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Summary report on the evaluation of the country strategic plan for the Gambia (2019-2021)

Executive summary

The evaluation of the transitional interim country strategic plan and the country strategic plan for the Gambia covered the period between January 2018 and September 2020¹ and served the dual purpose of accountability and learning. It assessed the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, coherence, coverage and connectedness of both plans, including consideration of cross-cutting areas such as gender equality and the empowerment of women.

The design of the country strategic plan is largely aligned with national policies and relevant to the needs of vulnerable populations, and it has allowed WFP to position itself as a strategic partner. While emergency response needs were initially underestimated, the country office adapted appropriately when the need arose. Nutrition activities were largely effective but smallholder farmer support suffered bottlenecks. The portfolio of capacity strengthening activities would have benefitted from more strategic planning based on gap analysis and monitoring.

Building on the foundations of the 2018 national zero hunger strategic review, WFP shifted its approach through the country strategic plan, positioning itself as an enabler in support of the country's renewed engagement in policies designed to assist its most vulnerable populations. At the same time, WFP remained an effective humanitarian player, although operations were delayed by late funding and the successive scale-up of crisis response, including for the COVID-19 pandemic, and overstretched the country office's capacity.

¹ The report includes information on WFP activities obtained from the annual country report for 2020. Because the report includes a period beyond the scope of this evaluation (the fourth quarter of 2020), the information that came from it was not triangulated and therefore cannot be used as a basis for conclusive analysis.

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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The WFP school feeding programme is the largest safety net in the Gambia and during the COVID-19 pandemic was successfully used as a platform for distributing food to vulnerable households. The programme is being handed over to the Government but the process is being slowed by significant capacity constraints.

Livelihood support and resilience building activities began once funding was confirmed, almost two years after the start of the country strategic plan. While the design of smallholder farmer support is relevant, there are weaknesses in related processes and procedures.

Most nutrition activities were largely effective in addressing malnutrition among targeted populations. However, the country strategic plan did not include overweight or obesity as priority issues.

Country capacity strengthening activities have been well resourced but would benefit from a strategic approach with long-term objectives based on clearly defined national capacity gaps.

Gender equality and the empowerment of women were well integrated in the design of the country strategic plan but there was no reference to gender-based violence. Country office capacity on gender has improved, and the country office is now operationalizing commitments in this area.

The evaluation makes three strategic and two operational recommendations. The first strategic recommendation outlines programmatic adjustments that would result in better alignment with national priorities and needs; the second advises WFP to draw up a capacity strengthening strategy; and the third notes that in order to support progress towards the gender-transformative objectives of the country strategic plan, WFP should continue to mainstream gender in the country office and develop more evidence-based programming related to the inclusion of gender approaches in nutrition and smallholder support activities. The operational recommendations refer to the enhancement of value chain approaches and partnerships in order to increase the effectiveness of smallholder farmer support; and the strengthening of programme monitoring systems, emphasizing the importance of measuring results consistently over time and the need for a monitoring system for country capacity strengthening activities.

Draft decision*

The Board takes note of the summary report on the evaluation of the country strategic plan for the Gambia (2019–2021) (WFP/EB.2/2021/6-D) and management response (WFP/EB.2/2021/6-D/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 transitional interim country strategic plan (T-ICSP) and the country strategic plan (CSP) for the Gambia was conducted between May 2020 and April 2021. It covered WFP's strategy, interventions and systems for the period between January 2018 and September 2020. It served the dual purpose of accountability and learning by assessing results achieved against plans while creating opportunities for learning at the national, regional and corporate levels. The results of the evaluation informed the preparation of the revision for the extension of the CSP and the design of a new CSP for the Gambia.
2. The evaluation took a utilization-focused and consultative approach when defining the lines of inquiry around the four standard evaluation questions used for WFP country strategic plan evaluations. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the evaluation was conducted using a hybrid approach: two international team members engaged with stakeholders remotely and three national team members met stakeholders in person in the Gambia. The main evaluation mission in the Gambia took place over three weeks, between mid-September and early October 2020. Findings on nutrition were mostly drawn from the decentralized evaluation on nutrition that was conducted just before the CSP evaluation. Gender was taken into account throughout all phases of the evaluation process. The evaluation findings and recommendations were discussed with internal and external stakeholders during two online workshops in March 2021.
3. Limitations of the evaluation were largely linked to COVID-19 related restrictions. Also, complete and validated performance data for 2020 was published in March 2021, several months after data collection and when report drafting was already at an advanced stage; this limited opportunities for triangulation and analysis of 2020 data. Finally, some stakeholders were unavailable during the data collection stage. However, the evaluation team considers that the data available and sites visited were sufficient to allow for evidence-based analysis.













Context

4. The Gambia is the smallest country on mainland Africa and has an estimated population of 2.3 million (World Bank, 2018). Although poverty is concentrated in rural areas,² it is increasingly seen in the capital and surroundings. The Human Development Report 2019 by the United Nations Development Programme reports rates of severe multidimensional poverty as high as 32 percent. An important feature of poverty is gender inequality, as women constitute the majority of the poor. Gender-based violence is an important issue.
5. Agriculture is the main economic activity, employing 70 percent of the population. Production is predominantly from subsistence farming and has stagnated or even declined,³ currently covering 50 percent of domestic food requirements. This trend has been attributed to macroeconomic conditions, poor infrastructure, recurrent droughts and floods, and soil degradation.

²The Gambia Bureau of Statistics. 2020. *Population and Demography*. The national bureau of statistics estimates the urban poverty rate at 31.6 percent in 2015/16, while rural poverty stands at 69.5 percent.

³ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. 2020. [Gambia at a glance webpage](#).

6. Food insecurity remains a major economic and social problem in the Gambia, disproportionately affecting rural households. In the 2020 Global Hunger Index the country ranks 67 out of the 107 countries for which sufficient data were available to permit calculation of 2020 scores.⁴ Malnutrition is also a major public health problem, with the national stunting level at 19 percent.⁵ The data reveal significant regional and gender disparities, with stunting levels over 5 percent higher among males and in rural areas.

