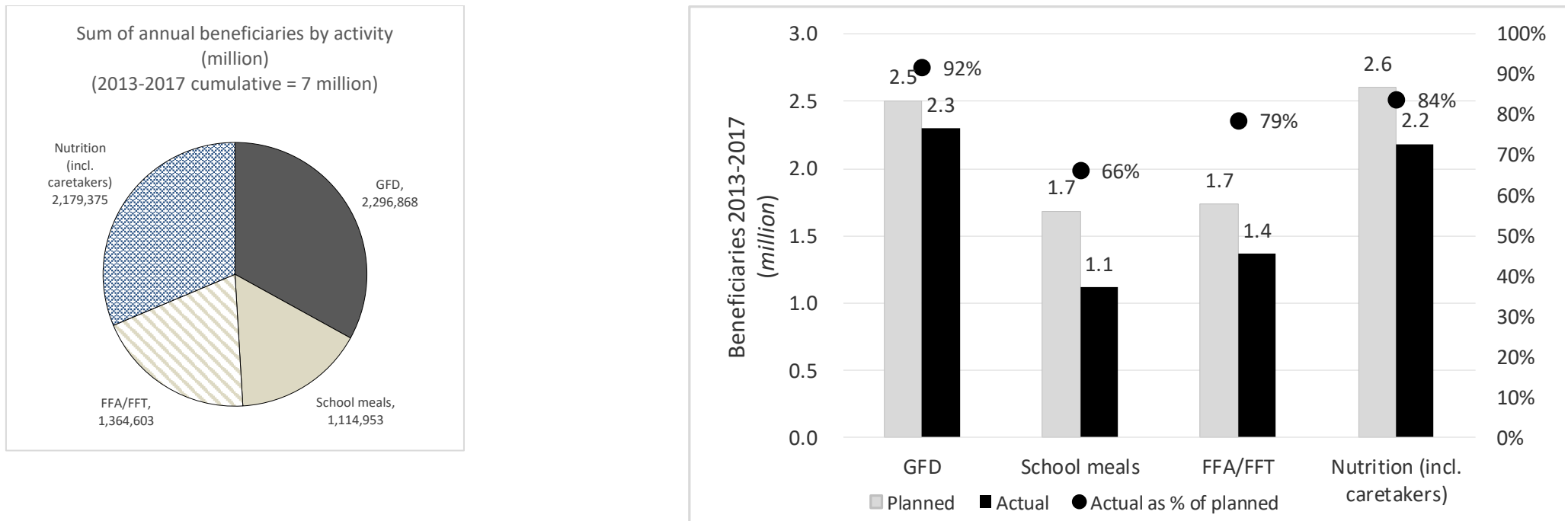
Figure 5: Planned versus actual numbers of beneficiaries, 2013–2017

Sources: Standard project reports for 2013–2017.

Numbers exclude double counting of beneficiaries receiving assistance through more than one modality.

26. The following paragraphs describe each of the portfolio activities separately. The relative size of each activity is shown in figure 6.

Figure 6: Total beneficiaries by activity, 2013–2017 (million)



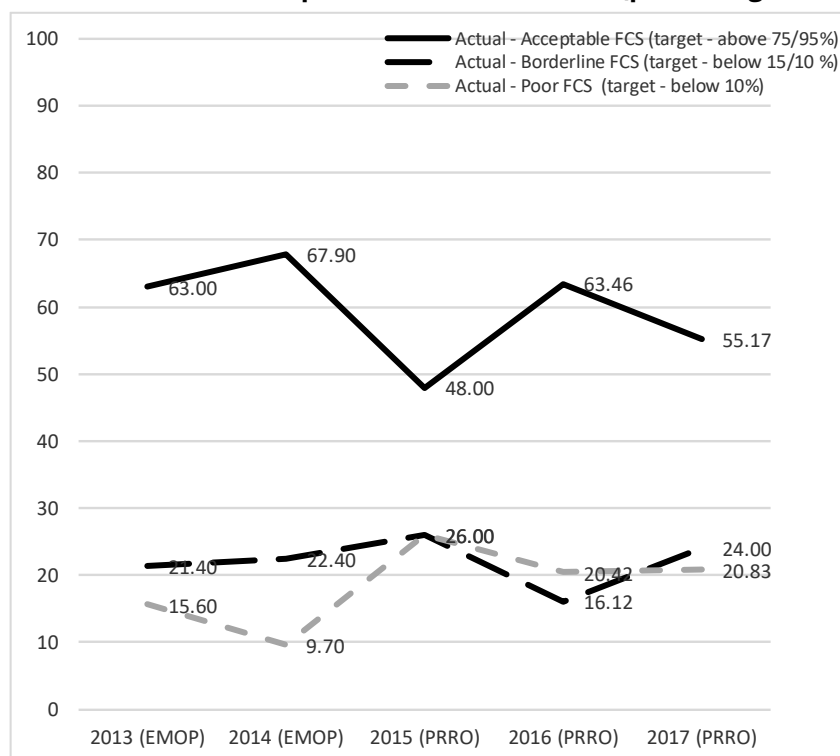
Source: Standard project reports for 2013–2017.

Numbers include double counting of beneficiaries receiving assistance through more than one modality.

GFD = general food distribution; FFA = food assistance for assets; FFT = food assistance for training.

27. *General food distributions.* WFP targeted food-insecure households in conflict areas in the north and centre for all of its general food assistance, which reached 2.3 million beneficiaries. As shown in figure 7, however, the original targets for food consumption outcomes in the project document were never achieved.⁸

Figure 7: Household food consumption scores, 2013–2017 (percentages of households)



Source: Standard project reports for 2013–2017.

EMOP = emergency operation; FCS = food consumption score

28. The evaluation found that the WFP response did not take sufficient account of the root causes of needs, which in some cases were not only related to the current security situation but were also more chronic in nature. This was not helped by the fact that neither the ENSAN nor standardized monitoring and assessment of relief and transitions (SMART) distinguish between households suffering from chronic food insecurity and those suffering from acute food insecurity. The evaluation also found what appears to be an imbalance of assistance in favour of the north⁹ and increasing shortages of assistance in the south, where needs are increasing fastest (as shown in table 2).
29. *School feeding.* WFP's school feeding programme reached 1.1 million primary schoolchildren, mainly in the north and centre, and had positive effects on net enrolment, which increased by 7 percent per year under the PRRO, and on continued school attendance, with more than 90 percent of enrolled children under the PRRO continuing to attend school. In Mopti, attendance increased from 50 to 80 percent. Because of funding constraints, however, the number of schools assisted halved from 1,238 in 2013 to 595 in 2017, and the number of schoolchildren assisted through WFP's school feeding decreased by more than two-thirds, from 368,000 to 109,000 over the same period. Decreases are occurring in regions where

⁸ It could be argued that significantly influencing the food consumption score for the entire country was a very ambitious target.

⁹ The evaluation found that in the north, according to annual reports on implementation of the national response plan, the International Committee of the Red Cross provided assistance to 118,080 beneficiaries in 2015 and 97,688 in 2016. This implies that overall about 135 percent of the food-insecure people in the four targeted regions of Mopti, Timbuktu, Gao and Kidal received assistance through either WFP or the International Committee of the Red Cross.

there appears to be potential for the hand-over of school feeding to the Government. In October 2017, WFP piloted the distribution of fortified rice in the schools that it assisted.¹⁰

30. *Nutrition.* WFP assisted 2.2 million beneficiaries through nutrition interventions, which accounted for almost a third of all interventions and for almost the same share of beneficiaries as general food distributions.
31. *Prevention of moderate acute malnutrition.* WFP assisted health centres through the supply of supplementary food: Supercereal plus for children aged 6–23 months and Supercereal and oil for pregnant and lactating women and girls. From 2013 to 2016, WFP also implemented a community nutrition project in its operational areas in Kayes, which showed positive results in a wide range of nutrition and health indicators.¹¹ In conflict areas in the north, prevention of malnutrition was relatively successful and highly appreciated by beneficiaries, and – overall – had relatively stable numbers of beneficiaries. Nonetheless, overall, acute malnutrition rates in the north remain high, partly because of high levels of ration sharing¹² and funding shortfalls.
32. The success rate of activities for the *treatment of moderate acute malnutrition* was above the norms, with recovery rates during the evaluation period of 87 to 96 percent, well above the target of 75 percent. However, the two thirds reduction in the number of health centres assisted by WFP, from 1,284 in 2015 to 489 in 2017 as a result of funding constraints, in a context of increased needs is likely to lead to increases in the number of people affected by and the levels of severe acute malnutrition in those districts. The Government and other partners deplore the reduction of health centres being supported.
33. *Purchase for Progress.* WFP successfully provided support to farmers through direct purchases of their produce and support for their marketing activities. In 2016 and 2017, WFP supported an average of 12,412 farmers per year, 89 percent of the planned number. Because of a decrease in in-kind distributions and an increase in cash-based transfers – in which WFP cannot influence the choice of food supplier – the purchase of food from farmer organizations was significantly reduced, however, with 3,913 mt of food purchased locally from pro-smallholder aggregation systems in 2017 compared with 5,947 mt in 2016 and 8,886 mt in 2015.
34. *Food assistance for assets.* WFP assisted an average of 480,000 beneficiaries through its FFA activities in 2013 and 2014, but reached only 20 percent of this number in 2015 and 2016. Since 2017, however, the number of beneficiaries has started to increase (with 170,000 reached in 2017) because of donors' increased interest in building resilience to shocks, the introduction of WFP's "three-pronged approach"¹³ and the decision to expand FFA activities in the north and centre. Focus group discussions with beneficiaries highlighted a preference for FFA over food distributions and a high level of appreciation of a mix of in-kind food assistance and cash transfers. No systematic monitoring or evaluation of the assets created and the long-term outcomes achieved after completion of the activities has yet been performed, however.¹⁴

¹⁰ The fortified rice pilot in West Africa is supported by the WFP Innovation Accelerator. See <http://innovation.wfp.org/project/rice-fortification>.

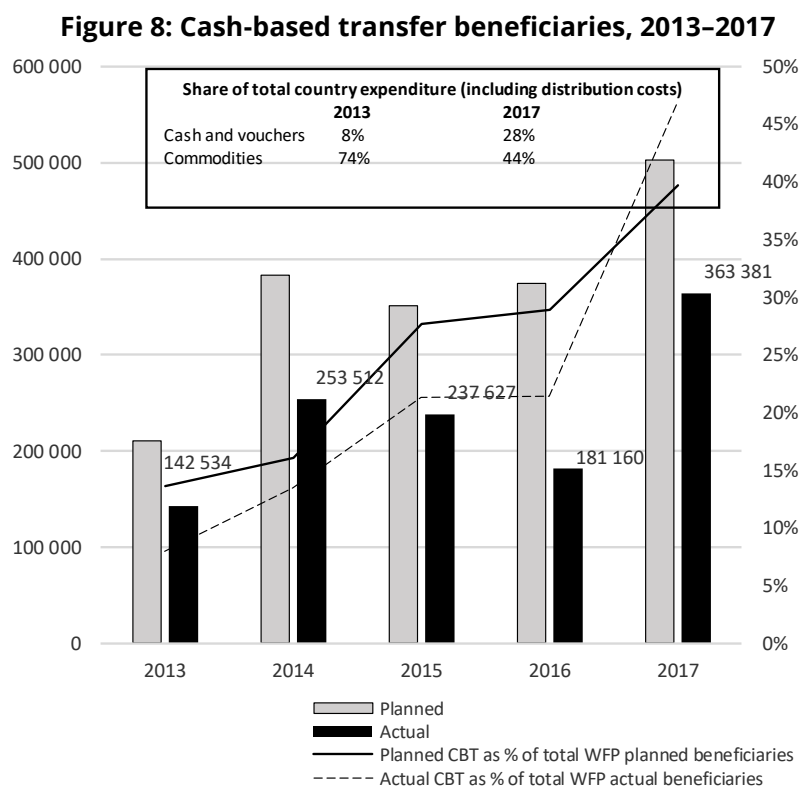
¹¹ For additional information, see <http://www.isrctn.com/ISRCTN08435964>.

¹² In 2015 and 2016, targeted children consumed between 54 and 70 percent of their rations, with the remainder being shared or traded (according to data from post-distribution monitoring reports for 2015 and 2016).

¹³ WFP's three-pronged approach comprises integrated context analysis at the national level, seasonal livelihood programming at the subnational level and participatory community planning at the community level.

¹⁴ A decentralized evaluation of the resilience activities undertaken by WFP and FAO and funded by the Directorate General for International Cooperation and Development of the European Commission in the north of Mali is planned for 2018.

35. *Cash-based transfers.* WFP followed a pragmatic approach in deciding which modality to adopt where, concentrating its use of cash-based transfers in northern regions and distributing in-kind food¹⁵ in the central regions closer to the main warehouse in Mopti. Cash-based transfers were also used in school feeding, in FFA and to a lesser extent in nutrition support for carers. As figure 8 shows, WFP made a substantial effort to increase the use of cash-based transfers, doubling the total number of beneficiaries and more than trebling the value of the transfers between 2013 and 2017. It started by distributing cash-based transfers in urban areas in 2013, before expanding their use to reach even the rural areas of the north.



Sources: Standard project reports for 2013–2017.

Figures include double counting of beneficiaries receiving assistance through more than one modality.

36. Over the evaluation period, WFP changed its choice of activity or modality in order to address the needs of certain beneficiaries, in some cases causing unintended consequences for the community.¹⁶ The limited availability of data prevented a more detailed analysis, but diverse specific examples that were found indicated that insufficient attention was paid to managing the risks associated with changes in modalities, such as effects on the incomes of small local producers or on market prices.¹⁷ The significance of these examples could not be assessed but they were sufficient to merit attention.
37. Promising synergies were achieved in 2017 by concentrating the provision of assistance on selected communities in “zero hunger villages”, and using the same implementing partners with the objective of increasing the overall impact of implementing several interventions – FFA, nutrition and school feeding activities – in the same communities. As this initiative is relatively recent, however, outcome data on its results were not yet available.

¹⁵ The food, which was procured by WFP or received as in-kind contributions (mainly from the United States), accounted for 9.2 percent of the funding for emergency operation 200525 and 7.2 percent of funding for PRRO 200719 at the end of 2017.

¹⁶ The evaluation team was unable to gather sufficient data to quantify the negative impacts.

¹⁷ Evidence from interviews with beneficiaries and farmer associations.

38. *Capacity development.* WFP supported the Government through the collection of data, work on core policies and technical guidance and the implementation of government policies, including those for social protection. In 2017, however, because of funding constraints, 90 percent of the planned activities did not take place and the national capacity indexes for both school feeding and the food security programme were below target.
39. *Gender.* Data in standard project reports indicate that there was a good gender balance among beneficiaries reached, with women representing 51 percent of the total. At a more strategic level, women were encouraged to take part in income-generating activities such as those for Purchase for Progress and food assistance for assets; they were appointed as members of management committees, which are traditionally dominated by men, and received 90 percent of cards for cash-based transfers. The enrolment and attendance rates of girls in primary schools supported by WFP also improved, and retention rates of girls in those schools were more than 90 percent for the duration of the PRRO. The evaluation team did not find a gender action plan for guiding the integration of gender considerations into programming, however, and the gender team was not found to be very active.
40. *Protection and accountability to affected populations.* In the 2017 standard project report, all the six indicators of protection and accountability to affected populations have values of more than 98 percent. There is no indicator of the prevalence of gender-based violence, however, and the evaluation team found that neither WFP nor its partners paid specific attention to this issue. It is expected that the overall quality of monitoring will improve once WFP has completed the roll-out of a call centre dedicated to dealing with beneficiaries' complaints. WFP currently relies mainly on information received from third-party monitors.
41. *Humanitarian principles and access.* In implementing its activities, WFP adhered to and actively promoted the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. Since 2013, however, WFP has had limited access to some areas in the north and centre of Mali and has had to rely on NGOs for both the implementation of its activities and the monitoring of results. It also made a deliberate attempt to reach diverse groups including pastoral nomads, agro-pastoral communities, internally displaced persons and returnees. However, strong donor preferences for assisting beneficiaries in the north and centre of the country limited the ability of WFP to address needs equitably.
42. *United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS).* In response to the suspension of commercial flights in March 2012, WFP provided UNHAS flights to major urban centres in the north and occasionally to secondary towns. The service is appreciated by its users and at least one major donor.
43. *Efficiency.* WFP purchased most of the food it used in Mali – 95 percent in 2017 – procuring only high-value products such as vegetable oil or supplementary food items from abroad. The country office also made good use of the Global Commodity Management Facility, for both global and local purchases: in 2017 the facility was used for more than 80 percent of the total metric tonnes purchased. The main international corridors for reaching landlocked Mali are through the ports of Lomé or Cotonou, with handling and storage in warehouses in Bamako or Mopti (the main port of entry for the northern regions of Gao and Timbuktu). Some convoys going to the north must be escorted by the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali. The evaluation team did not find any evidence of supply chain issues, except for some pipeline breaks due mainly to funding shortages.
44. WFP made a substantial effort to improve efficiency through increases in local procurement and its use of cash-based transfers: a study carried out by WFP in 2016, found that the use of cash-based transfers was an average of 29 percent cheaper than in-kind

food distributions.¹⁸ Data on costs by activity were insufficient to enable a more detailed analysis of efficiencies.

Conclusions

45. WFP's response to the complex emergency in the north and centre of Mali was adequate, despite initial difficulties with scale-up. Despite the lack of a valid formal strategy during the period under evaluation, WFP designed and delivered a coherent response to country needs.
46. WFP aligned its activities with national policies, strengthened its partnerships with relevant ministries and collaborated with other United Nations agencies through the UNDAF throughout the period.
47. The main driver of decision-making was the assessment of humanitarian needs, prepared jointly with the Government and the international community. The low level of funding compared with needs, coupled with the priorities of donors also played an important role, however, at times creating a risk of imbalance in the geographic distribution of assistance compared with needs and in the choice of modalities used.
48. With regards to effectiveness, despite chronic underfunding WFP was able to assist more than 80 percent of planned beneficiaries. The country office is testing a new approach, which is based on more focused multi-activity interventions in the "zero hunger villages" and appears promising. Nonetheless, none of WFP's operations managed to significantly improve the food consumption score, which was one of the outcome indicators of activities in Mali.
49. Given the high needs and persistently low funding levels, there is need for WFP and other actors, including the Government, to design a strategy for optimizing synergies and increasing efficiency, including through more efficient needs assessments and more coherent targeting.
50. In the design of operations, the three areas that require more in-depth analysis by WFP are understanding of the root causes of needs in conflict-affected areas, which are not always only related to the current security situation but are also often more chronic in nature; planning of the geographic distribution of assistance, taking into account evolving needs and the interventions of other actors; and analysing in advance the potential positive and negative, direct and indirect effects of changes in activities or modalities on beneficiaries and on the overall resilience of the communities where the changes take place.
51. A reduction in funding from 2014 led to decreases in school feeding and nutrition activities, creating a risk of reversing the positive results achieved so far. While some of these activities are being taken over by the Government or other organizations, there is need for a coherent strategy agreed with partners in order to ensure a transition that is as efficient and effective as possible.
52. Conscious efforts were made to maintain adherence to humanitarian principles, but the beneficiary feedback mechanism could be improved.
53. While beneficiary numbers by activity appear to be balanced between the genders and women have been included in income-generating activities, a more integrated evidence-based gender strategy is merited.
54. As a result of increased local purchases and a move towards the use of cash-based transfers, the overall efficiency of WFP's activities appears to have increased.

¹⁸ WFP Mali country office. 2016. *Etude de faisabilité pour l'introduction des Transferts Monétaires dans le Programme de Repas Scolaire*, September 2016. The study covered eight regions.

Recommendations

55. The evaluation resulted in eight recommendations, which WFP should start implementing in 2018. The observations in the evaluation report should also help the country team in the preparation of its country strategic plan, which is due to be presented for approval at the Board's 2019 second regular session, in November.
56. The recommendations fall into two categories: "strategic thrust 1" relates mainly to improvements in the design of activities with a view to ensuring that people's food needs and livelihoods are supported sustainably; "strategic thrust 2" relates to opportunities for improving efficiency. While the recommendations are addressed to the country office, as the following table shows, the Regional Bureau, the Policy and Programme Division and the Supply Chain Division are expected to support the country team in the design and implementation of activities for addressing some of the recommendations.

No.	Rationale	Recommendation	Responsibility and timing
Strategic thrust 1: supporting food needs and livelihoods sustainably			
Understanding the root causes of needs			
1	Operations in the centre and north are designed as emergency operations without acknowledgement of the fact that some needs are not directly related to the conflict but are chronic in nature.	<p>While maintaining a response mechanism, in order to be able to respond to acute humanitarian needs in cases of displacement caused by conflict or climate shocks, WFP should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) prepare a formal detailed analysis of the root causes of needs throughout the country, by region, type of need, type of beneficiary, etc.; b) discuss with partners, including FAO, UNICEF, other United Nations agencies and NGOs, and with the Government the strategic links among humanitarian assistance, development and peacebuilding and the WFP activities that can (indirectly) support the combined treatment of both the symptoms and causes of needs; c) consider synergetic activities for addressing the root causes of needs, such as multi-annual FFA, in order to reduce the need for assistance during the lean season (June to September); and d) ensure that the needs of pastoral and agro-pastoral people are appropriately considered. 	Country office with support from the regional bureau 2018–2019

No.	Rationale	Recommendation	Responsibility and timing
Re-prioritizing assistance by region			
2	Current WFP assistance is heavily focused in areas of the north and centre even though needs in some districts in the south are just as high and, in some cases, are increasing.	<p>WFP should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) review the current geographic targeting of general food assistance with a view to addressing needs in areas beyond the conflict zones of the north and centre; b) improve coordination with partners such as the International Committee of the Red Cross in order to align targeting criteria and avoid “over-assisting” some areas of the country while “under-assisting” others; c) discuss the geographic balance of needs with donors with a view to increasing funding for areas that are currently not directly involved in the conflict; and d) discuss with the Government the division of coverage (always under Government oversight) by region and by location – for example, between rural versus urban beneficiaries, who are easier to reach. 	Country office 2018–2019
Advanced planning for reductions in the funding for school feeding and nutrition activities			
3	Because of funding shortfalls and the prioritization of general food assistance, WFP has significantly reduced the number of schools and health facilities it assists, creating the risk of losing the benefits achieved so far.	<p>WFP should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) realistically estimate the funding that it can allocate to these activities in the future and identify any potential cost efficiencies in the delivery of assistance, such as changes in modality, new partnerships, etc.; and b) prepare a hand-over strategy with partners and the Government with a view to minimizing the negative impact of the reduced coverage of WFP activities on beneficiaries, and identify at an early stage of this process other organizations that have potential to take over from WFP in providing assistance and the relative sources of funding. Solutions may include moving some activities into the main social protection and health interventions funded by the Government. 	Country office 2018–2019

No.	Rationale	Recommendation	Responsibility and timing
Managing changes in activities or modalities			
4	Changes in activities and modalities are affecting local communities through changes in local procurement, prices, etc.	WFP should design a tool that facilitates the formal mapping of the direct and indirect implications of changes in activities or modalities of their implementation so as to support evidence-based decision-making. The tool should include both quantitative and qualitative analysis and incorporate feedback from beneficiaries and other major stakeholders. In areas where evidence is limited, WFP should consider carrying out impact assessments.	Country office with support from the regional bureau, the Policy and Programme Division and the Supply Chain Division 2019–2020
Strengthening food assistance for assets			
5	FFA has the potential to solve some of the root causes of chronic needs. Evidence of the impact of past interventions is currently limited, however.	WFP should scale-up and strengthen its design of and monitoring methodology for FFA activities, ensuring that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) all interventions are designed in ways that allow outcomes to be monitored; and b) thorough use is made of the lessons learned from the “zero hunger village” approach, which involves the integration of several assistance modalities, including FFA. 	Country office with support from the regional bureau and the Policy and Programme Division 2019–2020
Preparing a gender strategy			
6	While the numbers of men and women beneficiaries appear to be reasonably balanced, there is no evidence of a formal analysis of gender gaps and inequalities.	WFP should develop an evidence-based operational strategy for integrating consideration of gender issues into programming, ensure that programming is based on specific gender analysis and strengthen its country gender team.	Country office with support from the regional bureau, the Policy and Programme Division and the Gender Office 2018–2020

No.	Rationale	Recommendation	Responsibility and timing
Strengthening the feedback mechanism on protection and humanitarian access			
7	The evaluation team was unable to conclude on whether protection and humanitarian access issues are being followed up adequately by WFP.	WFP should: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) accelerate the roll-out of a comprehensive beneficiary feedback mechanism and ensure that beneficiaries, implementing partners and third-party monitors are properly informed of their rights, roles and responsibilities related to the new tool; and b) improve the monitoring of protection of women, girls and other vulnerable groups. 	Country office 2018-2019
Strategic thrust 2: Efficient and effective implementation			
Leveraging technology for reduced costs and increased impact			
8	Improved technology could reduce the costs and improve the effectiveness of food security assessments at the district level and of cash-based transfers.	<p>For <i>food security assessments</i>, WFP should carry out a study to identify more cost-effective methods of gathering and analysing information on food-insecure and vulnerable households and the root causes of needs, looking at recent developments in mobile vulnerability analysis and mapping, mobile phone-facilitated assessments, quantitative and qualitative information collected through third-party monitoring and potential synergies with other initiatives such as the Government's universal social registry.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) For <i>cash-based transfers</i>, WFP should carry out an assessment of the potential for using vouchers in remote areas and e-transfers in urban areas that are usually assisted with vouchers; and b) strengthen partnerships with mobile phone providers. 	Country office with support from the regional bureau, the Policy and Programme Division and the Supply Chain Division 2019-2020

Acronyms used in the document

CBT	cash-based transfer
EMOP	emergency operation
ENSAN	national food security and nutrition survey
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FCS	food consumption score
FFA	food assistance for assets
IDP	internally displaced person
IPC	Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
NGO	non-governmental organization
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PRRO	protracted relief and recovery operation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SMART	standardized monitoring and assessment of relief and transitions
UNDAF	United Nations development assistance framework
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHAS	United Nations Humanitarian Air Service
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund