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Summary report on the evaluation of the country strategic plan for Bangladesh (2017–2020)

Executive summary

An evaluation of the country strategic plan for Bangladesh was conducted between October 2019 and September 2020. To assess strategic and operational continuity it covers WFP activities implemented from 2016 to 2019. Taking a utilization-focused consultative approach, it serves the dual purpose of accountability and learning to inform the next Bangladesh country strategic plan.

Bangladesh is a lower middle-income country with a strong national policy environment in development, social protection, climate change, gender and nutrition. Rapid economic growth is coupled with persistent geographical disparities in income, food security, education and gender equality. Natural disasters are frequent and severe, and for decades the country has hosted large numbers of Rohingya refugees from Myanmar.

The evaluation found that the overall performance of WFP under the country strategic plan was broadly aligned with the plan's stated outcomes and objectives and consistent with national policies and humanitarian interventions in Bangladesh. The country office was effective in responding to expanded needs in the country although it did not pay adequate attention to exclusion or inclusion based on gender, disability or other factors. The approach to increasing the coverage and scale of interventions with the Government was broadly successful, resulting in expanded coverage of a range of national programmes.

WFP made progress in delivering its strategic outcomes, although some activities have progressed more than others. In 2017 progress was slow as country strategic plan systems were established while the Level 3 response to the Rohingya refugee crisis was being scaled up. Strategic outcome 5

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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was a successful addition to the country strategic plan that enabled WFP to provide the humanitarian community with access to reliable common services; however, WFP was unable to fully capture the results of its interventions or their contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals.

WFP struggled to maintain a resource mobilization strategy yielding adequate and sufficiently flexible resources to finance the entire country strategic plan. Managing the capacity of staff to implement the country strategic plan while adapting human resource needs to respond to the Rohingya crisis also presented some operational challenges.

Despite its efforts, WFP's ability to enact the strategic shift to capacity strengthening has been inconsistent and is not yet institutionalized. The establishment of effective partnerships spanning the humanitarian and development contexts proved difficult in the absence of a shared institutional understanding of what strategic partnerships entail or a reassessment of the organization's strategic positioning.

The scale, speed and coverage of the WFP response to the influx of Rohingya refugees since 2017 have been widely commended by the international community. By the end of 2019, 880,000 refugees were receiving monthly food assistance. WFP sustained strong leadership in the food security, logistics and emergency telecommunications sectors and provided systematic coordination and shared services that contributed to an effective joint humanitarian response.

The evaluation team concludes that WFP has effective, fast response mechanisms in place and is well placed to continue in its trusted role while supporting and strengthening national development programmes to mitigate the long-term impact of disasters on vulnerable groups.

The evaluation generated six recommendations, three strategic and three operational, aimed at addressing key issues for the next country strategic plan and responding to the urgent challenges presented by the coronavirus disease pandemic in Bangladesh. The strategic recommendations are to enhance strategic partnerships; improve the effectiveness of emergency preparedness, readiness and response mechanisms; and strengthen support for nutrition-sensitive social protection safety nets. The operational recommendations focus on enhancing capacity strengthening; strengthening gender equality and social inclusion interventions; and strengthening performance management.

Draft decision*

The Board takes note of the summary report on the evaluation of the country strategic plan for Bangladesh (2017–2020) (WFP/EB.1/2021/6-A) and management response (WFP/EB.1/2021/6-A/Add.1) and encourages further action on the recommendations set out in the report, taking into account the considerations raised by the Board during its discussion.

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

Introduction

Evaluation features

1. The evaluation of the Bangladesh country strategic plan (CSP) was timed to provide evidence and lessons to inform the development of the next CSP for Bangladesh.
2. The evaluation covered activities carried out in 2016, prior to the CSP, as well as CSP implementation from March 2017 to December 2019, in order to assess strategic and operational continuity. It was designed to assess WFP's strategic positioning and the extent to which WFP made the shift expected under the CSP; WFP's effectiveness in contributing to strategic outcomes; the efficiency with which the CSP was implemented; the appropriateness of operational modalities for the Level 3 response to the Rohingya crisis; and factors explaining WFP's performance.
3. An independent external evaluation team conducted the evaluation, using a mixed-methods approach, drawing on monitoring data, document review, semi-structured interviews with 264 stakeholders and focus group discussions with 688 community members. Both primary and secondary data were carefully triangulated to ensure the validity of findings. Gender and social inclusion were fully integrated into the evaluation's methodological approach. Ethical standards were applied to ensure the dignity and confidentiality of those involved in the evaluation. The team did not encounter any major constraints that compromised the overall validity of the evaluation.

Context

4. With an estimated population of 163 million, Bangladesh has a fast-growing economy, with 7.6 percent average annual growth in gross domestic product during the period from 2016 to 2019. Bangladesh achieved lower middle-income country status in 2015¹ and in 2018 met the criteria to graduate from the United Nations list of least developed countries in 2024.² Poverty is declining (from 85 percent in 1972 to below 9 percent in 2018)³; however, poverty reduction has been uneven, with persistent geographical disparities in income, food security, education and gender equality.
5. Bangladesh ranks 88th of 117 countries in the 2019 Global Hunger Index, with a score of 25.8 (table 1), compared to 30.3 in 2010. Bangladesh has made steady progress on improving child nutrition over the past decade, although many children suffer from micronutrient deficiencies. Social, economic and ecological factors, including ethnicity, urbanization and climate change, contribute to disparities in food security.

¹ World Bank, 2020. *The World Bank In Bangladesh - Overview*. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/bangladesh/overview#:~:text=Bangladesh%20reached%20the%20lower%20middle,track%20for%20graduation%20in%202024>.

² United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2020. *The Least Developed Countries Report 2020*. https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/ldcr2020_en.pdf.

³ World Bank, 2018. *Bangladesh: Reducing Poverty and Sharing Prosperity*. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/results/2018/11/15/bangladesh-reducing-poverty-and-sharing-prosperity>.

Year	Indicator	Value
2020	Total population	163 million
2017	Life expectancy at birth	57 years
2020	Annual population growth	1.05 percent
2019	Gross domestic product per capita (based on purchasing power parity)	USD 4 950
2017	Human Development Index score	0.614
2018	Gini coefficient (income inequality)	0.32
2017	Gender Development Index score (gender gap)	0.719
2019	Global Hunger Index score	25.8
2017	Stunting	31 percent
2017	Underweight	22 percent
2018	Share of agriculture in gross domestic product	13 percent
2011	Literacy rate, population age >7 years	51.8 percent

6. Despite the rapid increase in educational attainment and policy changes in favour of women, prejudicial social and legal norms continue to impede the achievement of gender equality (Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5). Gender-based violence and high rates of child marriage and adolescent pregnancy are of serious concern.
7. Bangladesh is particularly vulnerable to frequent and severe impacts of climate change that affect agricultural production and cause internal migration to urban areas. Bangladesh continues to host between 850,000 and 915,000 Rohingya refugees⁴ from Myanmar, the majority of whom live in 34 extremely congested camps.
8. The Government of Bangladesh has a strong national policy environment with regard to development, social protection, climate change, gender and nutrition. Its seventh 5-year plan (covering 2016–2020) articulates its national development goals, including achieving upper middle-income status.⁵ Priority thematic areas include poverty reduction, food security and hunger, health and women’s empowerment.

Country strategic plan

9. The Bangladesh CSP for the period 2017–2020 was one of WFP’s first pilot CSPs and one of the first CSPs to incorporate a Level 3 emergency response. Building on earlier operations (figure 1), it focuses on five strategic outcomes, as shown in figure 2, with the aim of shifting WFP’s focus from direct project implementation to technical assistance and capacity strengthening with regard to national hunger solutions.

⁴ The joint Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees /Government registration in September 2019 recorded 914,998 refugees. However, the second registration phase – including biometric identification – recorded 854,000. https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/sitrep_december_2019_english.pdf.

⁵ Government of Bangladesh, 2015. *Seventh Five Year Plan: FY2016–FY2020*. <http://nda.erd.gov.bd/en/c/publication/seventh-five-year-plan-fy2016-fy2020>.

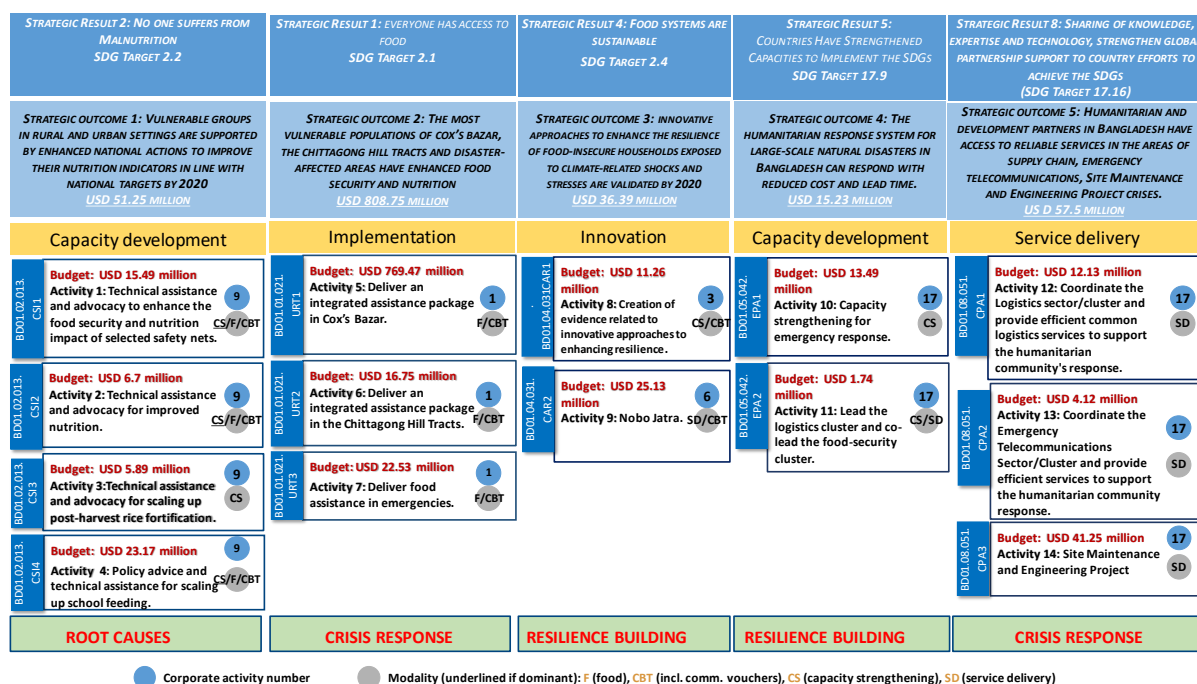
Figure 1: WFP operations in Bangladesh (2016–2020)

Operation	Timeframe	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
CP 200243	January 2012 – March 2017	Total requirements (2016–2017) USD 54 485 426 Total contributions received USD 12 275 315 Funded: 23 percent				
PRRO 200673	July 2014 – March 2017	Total requirements (2016–2017) USD 7 929 939 Total contributions received: USD 4 259 386 Funded: 54 percent				
CSP BD01	March 2017 – December 2020			Needs-based plan (2017–2020): USD 969 120 577 Needs-based plan funded: USD 641 426 577 Funded: 66 percent		
Direct expenditures (USD)		190 467 392	46 933 286	183 726 999	124 929 197	N/A

Abbreviations: CP = country programme; N/A = not applicable; PRRO = protracted relief and recovery operation.

Source: WFP FACTory April 2020.

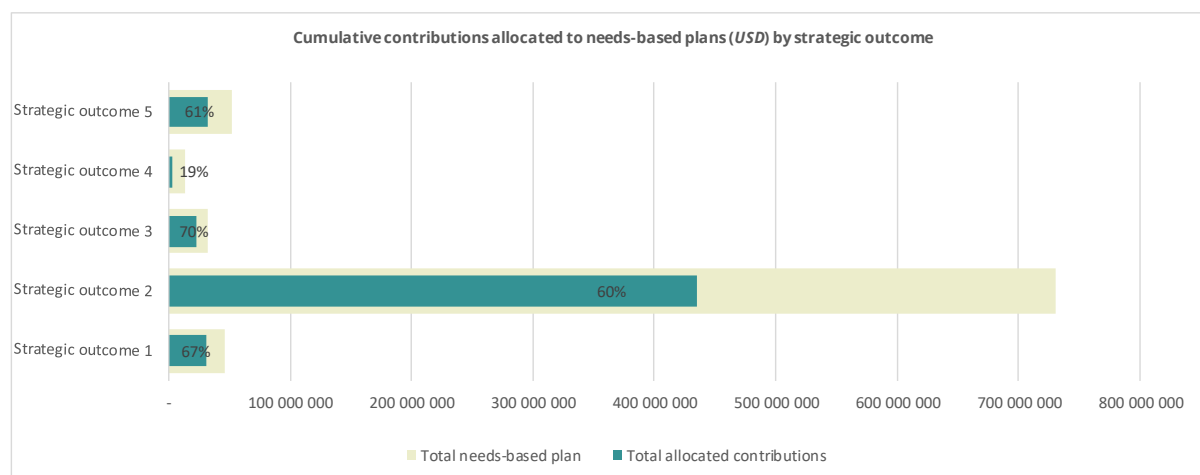
Figure 2: Bangladesh country strategic plan “line of sight”



Source: WFP Bangladesh country office.

10. The CSP budget was initially USD 202 million in 2017 and, through a series of revisions, reached USD 969 million in 2019.⁶ The revisions were mainly aimed at extending operations for the response to the Rohingya crisis (strategic outcome 5)⁷ and covered activities that included in-kind food assistance and a transition to e-vouchers, as well as an additional activity related to the humanitarian crisis. WFP's ability to mobilize adequate resources to finance the CSP decreased over time. Contributions covered 142 percent of the needs-based plan in 2017, decreasing to 94 percent in 2018 and 60 percent in 2019 (figure 3).

Figure 3: Total contributions to needs-based plans by Bangladesh CSP strategic outcome (2017–2019)



Source: WFP, Integrated Road Map analytics.

Evaluation findings

To what extent are WFP's strategic position, role and specific contribution based on country priorities and people's needs and rights, as well as WFP's strengths?

Relevance and strategic positioning

11. The design of the CSP is relevant, appropriate and consistent with national policies, plans, strategies and goals related to food security and nutrition, including the Government's seventh 5-year plan, covering 2016–2020.
12. The shift in focus from direct implementation towards capacity strengthening for government systems aligns with the national goal of enhancing national nutrition-sensitive social safety net programmes; in practice, however, a focus on capacity-building per se rather than enhancing national systems affected WFP's ability to influence the safety net programmes.
13. The CSP objectives for building the long-term resilience of disaster-stricken populations are well-aligned with the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief's disaster management plan for 2016–2020.⁸

⁶ WFP, 2019. *Crisis response revision of Bangladesh country strategic plan (March 2017–December 2020) and corresponding budget increase*, revision 5.

⁷ WFP, 2017. *Bangladesh country strategic plan, revision 1*.

⁸ Government of Bangladesh. 2017. *National Plan for Disaster Management (2016–2020): Building Resilience for Sustainable Human Development*. [https://modmr.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/modmr.portal.gov.bd/policies/0a654dce_9456_46ad_b5c4_15ddf8c4c0d/NPDM\(2016-2020\)%20-Final.pdf](https://modmr.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/modmr.portal.gov.bd/policies/0a654dce_9456_46ad_b5c4_15ddf8c4c0d/NPDM(2016-2020)%20-Final.pdf).

14. The WFP response to the Rohingya crisis was both relevant and appropriate. It involved incorporating a fifth strategic outcome into the CSP framework and classifying the response as a Level 3 emergency.

Coherence and alignment

15. The CSP did not set sufficient strategic direction for WFP on how it should align with United Nations and other humanitarian actors. While the design of the CSP was fully aligned with the United Nations development assistance framework for 2017–2020, the CSP objectives were not well reflected in the framework.
16. WFP used its comparative advantage to position itself as a United Nations agency that was engaged in the response to, but not directly implicated in the politics of, the Rohingya crisis. The speed and sheer scale of WFP's operations in Cox's Bazar are a testimony to its ability to deliver rapid, large-scale responses. However, WFP did not demonstrate adequate alignment with other humanitarian actors within the broader institutional and humanitarian policy context and the CSP missed opportunities to strengthen attention to protection and inclusion.

Addressing the needs of the most vulnerable

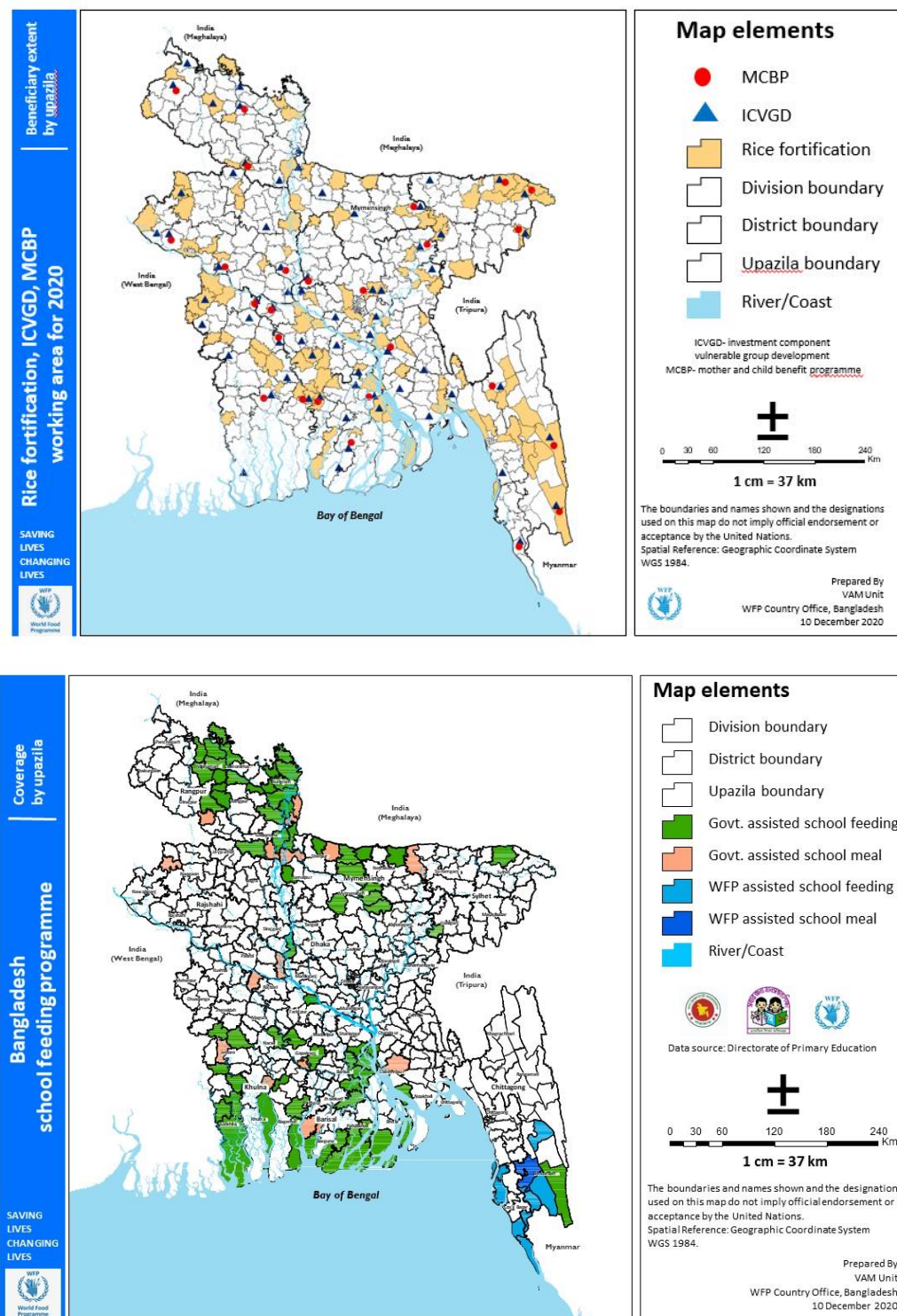
17. The CSP design is appropriate for the immediate needs of the most food-insecure people but does not pay adequate attention to exclusion and inclusion based on gender, disability or other factors. The gender analysis underpinning the CSP identifies significant gender inequality that would have warranted a stronger strategic focus on gender equality and women's empowerment.
18. There are mixed findings concerning WFP's ability to address exclusion and inclusion appropriately. WFP strategies aimed at reaching the poorest refugees in Cox's Bazar were effective in reaching women but were less focused on other disadvantaged groups such as the disabled.⁹
19. Vulnerability analysis and mapping (VAM) was used to inform targeting and inclusion strategies; however, its effectiveness was affected by a reliance on outdated government poverty maps; lack of a single national system for mapping and verifying beneficiaries; and sub-optimal use of data and evidence by staff to adapt programmes.

Coverage and scale-up

20. WFP's approach to increasing the coverage and scale of interventions with the Government was broadly successful, resulting in expanded coverage of a range of national programmes, as highlighted in figure 4. WFP made significant contributions to the national mother and child benefit and vulnerable group development programmes, and coverage of the national school feeding programme increased significantly under the CSP. The rice fortification initiative scale-up was successful in strengthening both the demand for and supply of fortified rice, with distributions reaching over 2 million beneficiaries in 2019 (compared to 30,000 in 2013).

⁹ WFP. 2019. *WFP Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2019–2020*.

Figure 4: Maps showing coverage of national programmes in Bangladesh



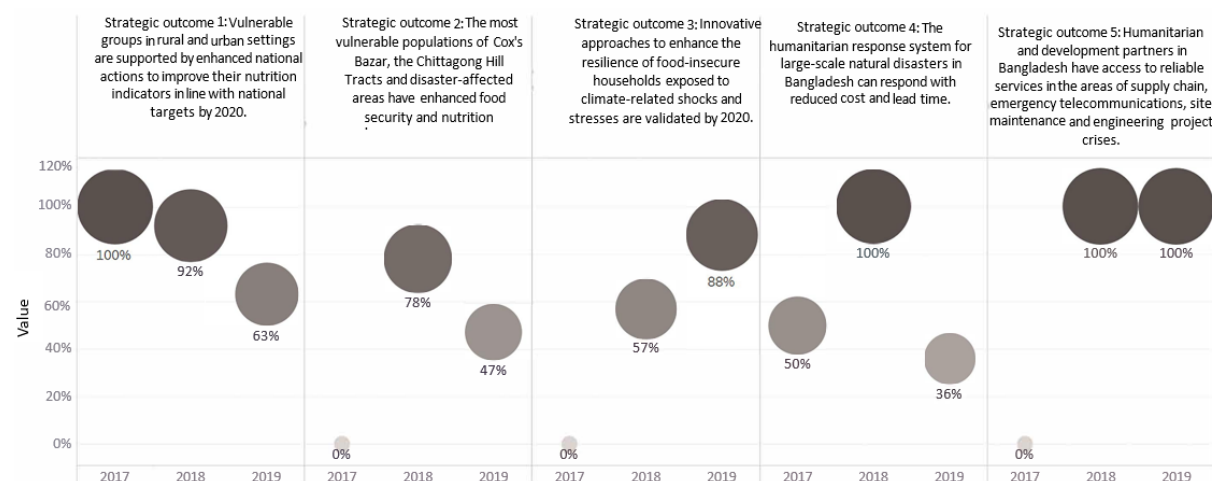
Source: WFP Bangladesh country office (top map) and Directorate of Primary Education, Government of Bangladesh (bottom map). Prepared by WFP Bangladesh country office, 10 December 2020.

What is the extent and quality of WFP’s specific contribution to CSP strategic outcomes in Bangladesh?

Outputs

21. WFP has made progress and experienced successes in delivering its expected strategic outcomes, although some activities have progressed more than others (figure 5). In 2017 progress was slow, largely as a result of CSP systems being established while the country office scaled up its refugee response.

Figure 5: Percentage of output indicators that reached or surpassed annual targets, by strategic outcome

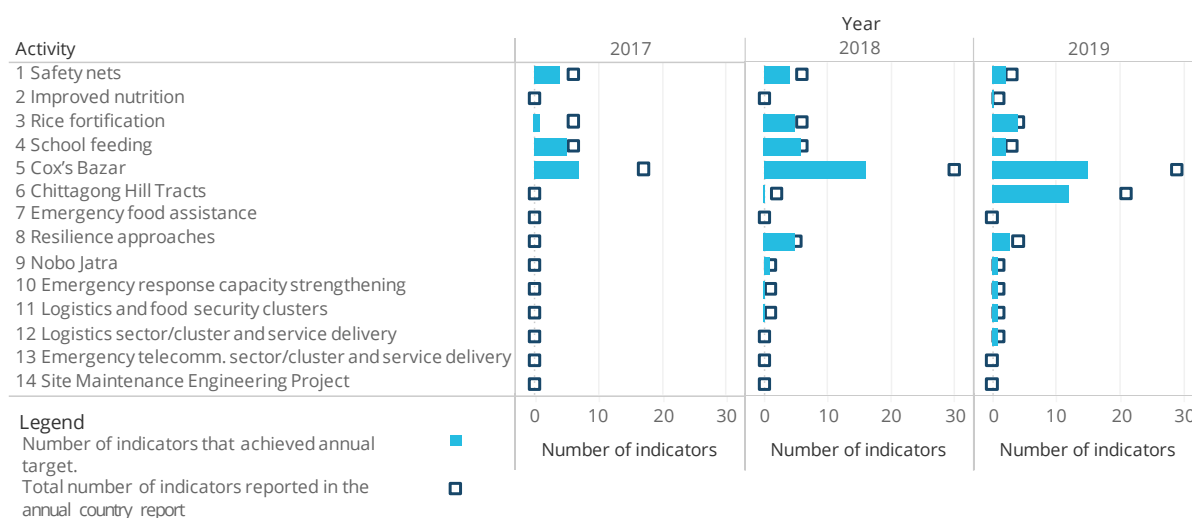


Source: WFP Bangladesh annual country reports for 2017, 2018 and 2019.

Contribution to higher-level results

22. Progress towards achieving CSP outcomes varies widely between activities (figure 6). Achievement rates were inconsistent and sometimes low. The rates were affected by the differing numbers of indicators reported on per activity combined with changes to the CSP logical framework and variable reporting processes, however, hence low target achievement rates do not necessarily reflect a poor performance by the country office.

Figure 6: CSP outcome indicators for which annual targets were achieved



Source: WFP Bangladesh annual country reports for 2017, 2018 and 2019.

23. Under strategic outcome 1, WFP has focused on strengthening government capacity. Social safety nets, rice fortification and school feeding activities have been successful in providing support for numerous enhancements to the national programmes; however, nutrition was the least funded activity of the CSP, resulting in slower progress and poorer results.
24. Work under strategic outcome 2 has been largely successful. Large assistance packages are being successfully delivered in Cox's Bazar, Chittagong Hill Tracts and disaster-affected areas. WFP assists more than 837,000 refugees through a combination of food and e-voucher transfers, as well as livelihood support and treatment and prevention of malnutrition for pregnant and lactating women and children under 5. By the end of 2019, WFP had achieved 90 percent progress or better on most indicators under activities 5 and 6, suggesting good progress on achieving the overall goal of enhancing food security and nutrition.
25. Strategic outcome 3 was pursued through a series of interventions. Piloting of the forecast-based financing mechanism and implementation of the disaster risk reduction pillar of the Nobo Jatra project have demonstrated success in testing new approaches.
26. Strategic outcome 4 has also seen success. Emergency preparedness and response support has been cost-effective despite challenges. In 2017 WFP was instrumental in establishing the Bangladesh national logistics cluster, which under the co-leadership of WFP and the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief seeks to improve the long-term coordination of supply chain functions for the whole country. In Cox's Bazar WFP supported the coordination of inter-agency emergency preparedness and response activities across various sectors. An emergency operational dashboard was developed and emergency simulation exercises were conducted to build the capacity of government counterparts, particularly the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief.
27. Strategic outcome 5 was a successful addition to the CSP, enabling WFP to provide the humanitarian community with access to reliable common services for logistics, emergency telecommunications and food security for a coordinated response to the large-scale and complex Rohingya crisis. All activities met their output indicator targets.

Gender, protection and accountability to affected populations

28. Within the country office there is a high level of awareness of, and commitment to, the cross-cutting priorities related to gender equality, protection and accountability to affected populations.
29. Positive gender actions have been developed by staff, but these are not part of a country-office-wide strategic approach. Furthermore, there is limited evidence of systematic monitoring and reporting on gender across the CSP. A more nuanced understanding of how women (and other groups) access and engage with WFP interventions, and how this relates to intra-household and social roles, is lacking.
30. Understaffing of the gender and inclusion unit, a lack of a dedicated budget, weak lines of accountability and limited corporate guidance on how to operationalize gender equality and women's empowerment, protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and inclusion at the country level represent significant challenges for the country office in such a dynamic operating environment.
31. In principle, protection, gender and inclusion feature strongly in the coordinated United Nations Rohingya refugee response, and a number of respondents commended WFP for its contribution to advocacy on issues of protection and inclusion; however, the impact on the ground has been frustrated by a number of factors, including the conservative culture

of the Rohingya population and the Majhi¹⁰ system, which limits interaction with the refugee community.

32. Accountability to affected population mechanisms are in place and operational but are confined to raising people's awareness and alerting them rather than the systematic incorporation of their views on their rights and entitlements into programmes. The extent to which affected populations, especially women, feel empowered to use these feedback mechanisms is unclear.

Connectedness and sustainability

33. Efforts to forge linkages between emergency response and long-term resilience have been made through the rice fortification interventions. Successful efforts were made in the response to the Rohingya refugee crisis, through livelihoods support for the host population and the SAFE (safe access to fuel and energy) project jointly conducted by WFP, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the International Organization for Migration. There is widespread criticism among donors and partners that WFP did not engage in efforts to lobby the Government to provide cash for refugee populations, considered pivotal for connectedness and to provide recipients with the freedom to build their own assets.
34. Despite these efforts, the institutional take-up of interventions by the Government and other partners necessary for connectedness to be sustainable is not yet in place and the level of relationship-building required to ensure sustainability has yet to be achieved.

To what extent were WFP's systems, structures and resources marshalled efficiently in support of CSP outputs and strategic outcomes?

Resource mobilization

35. WFP struggled to maintain a resource mobilization strategy that yielded flexible resources adequate to finance the entire CSP, reducing its ability to facilitate the envisioned strategic shift. The earmarking of most donor contributions (table 2) resulted in the underfunding of certain activities, notably those with a long-term vision, while resource utilization for other activities was lower than expected.¹¹ Mobilization of financial resources was further hampered by the absence of a dedicated country-wide communications strategy for demonstrating results.

Flexible funding			Private donors		
Year	Allocated contributions (USD)	Share of needs-based plan (%)	Year	Allocated contributions (USD)	Share of needs-based plan (%)
2017	11 215 555	12.6	2017	13 813 492	15.6
2018	21 057 728	6.5	2018	8 948 879	2.8
2019	6 562 327	2.1	2019	12 436 587	3.9

Source: WFP FACTory, April 2020.

¹⁰ Mahjis are government-appointed refugee representatives in camps.

¹¹ WFP, 2019. *Bangladesh Annual Country Report 2019*.

Oversight, accountability and leadership

36. The CSP mechanisms for reporting and reviewing performance across the country office and sub-offices, while useful in monitoring general progress, do not actively support CSP implementation. Oversight is maintained at an activity and strategic outcome level and there is little cross-strategic-outcome sharing of information. Limited evidence of systematic reporting on gender mainstreaming was found and no specific budget provisions for gender are in place.
37. The country office has aligned the CSP with WFP's 2018 enterprise risk management policy and strengthened risk management decision making procedures, including by creating a specific risk register for the Rohingya crisis response.
38. WFP leadership generally improved with the introduction of the CSP, with improved communications between senior and more junior staff. In the initial phases of CSP implementation, staff would have benefited from clearer direction and guidance on how to operationalize the CSP.

Internal capacity and alignment

39. Managing the capacity of staff to implement the CSP while adapting human resource needs for responding to the Rohingya crisis presented some operational challenges. The Cox's Bazar office quickly increased the number of staff, reaching 350 by January 2020; however, recruitment and training of new country office staff since 2017 did not provide the necessary expertise to support the shift to institutional capacity strengthening.
40. The establishment of a protection, gender, disability and inclusion unit during CSP implementation is a positive development, but the unit requires increased resources and capabilities.¹² In Cox's Bazar there is a gender team with separate protection advisers. This has contributed to raising the profile of gender equality support for humanitarian activities.
41. Despite women occupying 60 percent of positions in leading units (e.g. finance, administration, VAM, sub-offices), they are not represented in senior positions across the country office.

Cost-effectiveness

42. Measures were taken to implement more cost-effective means of delivering activities under strategic outcome 1, through the provision of technical assistance.
43. The WFP supply chain and logistics services were efficient and cost-effective, providing local and international sourcing of a high volume of food and non-food items within the national programme and the Rohingya response operation (TABLE 3).

¹² At the time of the evaluation, one member of the two-person protection, gender, disability and inclusion unit was on sick leave.

Year	Food commodities distributed (mt)	Goods and services procured (USD)
2017	35 826	4 452 881
2018	148 269	8 359 354
2019	111 103	4 851 830
Activity	Food commodities distributed (mt)	Goods and services procured (USD)
Activity 5 (Cox's Bazar)	291 498 (99%)	-
All others	3 701 (1%)	-
Total	295 198	17 664 065

Source: WFP Bangladesh annual country reports for 2017, 2018 and 2019; country office supply chain data.

44. Moreover, WFP was able to provide cost-effective and timely emergency food assistance at the start of the Rohingya crisis due to pre-assigned agreements with the Government. Outsourcing the provision of refugee food assistance to local market retailers through the e-voucher programme in Cox's Bazar also appears to be more cost-effective than in-kind assistance.
45. An overall cost-comparison between food and cash-based transfers was not possible. Analysis of WFP beneficiary and expenditure data provides a rough cost estimate and shows that costs of food versus cash-based transfers and commodity vouchers varied by activity, and over time (table 4).

Year	Expenditure (USD)		Number of beneficiaries		Cost per beneficiary (USD)	
	Food	CBTs and commodity voucher	Food	CBTs and commodity vouchers	Food	CBTs and commodity vouchers
Activity 4 - Policy advice and technical assistance for scaling up school feeding						
2017	1 683 555	196 944	272 995	16 444	6.17	11.98
2018	1 649 540	203 680	102 791	15 047	16.05	13.54
2019	736 212	178 641	14 165	14 165	51.97	12.61
Activity 5 - Deliver an integrated assistance package in Cox's Bazar						
2017	14 906 606	4 421 550	1 170 424	66 400	12.74	66.59
2018	96 070 757	30 051 858	1 513 777	423 452	63.46	70.97
2019	73 742 268	61 686 105	1 502 917	932 881	49.07	66.12
Activity 6 - Deliver an integrated assistance package in the Chittagong Hill Tracts						
2017	480 145		64 886		7.40	
2018	1 310 203	523 806	61 338	6 240	21.36	83.94
2019	1 793 223	733 728	90 566	29 467	19.80	24.90

TABLE 4: FOOD VERSUS CASH-BASED TRANSFERS AND COMMODITY VOUCHER COMPARISON OF COUNTRY OFFICE EXPENDITURE, NUMBER OF BENEFICIARIES AND COST PER BENEFICIARY, BY ACTIVITY						
Year	Expenditure (USD)		Number of beneficiaries		Cost per beneficiary (USD)	
	Food	CBTs and commodity voucher	Food	CBTs and commodity vouchers	Food	CBTs and commodity vouchers
Activity 7 - Deliver food assistance in emergencies						
2017	423 526	1 529 677	334 000	48 035	1.27	31.85
2018	460 569	18 434				
2019	397 915	850 949	266 680	75 000	1.49	11.35
Activity 8 - Creation of evidence related to innovative approaches to enhancing resilience						
2017						
2018		161 224		16 900		9.54
2019		314 954		22 070		14.27
Activity 9 - Nobo Jatra						
2017		1 294 462		82 060		15.77
2018		7 676 656		169 070		45.41
2019		4 708 915		142 365		33.08

Abbreviation: CBTs = cash-based transfers.

Source: WFP country office tool for managing effectively (COMET); Bangladesh annual country reports for 2017, 2018 and 2019.

What are the factors that explain WFP performance and the extent to which it has made the strategic shift expected by the CSP?

Use of data

46. The CSP design was informed by relevant data, including data from the WFP 2016 Strategic Review of Food Security and Nutrition in Bangladesh, which led to the strategic shift in approach from direct service delivery to institutional capacity strengthening and shaped the school meals programme and the design of refugee assistance packages, among other things. During implementation, however, there was limited use of evidence, including evidence generated through VAM assessment, to inform strategic decisions and adapt programming.
47. Lack of alignment of monitoring and evaluation systems between different activities hampered systematic monitoring and optimal use of data to improve performance. WFP was more strategic in utilizing data to inform the Rohingya crisis response through the 2019 refugee influx emergency vulnerability assessment for Cox's Bazar, which led to a shift from in-kind food assistance to hybrid solutions, including vouchers.

Shift to capacity strengthening

48. Despite the efforts outlined above, WFP's ability to effect the strategic shift to capacity strengthening has been inconsistent and is not yet institutionalized or embedded in its organizational culture. Technical assistance provided to the Government consisted mostly of training and exposure visits rather than engagement in broader policy discussions on issues such as embedding nutrition in existing social safety net programmes.

Strategic partnerships

49. Throughout CSP implementation, WFP engagement with a wide range of partners positively influenced performance. A whole-of-society approach was adopted through partnerships with local non-governmental organizations in, for example, the school feeding programme and rice fortification. The WFP office in Cox's Bazar effectively leveraged synergies with other United Nations bodies, including FAO, the United Nations Children's Fund and the International Organization for Migration, to respond to the humanitarian crisis and address host community needs, including through expanded use of WFP's SCOPE digital beneficiary information and transfer management platform. Throughout the implementation of the CSP, WFP worked with various government ministries and agencies, and there was some concern on the part of some stakeholders that WFP should have worked more strategically with other ministries to expand its reach and coverage.
50. Due to its central position within the United Nations system, and particularly in the Rohingya crisis response, WFP is seen as having the convening power to link its work with that of other development actors in areas such as disaster risk reduction and resilience. WFP was not, however, able to use its leverage effectively to forge the strategic linkages needed to pursue its dual mandate of humanitarian and development work at the national level.
51. WFP has endeavoured to strike a delicate balance to uphold respect for the humanitarian principles of neutrality, humanity, impartiality and operational independence while working under the auspices of government-managed interventions; however, it is clear that this poses challenges to the operational independence of WFP, as exemplified by the Rohingya crisis response.

To what extent were the operational modalities (structure, systems and processes) the right ones to allow WFP to respond effectively to the Level 3 emergency in the context of a CSP?

Scale-up of a principled emergency response

52. The scale, speed and coverage of the WFP response to the Rohingya refugee crisis since 2017 have been widely commended by the international community. By the end of 2019, 880,000 refugees were receiving monthly food assistance, either in-kind or through e-vouchers via SCOPE, and almost 20,000 women from host communities were benefitting from livelihoods and resilience-building programmes.¹³ WFP's SCOPE registration process was recognized as successful in terms of both rapidly enrolling people and assisting them in making the transition (ongoing) from in-kind general food distribution to a multi-wallet e-voucher system.
53. While the CSP did not have an adverse impact on the speed or scale-up of the WFP response to the Rohingya crisis, the CSP systems and structures in place were not the most effective. Updating the CSP with an additional strategic outcome for the Level 3 emergency response was a pragmatic and effective solution that allowed an appropriate and rapid scale-up; however, the Level 3 response was run as a separate operation, largely delinked from other WFP activities in the country.
54. Protection, accountability, gender and inclusion feature in successive joint response plans. Other agencies commend the WFP approach to gender, accountability and inclusion, despite cultural and contextual barriers that reduce its impact. Protection from sexual exploitation and abuse remains a concern, especially with the shift from in-kind provision to e-vouchers, and it is unclear how WFP intends to manage the risks entailed.

¹³ WFP, 2019. *Bangladesh Annual Country Report 2019*.

Coordination

55. WFP sustained strong leadership in the food security, logistics and emergency telecommunications sectors. It provided systematic coordination and shared services that contributed to an effective joint humanitarian response by improving inter-agency emergency telecommunications services at the start of the Level 3 response; conducting several assessments (with FAO) that were used to increase the local market capacity of refugees and the reach of the e-voucher system and increase cash-based assistance; and supporting the logistics sector in the effort to deliver assistance to the humanitarian community effectively. While the logistics coordination with the Government improved, there is a need for better integration of the work by the logistics sector and the Government.

Conclusions

56. The evaluation found WFP's overall performance under the CSP to be broadly aligned with the plan's stated outcomes and objectives and largely consistent with national policies and humanitarian interventions in Bangladesh. WFP was adept in responding to critical issues during CSP implementation. Expanding the CSP activities and adding a fifth strategic outcome while managing the Level 3 response through several revisions of the CSP presented many challenges. Despite this, the WFP country office was effective in responding to the expansion of needs in the country.

Quality of strategic outcomes

57. WFP was unable to fully capture the results of its interventions or their contribution to progress on the various SDGs. Clearer linkages between CSP activities and intended outcomes would have facilitated CSP adaptation to a changing context and enhanced alignment with government efforts to achieve SDG 2 and SDG 17 targets.
58. During the initial phase of CSP implementation, underfunding and a lack of flexible funding affected the country office's ability to achieve its strategic aim of capacity strengthening. This was compounded by the absence of a clear vision of how activities under strategic outcome 1 would contribute to the intended outcome.

Emergency response operational modalities

59. The CSP was primarily and appropriately designed to strengthen the linkages between humanitarian and development interventions. Forging these linkages and related structures and processes, however, often requires extensive lead-in time and new resource mobilization strategies to secure and maintain appropriate resources.
60. The shift to the Level 3 response modalities contributed to a disruption in the strategic direction of the CSP, affecting progress towards ongoing development initiatives. Although the design of the CSP anticipated that WFP might need to respond to a sudden-onset emergency, there was a disconnect between an effective strategy and operational systems for scale-up and integration into collaborative action by the Government and United Nations agencies.
61. In the event of worst-case climate change scenarios, food insecurity among an increasing number of vulnerable people is likely to be a recurring problem in Bangladesh. WFP is well placed to continue in its trusted role, using the effective fast response mechanisms in place and supporting and strengthening national development programmes to mitigate the long-term impact of disasters on vulnerable groups.

Gender and social inclusion

62. The CSP rightly identifies key cross-cutting linkages, gaps and challenges; however, a more concerted effort is required to mainstream commitments and obligations across the full range of interventions, and cross-cutting issues need to be sufficiently mainstreamed and thus routinely reflected in all office practices and systems.
63. The CSP defined a clear operational focus on the most vulnerable women, men and children, but this was not consistent across all outcome areas. Importantly, the CSP did not adequately consider sector-wide linkages or best practices in the context of international humanitarian policy architecture and protection. In responding to the Rohingya crisis, WFP was effective in reaching the poorest refugees; however, inadequate attention was paid to rights and gender implications and to assessing the risks of exclusion.

Institutional capacity strengthening – embedding new ways of working

64. Despite best efforts, there are clear challenges concerning WFP's ability to embark on the organizational shift to institutional capacity strengthening. The approach so far has been inconsistent, largely as a result of ineffective communication with staff and a lack of investment in understanding the capacity support needs of WFP's key partners. Country office staff require essential skills to complement and support institutional system strengthening at the various government levels.

Enhancing partnerships

65. The CSP was intended to result in more effective partnerships spanning the humanitarian and development contexts. This proved difficult because there was no shared institutional understanding of what strategic partnerships entailed or reassessment of the organization's strategic positioning vis-à-vis its longstanding relations with counterpart government ministries.
66. The value of the CSP framework as a new and effective strategic partnership tool is yet to be fully appreciated within WFP and among its external partners. Further effort will be required to ensure that the country office takes a partnership approach to inform the design of the next CSP.

Lessons learned

67. The CSP demonstrates the value of beginning with a shared institutional understanding of what strategic partnerships entail. To better manage performance and track results, future CSPs would benefit from an overarching theory of change that determines the causal pathways and assumptions underpinning CSP interventions.
68. The CSP was not originally set up to provide the most effective mechanism for delivering a Level 3 emergency response; however, introducing a strategic outcome to CSPs to enable a response to an emergency without compromising overall strategic and programmatic coherence is a pragmatic solution, especially in highly disaster-prone countries like Bangladesh.
69. In the light of shifting priorities and given its longstanding experience in supporting government social safety net programmes, there may be a case for WFP to reprioritize and reposition itself if it intends to stay engaged with the evolution of national nutrition-sensitive social safety net programmes at a strategic level.

Recommendations

70. In its key findings, lessons learned and conclusions, the evaluation reveals the many positive changes brought about by the CSP process, as well as opportunities to shape the strategic and operational direction of future CSPs. The six recommendations, three of which are strategic and three operational, will need to be considered systematically to address key issues for the next CSP and respond to the urgent challenges presented by the coronavirus disease pandemic in Bangladesh.

No.	Recommendation	Type	Who	Priority	When
1	<p>Enhance strategic partnerships</p> <p>WFP should:</p> <p>1.1 enhance and strengthen planning processes for developing the next CSP and actively engage with key stakeholders in shaping the strategic direction of the CSP;</p> <p>1.2 ensure that staff across the country office actively participate in the development of the next CSP by identifying and understanding the roles and operational parameters of key partners;</p> <p>1.3 develop a clear operational strategy that sets out how the next CSP will sustain government efforts to achieve SDG targets, focusing on:</p> <p>a) United Nations reform efforts through the United Nations sustainable development cooperation framework to set clear targets for 2030; and</p> <p>b) strengthening and supporting government governance and institutional reform systems engagement</p> <p>1.4 identify financial resources and development partners willing to invest in multi-year development interventions and resilience building efforts with communities affected by humanitarian crisis; and</p> <p>1.5 assess experiences and lessons learned from other country offices on CSP design processes to achieve the most effective strategic outcomes.</p>	Strategic	Country office, supported by the regional bureau and headquarters (Programme – Humanitarian and Development Division; Strategic Partnerships Division)	High	Mid-2021

No.	Recommendation	Type	Who	Priority	When
2	<p>Improve the effectiveness of emergency preparedness, readiness and response mechanisms</p> <p>WFP should:</p> <p>2.1 ensure that an additional strategic outcome area is retained within the CSP for anticipating and mobilizing supplementary resources for immediate response to emergencies, including large-scale (Level 3) sudden-onset emergencies;</p> <p>2.2 actively engage with the Government to promote implementation of appropriate shock-responsive climate adaptation systems within national social protection programming and use WFP leverage to facilitate cooperation among stakeholders to sustain linkages between humanitarian-development programme interventions and emergency response mechanisms;</p> <p>2.3 invest further financial and human resources in supporting and complementing the work of the Government, other United Nations agencies and non-governmental organization networks on embedding global standards on protection, accountability to affected populations and gender in emergency response mechanisms; and</p> <p>2.4 develop ready-to-apply plans anticipating responses to disaster events, both in the current context and for future scenarios.</p>	Strategic	Country office, with specialist support from the regional bureau and headquarters (Emergency Operations Division; Programme – Humanitarian and Development Division)	High	2021
3	<p>Strengthen support for nutrition-sensitive social safety net programmes</p> <p>WFP should:</p> <p>3.1 re-evaluate its added value and contribution to the Bangladesh social protection and nutrition arena, assessing strategic opportunities with relevant government ministries to complement the development of the national social protection policy framework mapping for the next phase of the national social security strategy;</p> <p>3.2 improve strategic relationships with key government actors to consolidate its role in promoting nutrition-sensitive interventions through national social safety net programmes;</p> <p>3.3 enhance, develop and implement a monitoring and evaluation strategy to facilitate evidence-based decisions for sharing with government policymakers and development partners; and</p> <p>3.4 develop and strengthen partnership ties with key social protection development partners to enhance linkages between nutrition-sensitive and adaptive shock responsiveness aspects of existing social protection programmes.</p>	Strategic	Country office, supported by headquarters (Social Protection Unit) and the regional bureau	Medium	2021–2022

No.	Recommendation	Type	Who	Priority	When
4	<p>Enhance capacity strengthening strategy and interventions</p> <p>WFP should:</p> <p>4.1 ensure that the country capacity strengthening strategy is aligned with the revised corporate capacity strengthening strategy, underpins all CSP strategic outcome areas and effectively links up with other operational focus areas;</p> <p>4.2 ensure that the country office receives technical support for effectively linking programme operations and compliance with WFP global policy directives; this support should include:</p> <p>a) a training and development programme for selected staff tasked with implementing capacity strengthening objectives that takes into consideration WFP's niche areas and technical comparative advantage; and</p> <p>b) skills audits to determine the specific competency requirements for key staff for effectively and strategically engaging with government partners;</p> <p>4.3 reassess and evaluate the principles of the country capacity strengthening strategy to ensure clarity of purpose regarding how to effectively engage with the Government to support its capacity strengthening strategic goals in line with SDG commitments.</p>	Operational	<p>Country office</p> <p>Headquarters (Technical Assistance and Country Capacity Strengthening Service)</p> <p>Country office</p>	High	2021
5	<p>Strengthen gender equality and social inclusion interventions</p> <p>WFP should:</p> <p>5.1 fully integrate gender into thematic programming and CSP design to form the basis of a strategy for engaging with partners and stakeholders to ensure that WFP's position on gender is effectively communicated;</p> <p>5.2 strengthen the design, implementation and qualitative monitoring of gender equality and social inclusion, including by commissioning studies, to shift the focus from quantitative aspects of gender, equity and social inclusion mainstreaming to a set of transformative actions embedded in activities and tracked across strategic outcomes;</p> <p>5.3 ensure that gender advisers and support units fully embed the principles and policy obligations that underpin WFP's global position on gender transformation commitments in the CSP design process;</p> <p>5.4 build sufficient technical capacity in the gender, VAM and monitoring and evaluation units to support programme teams in operationalizing and mainstreaming gender considerations throughout the CSP period; and</p> <p>5.5 revisit recruitment and training strategies for redressing gender imbalances and ensure that adequate training is part of induction and continuous job performance and appraisal processes.</p>	Operational	Country office, supported by headquarters (Gender Office) and the regional bureau	High	2021

No.	Recommendation	Type	Who	Priority	When
6	<p>Strengthen performance management strategy, processes and systems</p> <p>WFP should:</p> <p>6.1 develop a performance and knowledge management strategy to promote evidence-informed intervention design and implementation across CSP strategic outcome areas. The strategy should aim to build on best practice principles of the WFP monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning approaches; the research, assessment and monitoring model; and the three-pronged approach;</p> <p>6.2 encourage closer integration of the monitoring and evaluation, VAM and programme units to better capture lessons across CSP strategic outcomes and enhance field-level staff functions to go beyond distribution and process monitoring to provide contextual information (design) and connection to beneficiary experience (monitoring and evaluation);</p> <p>6.3 enhance qualitative research to inform nutrition-sensitive evidence generation and develop monitoring and evaluation cross-cutting mechanisms – including strategies for engaging with and promoting the voices of poor and vulnerable groups in decision making – to inform policy and programmatic planning and to influence processes in dialogue with government partners; and</p> <p>6.4 ensure that all CSP activities are underpinned by specific theory-of-change methodologies, which should be regularly reviewed and used to inform programme interventions.</p>	Operational	Country office (Monitoring and Evaluation Unit; Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping Unit; Programme Unit)	High	2021

Acronyms

CSP	country strategic plan
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
VAM	vulnerability analysis and mapping