TABLE 1: SOCIOECONOMIC INDICATORS			
	Indicator	Year	Value
	Total population (2)	2018	2 280 102
	GDP per capita (2)	2018	USD 716.10
	Agriculture as share of GDP (2)	2019	16.7 percent
	Share of population in urban areas (1)	2018	61.3 percent
	Human Development Index (score) (1)	2018	0.466
	Share of population vulnerable to multidimensional poverty (1)	2018	21.8 percent
	Population in severe multidimensional poverty (1)	2018	32 percent
	Prevalence of moderate and severe stunting (height-for-age), children age 0–4 (3)	2018	19 percent
	Prevalence of HIV in population age 15–49 (2)	2018	0.3 percent
	Gender Inequality Index (score) (1)	2018	0.620
	Share of population age 25+ with at least secondary education (1)	2018	Both sexes: 36.8 percent Women: 30.7 percent Men: 43.6 percent
	Labour force participation (share of population age 15+) (modelled International Labour Organization estimate) (2)	2019	59.6 percent

Sources: (1) United Nations Development Programme. *Human Development Report, 2017 and 2019*; (2) World Bank. *World Development Indicators*; (3) United Nations Children's Fund. *The State of the World's Children*.

Country strategic plans

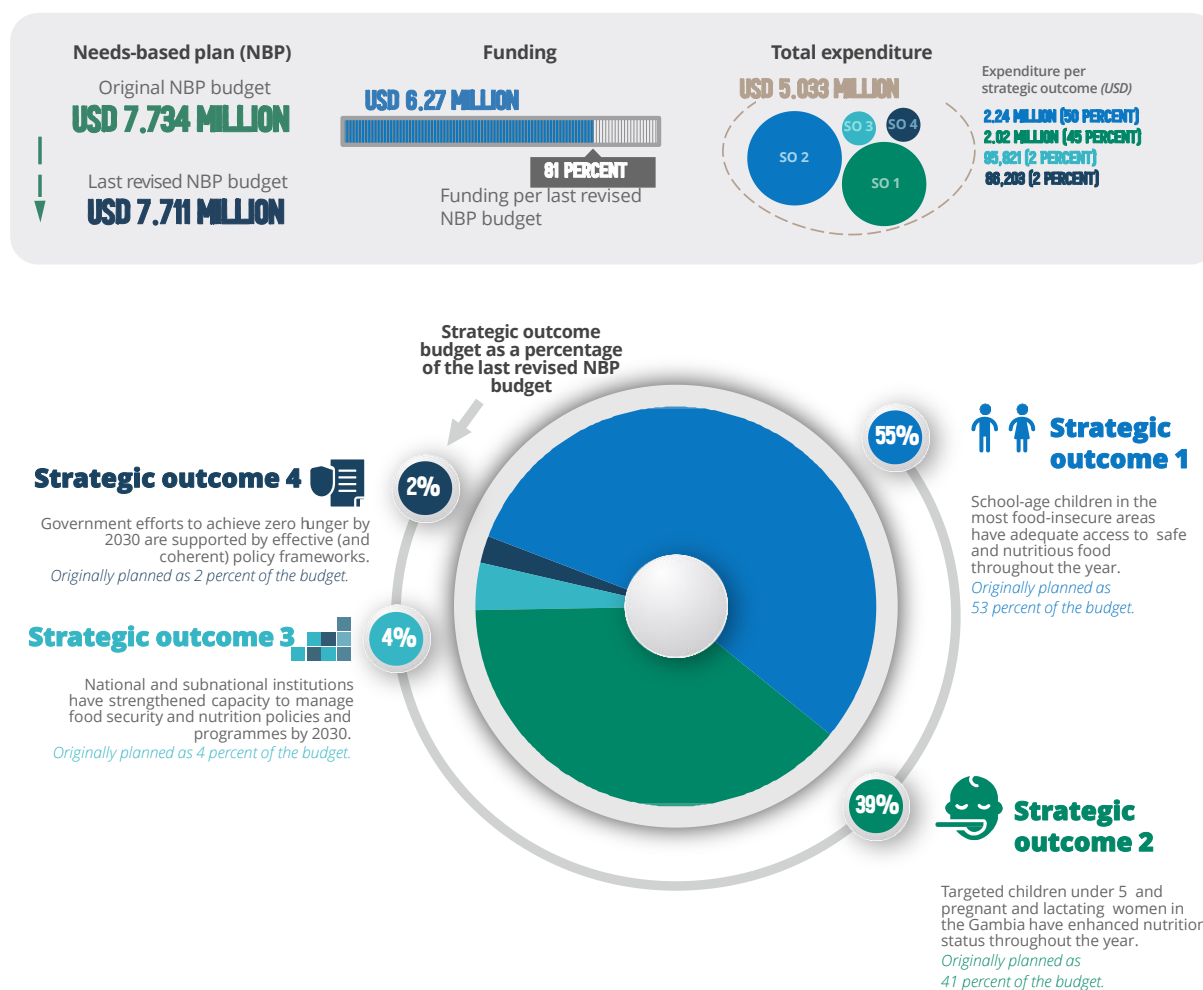
7. Since 1970 WFP has supported school meals, livelihood programmes, nutrition activities and emergency preparedness and response for drought and floods under various projects in the Gambia.

⁴ Concern Worldwide and Welthungerhilfe. 2020. [Global Hunger Index. The Gambia](#).

⁵ United Nations Children's Fund. 2019. [The Gambia Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2018](#).

8. With the introduction of WFP's Integrated Road Map (IRM), the T-ICSP was developed in 2018 with four strategic outcomes (figure 1). Initially, the T-ICSP had a budget of USD 7.734 million to cover assistance for 164,000 beneficiaries. Following evidence of a fall in acute malnutrition rates among children under 5, WFP subsequently revised the T-ICSP to reduce the budget to USD 7.711 million, reflecting a reduced planned beneficiary caseload of 146,000. The T-ICSP was funded with USD 6.27 million, which covered 81 percent of the needs-based plan presented in the revision.

Figure 1: The Gambia T-ICSP (2018): strategic outcomes, budget, funding and expenditures

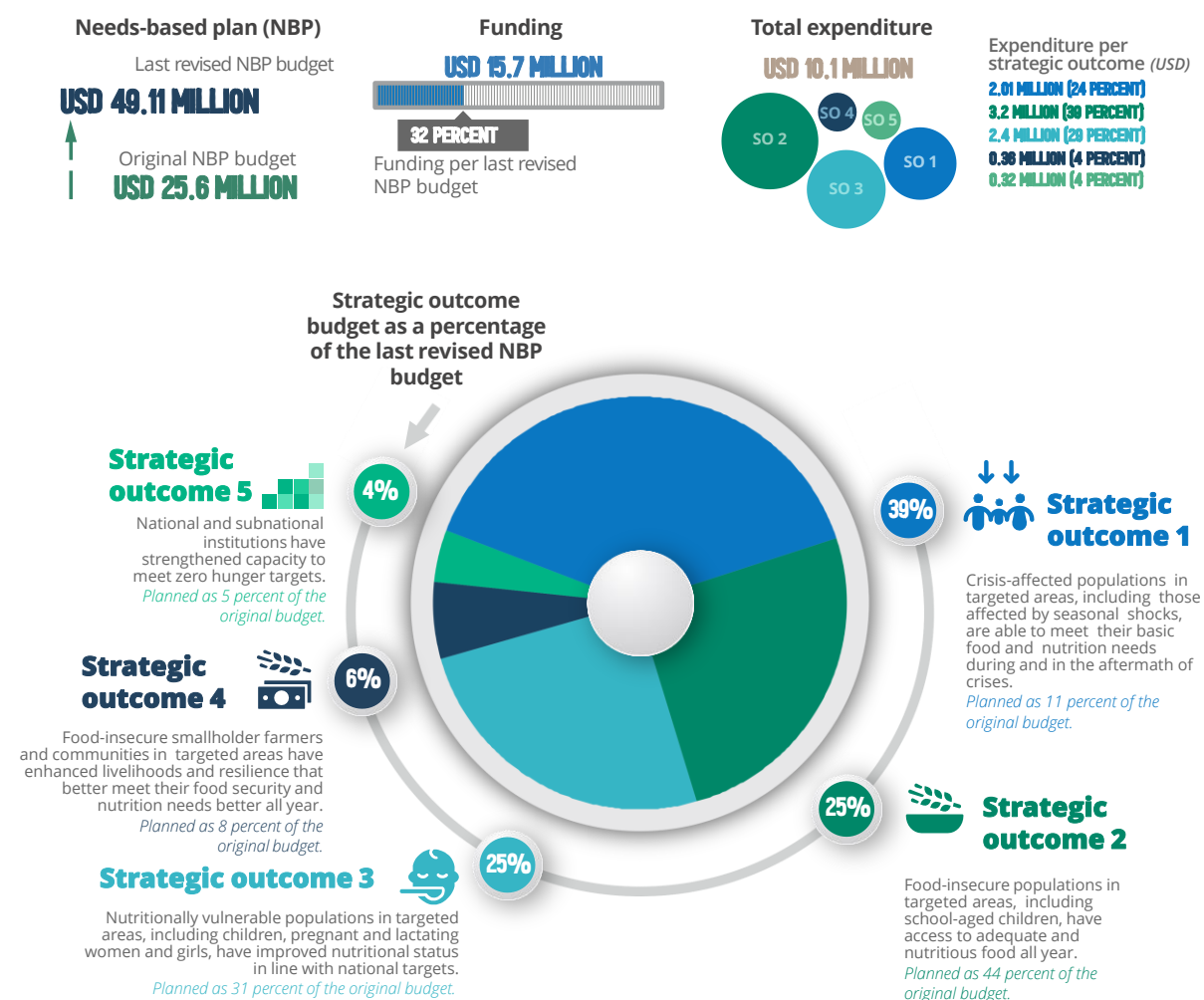


Sources: T-ICSP country portfolio budget (January 2018); CSP revision 1 (April 2018); FACTory CSP resource situation (December 2018).

9. The CSP for 2019–2021 was informed by a government-led zero hunger strategic review undertaken in 2018. It is a continuation of T-ICSP activities, with greater emphasis on capacity strengthening in all its strategic areas. It also includes strategic outcomes related to emergency response and support for smallholder farmer livelihoods and resilience (figure 2). Implementation of the CSP commenced with an initial budget of USD 25.6 million and plans to reach 159,000 beneficiaries, but it was revised twice, mainly to address drought in July 2019 and the COVID-19 pandemic in July 2020. The revisions increased the country portfolio budget to USD 49.11 million, with the aim of reaching 733,000 beneficiaries and resulted in activities under strategic outcome 1 constituting a much larger share of the CSP than originally planned. Resource mobilization was satisfactory in 2019 but funding was particularly low in 2020, covering just 32 percent of the revised needs-based plan. This is partly due to the late confirmation and availability of resources to meet the large budget increase, which covered COVID-19 response activities under strategic outcomes 1

and 3. Funding sources for the CSP include the European Commission, the Government of the Gambia, the Republic of Korea, the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund, other United Nations funds, the Emerging Donor Matching Fund and additional flexible funds.

Figure 2: CSP for the Gambia (2019–2021): strategic outcomes, budget, funding and expenditures⁶



Sources: CSP country portfolio budget (30 October 2018); CSP revision 2 (24 June 2020); annual country reports for 2019 and 2020; FACTory CSP resource situation (extracted on 10 October 2020).

Evaluation findings

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

- The design of the CSP is largely informed by the zero hunger strategic review, which was led by government agencies and included extensive consultations with national and regional institutions. With the review as its foundation, the CSP is strongly aligned with the national development plan and national policies on social protection, disaster risk management, climate change, gender equality and the empowerment of women (GEWE), education, nutrition and school feeding. The evaluation identified two gaps in CSP alignment with national policies: the CSP does not address overweight or obesity issues; and it omits

⁶ Activities were classified under different strategic outcomes for the T-ICSP and the CSP. For ease of reference, the classification in the CSP has been used throughout this report.

activities in support of agricultural processing, in which women play a particularly important role.

11. Well aligned with WFP policies, the CSP shifted the organization's focus towards capacity and national system strengthening. However, it was not based on a comprehensive capacity gap assessment and the corresponding long-term objectives were not clearly defined.
12. The CSP strategic outcomes and activities are justified by clearly identified and evidence-based needs related to food insecurity, malnutrition, recurrent shocks and access to education. WFP is present in the four regions with the highest levels of food insecurity and malnutrition and the lowest educational performance.
13. Overall, WFP has proven highly capable of adapting to change in context and has succeeded in keeping the CSP relevant to government priorities. Coverage of crisis response activities varied significantly over the years and has mostly been resource driven. While crisis response was absent from the T-ICSP, this was remedied in the CSP with a dedicated strategic outcome. Crisis response needs continued to be underestimated, but the country office was able to scale up its response through CSP revisions in 2019 and 2020.
14. Coverage of school feeding is adequate but targeting is based on feasibility and does not consider education or food security needs. The coverage of nutrition activities is consistent with identified needs. The CSP does not provide a clear targeting strategy for resilience building and does not include the consultative three-pronged approach, which is well adapted to resilience programming and widely used elsewhere by WFP.
15. The CSP shows a high level of coherence and alignment with the United Nations development assistance framework for the Gambia and the outcomes of United Nations studies and assessments. Moreover, WFP has played an active role in the United Nations country team and in several joint initiatives. The evaluation found potential for further collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) supporting agricultural value chains linked to home-grown school feeding (HGSF).

What is the extent and quality of WFP's specific contribution to T-ICSP and CSP strategic outcomes in the Gambia?

Delivery of outputs and contribution to outcomes

16. Performance related to CSP output delivery and outcome-related achievements varied between 2018 and 2020.

TABLE 2: T-ICSP BENEFICIARY DATA FOR 2018 BY STRATEGIC OUTCOME AND ACTIVITY*							
Strategic outcome	Activity	Planned		Actual		% achieved	
		M	F	M	F	M	F
1: School feeding	School meals	41 167	58 579	63 988	68 680	155	117
2: Nutrition programming	Malnutrition prevention	14 700	15 300	13 407	15 738	91	103
	Malnutrition treatment	2 400	10 100	1 488	21 168	62	210

Source: 2018 annual country report.

* The table only presents strategic outcomes with beneficiaries, i.e. outcomes 1 and 2.

Strategic outcome	2019 planned		2019 actual		2020 planned after CSP revision 2		2020 actual after CSP revision 2	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
1: Crisis Response	62 195	64 733	62 178	66 022	349 113	384 153	24 093	25 063
2: School feeding	55 736	61 020	73 545	77 456	39 053	40 648	71 673	84 138
3: Nutrition programming	17 069	20 532	18 516	24 160	51 980	77 849	3 949	15 725
4: Smallholder resilience	0	0	0	0	22 510	23 510	20 510	20 510

Sources: CSP revision 2; CM-R002b; WFP COMET.

* The figures included in this table may reflect overlaps in terms of beneficiaries.

Note: There were no planned beneficiaries in 2019 under strategic outcome 4.

Crisis response (strategic outcome 1)

17. In line with the T-ICSP, WFP did not assist crisis-affected populations in 2018. However, support was provided to the national disaster management agency for the development of contingency and community action plans. The CSP did include a strategic outcome related to crisis response, although its budget was initially underestimated. Nevertheless, WFP managed to scale up food and cash transfers to assist people affected by erratic rainfall and windstorms. Good quality outputs were delivered thanks to good coordination among partners. WFP also used an innovative e-money mechanism with the support of a mobile money network to deliver cash in a timely manner. The reach of the social and behaviour change communication (SBCC) activities that accompanied distributions fell short of expectations, partly because the village support groups undertaking them had too many households to visit. At the outcome level, WFP assistance did not prevent a slight worsening of food consumption and dietary diversity in 2019 compared to 2018, although there was a partial recovery in 2020. There was no notable change over these three years in the frequency with which beneficiaries had to resort to negative food-related coping strategies. In 2020, technical assistance provided for the Government's COVID-19 response was largely effective, although related WFP household transfers were delayed due to the slow confirmation and arrival of resources, with distributions under strategic outcome 1 taking place in late 2020. This explains the very low proportion of beneficiaries reached before year-end compared to the target. On the positive side, the delay helped to avoid duplicating assistance provided through the major response initiatives of other actors.

School feeding (strategic outcome 2)

18. Under strategic outcome 2, clear progress on output performance was recorded during the CSP periods. Cash-based transfers (CBTs) to schools and local procurement resulted in more diversified meals using local fresh food items adapted to the local diet, thus improving the nutritional value of school meals. The evaluation identified further opportunities for enhancing nutrition-sensitive approaches, in addition to a promising food fortification pilot project already under way. Communities expressed high satisfaction with the quality of

school meals and the usefulness of the take-home rations provided as part of the COVID-19 response but voiced concerns about the size of rations and how often they were distributed.

19. The evaluation team could not draw conclusions regarding WFP's specific contribution to outcome performance across the CSP due to a lack of data and the impossibility of disaggregating monitoring data for government- and WFP-supported schools. However, the aggregated data indicate increased enrolment and primary level completion, a reduction in school dropouts and an almost complete elimination of gender disparities at lower levels of basic education. Furthermore, information collected through key informants during the evaluation suggests that better learning outcomes are being achieved at WFP-assisted schools.
20. Although WFP was not able to deliver all technical assistance planned under strategic outcome 2, significant progress has been made in strengthening the capacity of the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education since 2017 in the areas of planning, budgeting, supply chains, information management, coordination, monitoring and evaluation, and handover preparations. Formally, the school feeding programme has been handed over to the Government in two of the six regions assisted by WFP. However, more capacity strengthening is required to facilitate the transition to full government ownership of the HGSF programme (see paragraph 28).

Nutrition (strategic outcome 3)

21. Targeted and blanket supplementary feeding and SBCC activities under strategic outcome 3 met or even exceeded targets in 2018 and 2019; however, 2020 targets for food distribution could not be achieved because of the late arrival of funding. Training was delivered effectively, although topics such as monitoring and evaluation, reporting and stock management were not covered.
22. The contribution of WFP outputs to the achievement of targets formulated at the outcome level under strategic outcome 3 varied. The target of achieving a beneficiary recovery rate of over 75 percent for moderate acute malnutrition treatment activities was achieved in 2018; the target was almost achieved in 2019 but could not be met in 2020 because of insufficient supplies of ready-to-use supplementary food and fortified food. Programme coverage and adherence scored highly in 2018 and 2019. However, the percentage of children with a minimum acceptable diet was only reported for 2018 and fell significantly short of targets.
23. The synergistic implementation of WFP activities and those of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and FAO helped to reduce global acute malnutrition and stunting rates. WFP activities implemented under the post-crisis response programme were complemented by UNICEF SBCC activities and activities for people with severe and acute malnutrition; meanwhile, FAO complemented WFP nutrition programming with activities that sought to enhance food security.

Smallholder farmer support and community resilience (strategic outcome 4)

24. Activities in support of food-insecure smallholder farmers met expectations under the T-ICSP; however, from 2019 onwards the activity portfolio under strategic outcome 4 was limited and implementation in the field only started in the last quarter of 2020, once funding was available. Support provided to farmers through the school feeding programme was considered very productive and innovative, although there were a number of bottlenecks at the field level: administrative requirements for local suppliers to access the HGSF programme were excessively complex and there were inadequacies in the design of pricing and payment mechanisms. However, women were involved in gardening activities supplying vegetables to schools and local markets.

25. The sole contribution that was received for strategic outcome 4 in 2019 was earmarked for technical support under the African Risk Capacity. Early warning activities are a critical part of African Risk Capacity support; opportunities to work through government systems for these activities have not been fully grasped.

Capacity strengthening (strategic outcome 5)

26. Activities under strategic outcome 5 seek to strengthen the capacity of national and subnational institutions by providing capacity support in the various areas of the CSP portfolio. WFP does not have a clearly laid-out capacity development strategy for all strategic outcomes or a comprehensive map of country capacity gaps or predictable requirements that could be used to define a strategic capacity strengthening approach. WFP also lacks a suitable framework and system for monitoring processes and results in this area.
27. Notable achievements in capacity strengthening included WFP's contribution to the formulation and review of the school feeding policy, the nutrition policy, the social protection strategy and the natural disaster preparedness and response strategy. WFP also supported the Cost of Hunger in Africa study; provided technical and financial contributions for the Gambia micronutrient survey; promoted rice and salt fortification; supported Scaling Up Nutrition processes; advised on the formulation of an Adaptation Fund project; and helped streamline methodologies for and conduct national food security vulnerability assessments, among other activities.
28. WFP handed over the HGSP programme to the Government in two regions but with considerable gaps in terms of budget, food quality and monitoring, which were not clearly identified in the handover road map. Functional committees at the middle and senior management levels of the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education required further support.
29. Capacity strengthening in the area of nutrition would have benefitted from a clearer formulation of goals and objectives and a better description of how the implementation of WFP nutrition programming related to national needs. There are opportunities to broaden the scope of capacity strengthening related to nutrition, including through activities that enhance national monitoring, evaluation and reporting systems, and improve stock management.

Gender equality and the empowerment of women

30. Although the country office had limited capacity for gender mainstreaming, the arrival of an experienced gender focal point in the second half of 2019 facilitated the start of an internal capacity strengthening process and the development of a GEWE action plan in 2020. WFP supported the revision of the national gender policy, which began in 2020.
31. As with other cross-cutting issues, performance on gender-related approaches and activities was only partially measured and achievements were mixed. Relatively good results were achieved regarding gender mainstreaming in schools and on school feeding committees. Other activities included an assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on urban women and the development of a project with the Government to benefit women at fish-landing sites, which could be replicated in other situations in which women are involved in food processing.
32. Gender was well mainstreamed in funding proposals related to strategic outcome 4; however, nutrition activities were not informed by gender analysis. GEWE objectives in the CSP did not take gender-based violence into account.

Accountability to affected populations, protection and environment

33. Although WFP came close to achieving its targets related to communication with beneficiaries about its programmes, beneficiaries would have appreciated a more consultative approach before assistance was delivered. A beneficiary complaint and feedback system functioned with gender-sensitive standard operating procedures and was effective in swiftly addressing issues during the distribution of rations during the lean season and at schools.
34. WFP included protection considerations in country capacity strengthening (CCS) activities and applied protection measures during distributions, taking into account particularly vulnerable groups. It paid limited attention to environmental considerations.

Sustainability and the triple nexus approach

35. Although gains achieved through the capacity strengthening activities conducted with the National Disaster Management Agency could be sustained, the capacity of the Government is still insufficient to support a complete handover of the management and the operational responsibility of the school feeding programme. Additional capacity strengthening would be needed to sustain the CBT and local procurement modalities. Ensuring the long-term benefits of nutrition activities would require an exit strategy, priority setting and resource mobilization.
36. As a well-respected leader in the humanitarian field, WFP has increasingly facilitated understanding of the links between crisis response, disaster risk reduction and nutrition-sensitive activities. Its work with CBTs, reconciliation-oriented food-for-asset activities and local procurement involving smallholder farmers have helped to connect humanitarian work with development and peacebuilding and address community tensions caused by climate change impacts.

To what extent has WFP used its resources efficiently in contributing to T-ICSP and CSP outputs and strategic outcomes?

Timeliness

37. Crisis and lean season response activities were implemented in a timely manner, except for transfers for the 2020 lean season and the COVID-19 response. No major delays were recorded for other strategic outcomes, although timeliness could be improved for activities such as SBCC and CBTs to schools. For the latter, the frequency and promptness of transfers did not always allow for the full participation of local smallholder farmers.
38. It took close to two years for WFP to draw up detailed plans for certain elements of the CSP, notably the integration of strategic outcomes and activities and a more ambitious gender approach.

Cost efficiency

39. The level of utilization of received resources was relatively high in 2018, but a large proportion of funds allocated to 2019 and 2020 became available late and had to be carried over to the following years.
40. In 2018 and 2019, the relatively stable direct support costs were slightly lower than those for CSPs for comparable countries in the region. Food and CBT costs per quantity and amount distributed rose significantly in 2019 due to higher supply chain costs triggered by the decision to distribute smaller quantities and amounts to more beneficiaries. Despite the increase, the cost per beneficiary was still lower than originally planned throughout the three years under evaluation. The choice of transfer modality was not based on a systematic cost-effectiveness analysis but on the situation of markets (strategic outcome 1) and government capacity for the distribution of CBTs (strategic outcome 2).

Figure 3: Food transfers 2018–2020: cost per metric ton (USD)

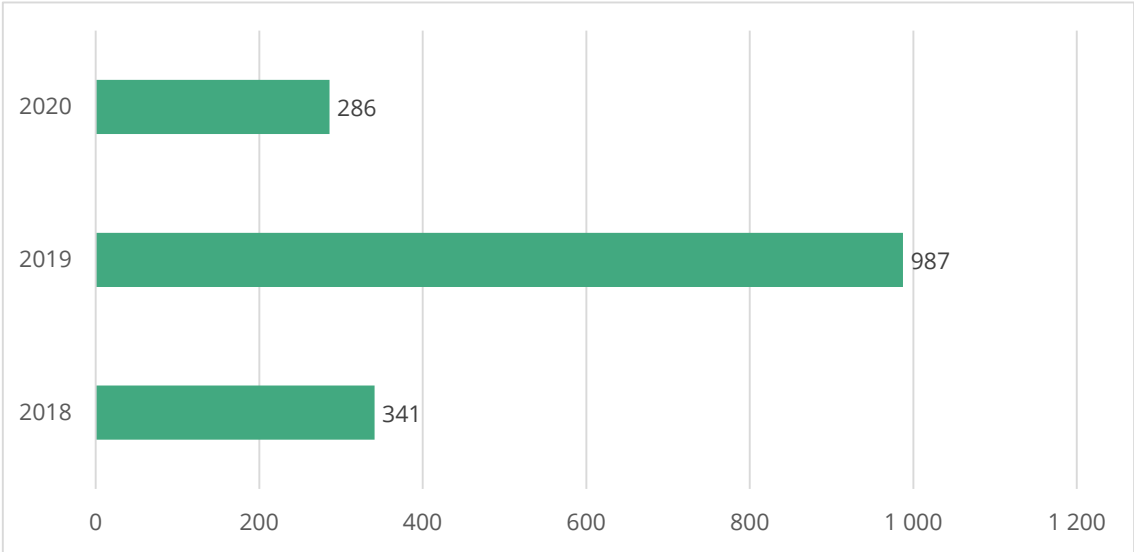
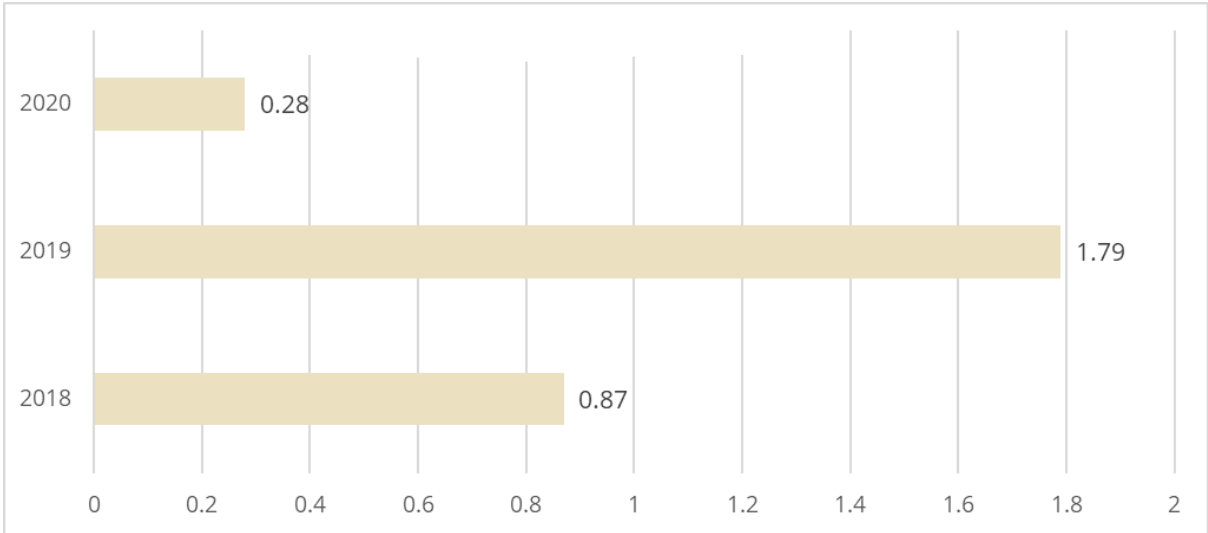


Figure 4: Cash-based transfers 2018–2020: average transfer value (USD)



Sources: Annual country reports for 2018, 2019 and 2020 for quantity and amount values; country portfolio budget plan vs. actual report, IRM funds management software, for cost values.

What are the factors that explain WFP performance and the extent to which the T-ICSP and CSP have resulted in the expected strategic shift?

- 41. Under each of the five strategic outcomes, WFP has strengthened and diversified its strategic partnerships with existing and new government agencies and with other United Nations entities. WFP participates fully in the United Nations “Delivering as One” approach. However, the evaluation team found that the Ministry of Agriculture and FAO were insufficiently involved in the HGSP programme at the national and regional levels.
- 42. The main sources of funding for the CSP have been the European Commission, the governments of the Gambia and the Republic of Korea, the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund and other United Nations funds, the Emerging Donor Matching Fund and additional flexible funds. These contributions have adequately supported the T-ICSP and CSP. While CCS activities were overfunded, resilience activities under the CSP encountered funding challenges in 2019. The scale-up in response to the COVID-19 pandemic was not funded sufficiently or swiftly enough. WFP activities in the Gambia were

largely supported by multi-year contributions, which allowed for long-term planning; however, most funding was heavily earmarked by donors, reducing flexibility.

43. Implementation of the CSP was also hampered by COVID-19-related restrictions imposed by the Government; the slow pace of staff capacity alignment, which started in 2018 and continued until the first quarter of 2020; and deficient performance monitoring, in particular with regard to capacity strengthening outcomes.

Conclusions

44. The T-ICSP and CSP for the Gambia had strategic objectives and activities that were highly relevant to country priorities and to the needs of the most vulnerable; the plans also served to position WFP as an important player in efforts to achieve zero hunger in the country. The CSP also allowed WFP to strengthen and diversify its partnership with key national institutions and with sister United Nations agencies.
45. WFP has played an enabling role in the policy sphere through the stronger emphasis on CCS introduced through the CSP. Connections were established between activities that address root causes and those emanating from WFP's comparative advantage as a humanitarian actor.
46. With recurrent shocks affecting the country, it was appropriate to include a strategic outcome related to crisis response in the CSP. However, the volume of crisis response activities was underestimated, leading WFP to revise the CSP budget twice in response to increased needs.
47. Notwithstanding overstretched response capacity, WFP proved able to adapt on various fronts, especially during the COVID-19 crisis. WFP successfully changed its working procedures to accommodate COVID-19-related restrictions by introducing remote working systems and rolling out the WFP mobile vulnerability analysis and mapping data collection tool. Its programmatic response included the provision of technical assistance in support of the Government's COVID-19 response to assist all food-insecure people; WFP also prepared additional transfers for the food-insecure population. Due to delayed funding, these activities only started in late 2020; however, the delay helped to avoid duplication of partner initiatives. Unclear progress was made towards the food security outcomes planned for the crisis-affected populations who received assistance. Technological innovations were commendable, but a system for determining the most effective transfer modality (food or cash) was still being developed.
48. Coverage of the Gambia's school feeding programme, the largest safety net in the country, was close to set targets, yet the selection of schools did not consider educational or food security criteria. School meals became more diversified under the CSP and take-home rations distributed during the COVID-19 pandemic were highly appreciated, even though beneficiaries considered that the rations had fallen short of household needs.
49. Resource shortfalls and insufficient coordination with United Nations and government partners prevented the country office from adequately supporting smallholder farmers in supplying food to schools. Support for those farmers would require a more comprehensive approach, including helping women to play a more prominent role in food value chains.
50. The handover of two regions to the national HGSP programme was commendable, yet capacity gaps remain. The handover of an additional region to the Government as planned in the CSP has been hampered by critical capacity and financial constraints. Capacity gaps in the areas of management, planning, finance, human resources, monitoring

and evaluation, and resource mobilization must be properly assessed, and planned coverage should reflect available resources.

51. WFP's nutrition activities were deemed relevant to national priorities and needs, except for the omission of overweight and obesity. Although output targets were reached, reporting, albeit incomplete, pointed at uneven outcome performance. The synergistic approach combining WFP's nutrition activities with partner interventions seemed to have contributed to reduced global acute malnutrition rates. However, poor results were achieved in terms of the percentage of children consuming a minimum acceptable diet.⁷ Funding shortfalls since 2020 have driven the country office to prioritize resource mobilization for nutrition activities.
52. No community resilience activities were planned for the first year of the CSP and in 2020 the implementation of such activities was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. For the remainder of the CSP, the prospects for diversified funding are good and should allow WFP to address needs in terms of protecting livelihoods and building resilience.
53. Despite the strategic importance of WFP's contribution to CCS, the CSP lacked a well-articulated capacity strengthening strategy with clearly identified gaps, long-term objectives and intervention pathways. The absence of an adequate monitoring and evaluation system for measuring progress in this area made it difficult for the evaluation team to draw conclusions regarding CSP achievements beyond the output level.
54. Apart from gender-based violence, GEWE objectives were well mainstreamed into the CSP design and a number of approaches and activities were conducted, with mixed results. Country office capacity was initially inadequate for implementing its ambitious plans; however, in 2020 a gender focal point and GEWE action plan were put in place to help mainstream gender across activities.
55. Slow alignment of staff capacities with those needed to deliver on CSP priorities may have contributed to the late development of certain key elements of the CSP such as the integrated approach to the five strategic outcomes at the regional and community levels and the GEWE action plan.
56. Despite some exceptions, WFP's country office in the Gambia has been relatively well resourced, with generous contributions received in support of WFP's shift towards an enabling role, assisting the Government in addressing food security and nutrition needs. However, funding was low in 2020 due to the late confirmation and availability of resources to support the large scale-up of crisis response and nutrition programming required to respond to the COVID-19 crisis.

⁷Data on minimum acceptable diet were only reported for 2018.

Recommendations

#	Recommendation	Type	Responsibility	By when
1	<p>Continue to support the thematic areas in the CSP for 2019–2021, with a strong focus on strengthening national capacity and systems, introducing some adjustments to increase their alignment with national priorities and needs.</p> <p>1.1 Expand the strategic outcome related to crisis response to cover a higher caseload than provided for in the original country portfolio budget in order to ensure that appropriate country office structures are in place to respond to shocks and simultaneously implement activities that improve resilience and address root causes.</p> <p>1.2 Continue to support the handover of the school feeding programme, with an emphasis on consolidating the HGSP programme with CBTs and national resource mobilization. Assess capacity gaps with the Government in order to strengthen the technical skills required to support Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education structures, systems and procedures related to management, planning, finance, human resources, monitoring and evaluation and resource mobilization. Engage with other partners who have been on the periphery such as the Ministry of Agriculture and FAO. Engage in policy dialogue with sectors involved in the school feeding programme on the appropriate and realistic coverage of the programme and targeting criteria.</p> <p>1.3 Integrate the challenge of overweight and obesity into the nutrition package and across the CSP and promote collaboration with actors working on the issue.</p> <p>1.4 Integrate food processing as a key potential element of value chains in which women can play an important role. Continue to support the local production of nutritious food products and mainstream nutrition into agriculture and food systems.</p> <p>1.5 Continue to support the social protection agenda as a broad framework for integrating WFP activities and promote the construction of national systems for addressing food insecurity and malnutrition.</p> <p>1.6 Promote a lesson-learning exercise on the response to COVID-19 in order to strengthen relations and coordinated programming with key actors.</p>	Strategic	<p>Country office (Regional Bureau for Western Africa (RBD), Nutrition Division (NUT))</p> <p>Country office (RBD)</p> <p>Country office</p> <p>Country office (RBD, NUT)</p> <p>Country office</p> <p>Country office</p> <p>Country office</p>	<p>Next CSP</p> <p>Next CSP</p> <p>Next CSP</p> <p>Next CSP</p> <p>From 2021 into next CSP</p> <p>2021</p>

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2	<p>Draw up a capacity strengthening strategy for the next CSP.</p> <p>2.1 Devise theories of change and identify long-term objectives and pathways for the national systems supported by WFP: disaster risk management, nutrition systems and social protection, in particular school feeding programmes.</p> <p>2.2 Carry out capacity assessments rooted in the theories of change in order to identify capacity gaps that need to be addressed in the short, medium and long term.</p> <p>2.3 Draw up a capacity strengthening strategy that includes a coherent combination of resources, partners and methods.</p> <p>2.4 Improve the coherence and clarity of the structure of the CSP: consider fully mainstreaming CCS into thematic strategic outcomes in order to integrate capacity strengthening with direct implementation and increase reporting clarity.</p> <p>2.5 Strengthen country office CCS expertise by creating a position for an experienced CCS specialist and with continued support from the regional bureau and headquarters.</p>	Strategic	<p>Country office (RBD, Technical Assistance and Country Capacity Strengthening Service – PROT)</p> <p>Country office (RBD, PROT)</p> <p>Country office</p> <p>Country office (RBD, PROT)</p>	<p>2021–2022</p> <p>Next CSP</p> <p>From 2021 into next CSP</p>
3	<p>Continue to strengthen the gender approach used in the CSP in order to make progress towards its gender-transformative objectives.</p> <p>3.1 Continue to develop country office capacity in gender programming; include dedicated budgeting for gender equality activities and consider making the gender officer a full-time role. Reinforce gender mainstreaming as being “everyone’s business”, such as by emphasizing management commitment to GEWE and through the active engagement of CSP activity managers.</p> <p>3.2 Conduct a gender assessment focused on nutrition and household and community practices and norms that affect nutrition outcomes.</p> <p>3.3 Assess the participation of women in value chains, particularly in processing activities, in order to identify potential that can be developed under strategic outcome 4 and possible links with the HGSF programme. Based on the results, develop an activity that supports the participation of groups of women involved in value chains by giving them the opportunity to supply produce for the HGSF programme.</p>	Strategic	<p>Country office (RBD, NUT, Gender Office (GEN))</p> <p>Country office</p> <p>Country office (RBD, GEN, NUT)</p> <p>Country office</p>	<p>From 2021 into next CSP</p> <p>2022</p> <p>2021 and 2022</p>

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4	<p>Strengthen the CSP monitoring and evaluation system to ensure appropriate analysis and reporting of the CSP outputs and outcomes.</p> <p>4.1 Ensure continuity in the measurement of all output and income indicators by maintaining the same indicators throughout the CSP implementation period and through appropriate planning and resources.</p> <p>4.2 Create a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system for CCS aimed at measuring progress based on the theories of change recommended above.</p>	Operational	<p>Country office (RBD, Corporate Planning and Performance Division (CPP), PROT)</p> <p>Country office (RBD, CPP)</p> <p>Country office (RBD, CPP, PROT)</p>	<p>From 2021 into next CSP</p> <p>2022</p>
5	<p>Improve the approach and processes related to local purchases in the HGSP programme in order to increase the opportunities for smallholder farmers to participate in the programme.</p> <p>5.1 In collaboration with FAO and the Ministry of Agriculture, develop the approach for supporting value chains and smallholder farmers by conducting value chain analyses in order to identify bottlenecks that hamper farmer participation in supplying the HGSP programme and take action to address those bottlenecks.</p> <p>5.2 In collaboration with the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education, carry out a cash flow assessment in respect of payment mechanisms with the Government and identify bottlenecks affecting the frequency and timeliness of payments.</p> <p>5.3 In collaboration with the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education and the Ministry of Agriculture, review and simplify the administrative requirements for suppliers.</p> <p>5.4 In collaboration with the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education and the Ministry of Agriculture, review the contracting and pricing system and consider adopting a farming contract approach that includes the negotiation of a fair price for farmers.</p> <p>5.5 Engage with key specialized institutions, in particular the Ministry of Agriculture and FAO, and promote their participation in agriculture-related activities under strategic outcome 4. Involve the Ministry of Agriculture regional directorates in field activities and monitoring.</p>	Operational	<p>Country office</p> <p>Country office</p> <p>Country office</p> <p>Country office</p> <p>Country office</p>	<p>2021 and 2022</p> <p>2022</p> <p>2022</p> <p>2022</p> <p>From 2021 into next CSP</p>

Acronyms

CBT	cash-based transfer
CCS	country capacity strengthening
CPP	Corporate Planning and Performance Division
CSP	country strategic plan
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GEN	Gender Office
GEWE	gender equality and the empowerment of women
HGSF	home-grown school feeding
IRM	Integrated Road Map
NBP	needs-based plan
NUT	Nutrition Division
PROT	Technical Assistance and Country Capacity Strengthening Service
RBD	Regional Bureau for Western Africa
SBCC	social and behaviour change communication
T-ICSP	transitional interim country strategic plan
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund