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## Summary report on the evaluation of the country strategic plan for Zimbabwe (2017–2021)

### Executive summary

The evaluation of the Zimbabwe country strategic plan for 2017–2021 was conducted between September 2020 and May 2021. It assessed WFP's strategic positioning and its contribution to outcomes, the efficiency with which the plan was implemented and the factors explaining WFP's performance. Taking a utilization-focused, consultative approach, it serves the dual purpose of accountability and learning and will inform the preparation of the new country strategic plan for Zimbabwe.

The country strategic plan articulates WFP's increasing focus on building long-term resilience to food insecurity, with six strategic outcomes focused on crisis response, nutrition, livelihoods, resilience, social protection and supply chains.

The evaluation found that the plan was aligned with national policies and was balanced with other strategic considerations, including the priorities of donors and WFP. The country strategic plan was easily adapted to increased needs associated with deteriorating food security and the emergence of the coronavirus disease 2019.

The evaluation revealed that, while overall targeting was broadly appropriate, the targeting of urban assistance beneficiaries was challenging because resources were not sufficient. The country office made useful contributions to the expected outcomes in connection with food security, nutrition and strengthened livelihoods, and resilience building through food assistance for assets activities. The results of efforts to reduce stunting rates were unclear. A comprehensive strategy

*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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for capacity strengthening was not articulated and there was limited progress in broadening the capacity of national institutions.

In general, utilization of resources was timely and effective, and cost efficiency improved in line with economies of scale. The strategy for shifting responsibility from WFP to the Government was, however, inadequately developed and was constrained by an unstable macroeconomic environment coupled with low levels of development assistance.

Programmatic flexibility was reduced due to earmarking of funding, which hampered the progress of several activities (e.g. nutrition activities). Donors remained hesitant to fund development activities given continuing concerns over government transparency and accountability. Overall, the use of monitoring data was heavily oriented towards external reporting and accountability rather than learning.

The evaluation led to the conclusion that WFP maintains a strong comparative advantage as the leading provider of humanitarian assistance in Zimbabwe and was agile in adapting to a very fluid situation, scaling up its emergency assistance rapidly and effectively. The country strategic plan was less successful in creating stronger operational linkages between humanitarian and development activities.

The evaluation generated five recommendations. Two strategic recommendations identify ways for WFP to make the most effective contribution in Zimbabwe, through a more focused strategy organized around WFP's comparative advantages and demonstrated results, with a focus on crisis response and resilience building. The strategic recommendations are complemented by three operational recommendations.

### **Draft decision\***

The Board takes note of the summary report on the evaluation of the country strategic plan for Zimbabwe (2017–2021) (WFP/EB.1/2022/6-E) and management response (WFP/EB.1/2022/6-E/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.

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

## Introduction

### Evaluation features

1. Country strategic plan (CSP) evaluations are the primary instrument for providing accountability and meeting learning needs in accordance with the expectations of the Board and WFP management. They provide evidence of WFP's strategic positioning and results to inform the design of the next generation of CSPs and potentially contribute to the design of United Nations sustainable development cooperation frameworks.
2. The evaluation of the Zimbabwe CSP for 2017–2021 covered WFP interventions between 2015 and 2020 to assess continuity from the previous programme cycle, the extent to which the CSP introduced strategic shifts and the implications of such shifts for performance and results. The users of the evaluation are the WFP country office and its internal and external stakeholders, including beneficiaries.
3. The evaluation adopted a mixed-methods approach and a concurrent triangulation design, drawing on multiple sources of evidence, including documentary evidence, performance data, budget data and key informant interviews. Due to travel restrictions related to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, most of the data was collected remotely, in November and December 2020, although the Zimbabwe-based evaluation team member visited project sites. Findings, conclusions and recommendations were discussed with stakeholders during two online workshops in April 2021.

### Context

4. Zimbabwe is a landlocked, resource-rich, low-income, food-deficit country with a population of 14.9 million<sup>1</sup> that is predominantly rural (68 percent)<sup>2</sup> and young (62 percent under the age of 25).<sup>3</sup>
5. Zimbabwe was hit by several major disasters during the CSP period and as a result has some of the highest levels of food insecurity in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>4</sup> In 10 of the last 11 years, over 1 million people in rural areas have been assessed as requiring food assistance (Figure 1).

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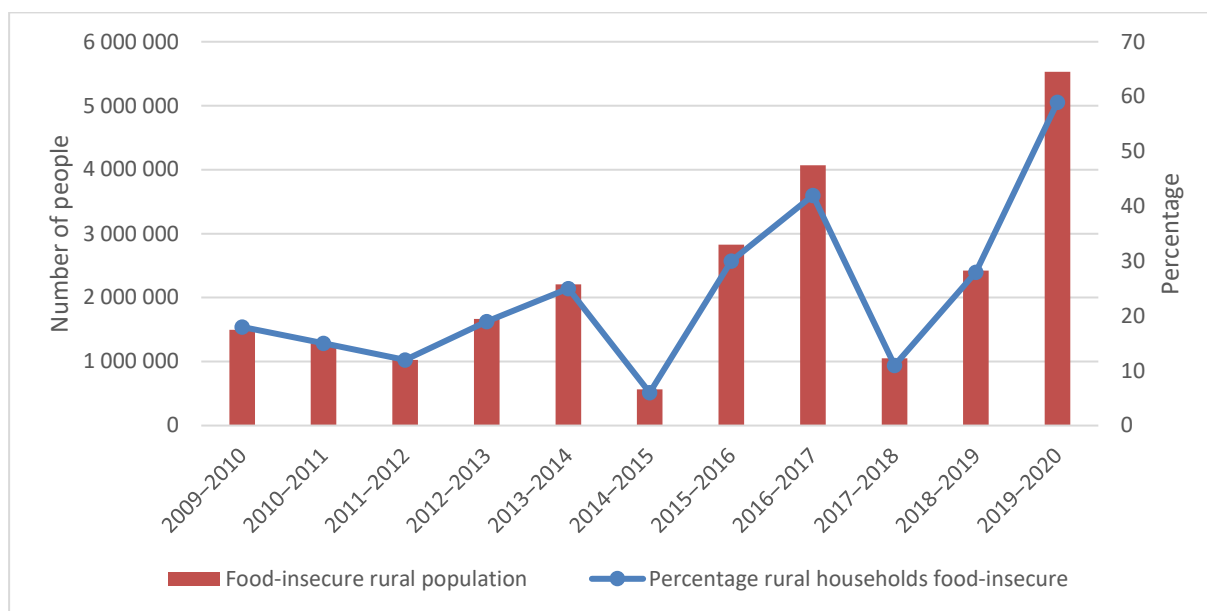
<sup>1</sup> United Nations Population Fund. 2021. [World Population Dashboard](#). (accessed on 28 January 2021).

<sup>2</sup> World Bank Group. 2018. [Rural Population \(% of total population\) – Zimbabwe](#). (accessed on 28 January 2021).

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Population Fund. 2019. [Young People](#). (accessed on 28 January 2021).

<sup>4</sup> World Bank Group. 2019. [Joint Needs Assessment for Zimbabwe: Identifying Challenges and Needs](#).

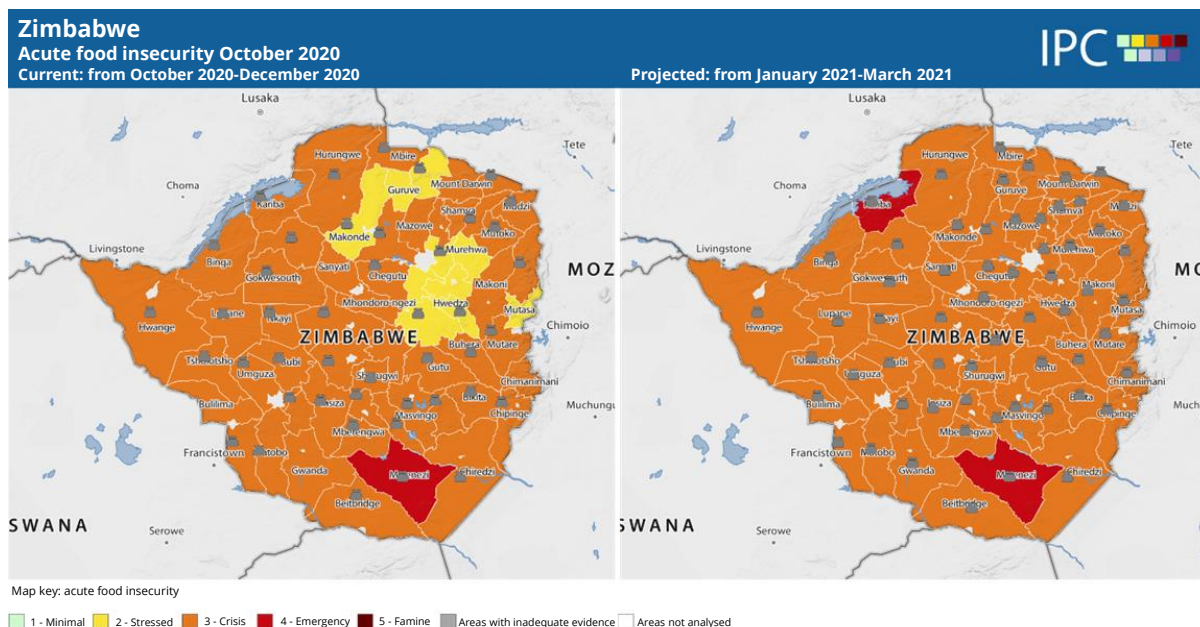
**Figure 1: Rural population assessed as requiring food assistance (2009–2020)**



Source: Evaluation team, calculation based on the Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee Rural Livelihoods Assessment (2009–2019).













- The food security situation in Zimbabwe deteriorated over the period of the CSP. In October 2020, 2.6 million people (27 percent of the analysed population) in rural Zimbabwe were in Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) phase 3 or above, while nearly 2.9 million people (30 percent) were “stressed” (phase 2). By December 2020, the majority of the country was in “crisis” (phase 3 or higher) (see figure 2).

**Figure 2. Zimbabwe food insecurity situation (October–December 2020 (left); January–March 2021 (right))**



Source: IPC. 2020. *Zimbabwe: Acute Food Insecurity Situation October–December 2020 and Projection for January–March 2021*.

7. Gross domestic product is estimated to have contracted by 8.1 percent in 2019, and the recession continued in 2020 due to persistent climate shocks and domestic vulnerabilities worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic. Table 1 sets out various socioeconomic indicators for Zimbabwe in the period covered by the CSP.

TABLE 1: SOCIOECONOMIC INDICATORS			
	Indicator	Value	Year
	Life expectancy at birth (years) <sup>a</sup>	61	2019
	Total fertility rate (per woman) <sup>a</sup>	3.62	2019
	Human development index <sup>b</sup>	0.571	2019
	Annual inflation rate (percentage) <sup>c</sup>	737.3	2020
	Share of agriculture in gross domestic product (percentage) <sup>d</sup>	11	2019
	Population living in poverty (percentage) <sup>e</sup>	70.5	2017
	Gini coefficient <sup>f</sup>	44.3	2017
	People facing acute food insecurity (percentage) <sup>g</sup>	27	2020
	Prevalence of stunting in children under five <sup>h</sup>	23.5	2019
	Percentage of children (6–23 months) consuming minimum acceptable diet <sup>h</sup>	4	2018
	Adult literacy rate (percentage for ages 15 and older) <sup>i</sup>	89	2018
	Gender Inequality Index (country ranking) <sup>b</sup>	129	2019

Sources:

<sup>a</sup> United Nations Population Division. 2019. *World Population Prospects 2019*

<sup>b</sup> United Nations Development Programme. *Human Development Report 2020*.

<sup>c</sup> World Bank Group. 2021. *The World Bank in Zimbabwe*. (Accessed on 28 January 2021).

<sup>d</sup> World Bank Group and Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery. 2019. *Zimbabwe Rapid Impact and Needs Assessment (RINA)*.

<sup>e</sup> Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency. 2018. *Poverty, Income, Consumption and Expenditure Survey – 2017 Report*.

<sup>f</sup> World Bank Group. 2021. *Gini Index (World Bank estimate) – Zimbabwe*. (Accessed on 28 January 2021).

<sup>g</sup> IPC. 2020. *Zimbabwe: Acute Food Insecurity Situation October–December 2020 and Projection for January–March 2021*. (Accessed on 28 January 2021).

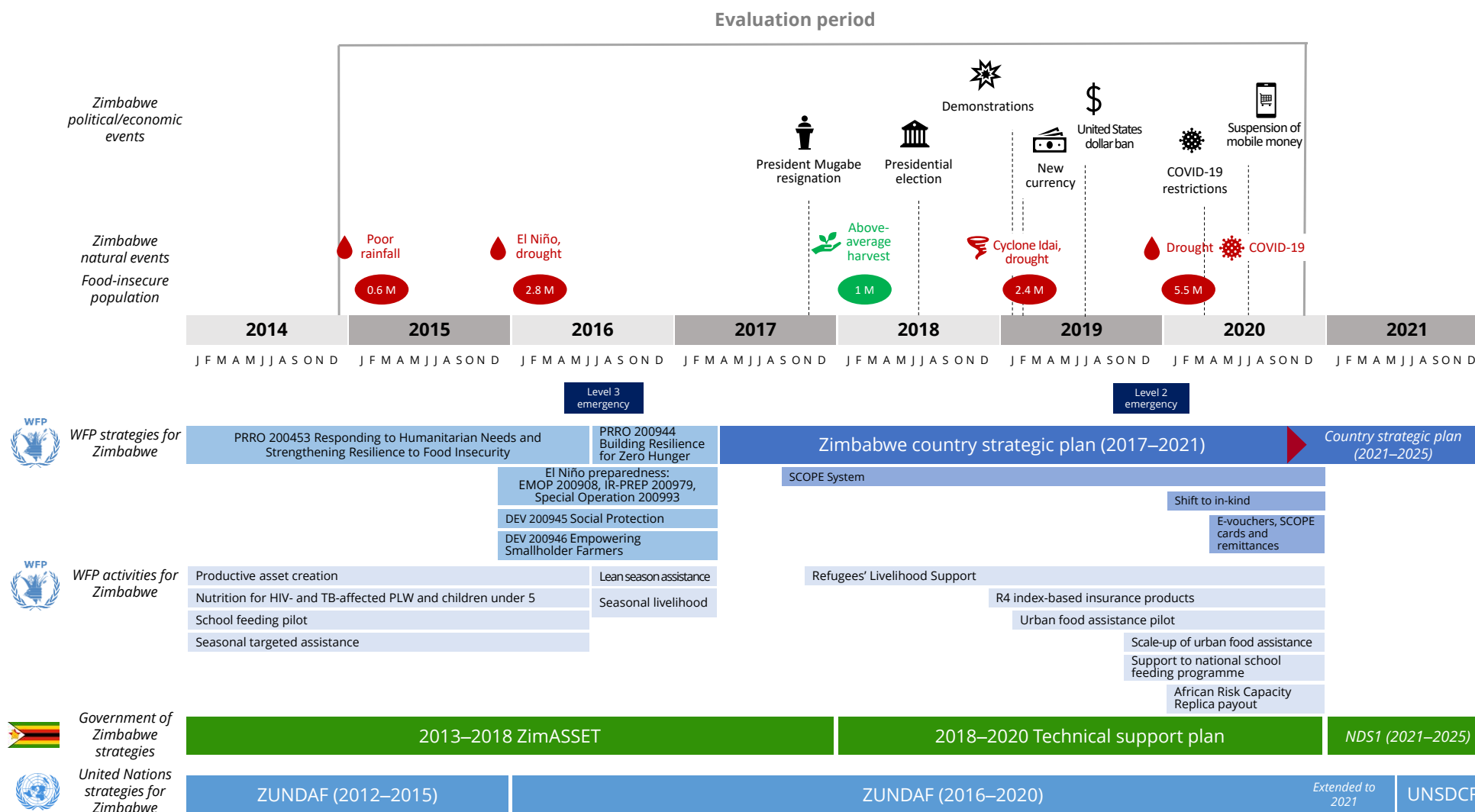
<sup>h</sup> Government of Zimbabwe. 2020. *Zimbabwe Food Security Outlook: Widespread Crisis outcomes (IPC Phase 3) outcomes expected to persist until the harvest in early 2021*.

<sup>i</sup> United Nations Development Programme. *Human Development Reports database*. (Accessed on 13 December 2021).

**Country strategic plan**

8. WFP has operated in Zimbabwe since 1980. Over the last decade, its strategy has shifted from addressing short-term humanitarian needs to building long-term resilience to food insecurity and livelihood vulnerability, with an increasing focus on food assistance for assets, enhanced partnerships and coordination with the national social protection system.
9. The CSP aimed to mitigate the negative impacts of the ongoing economic crisis while supporting long-term national social protection systems and resilience building to achieve zero hunger. Figure 3 illustrates the major changes in the country context, WFP's strategic focus and lines of activity and the United Nations development assistance framework.

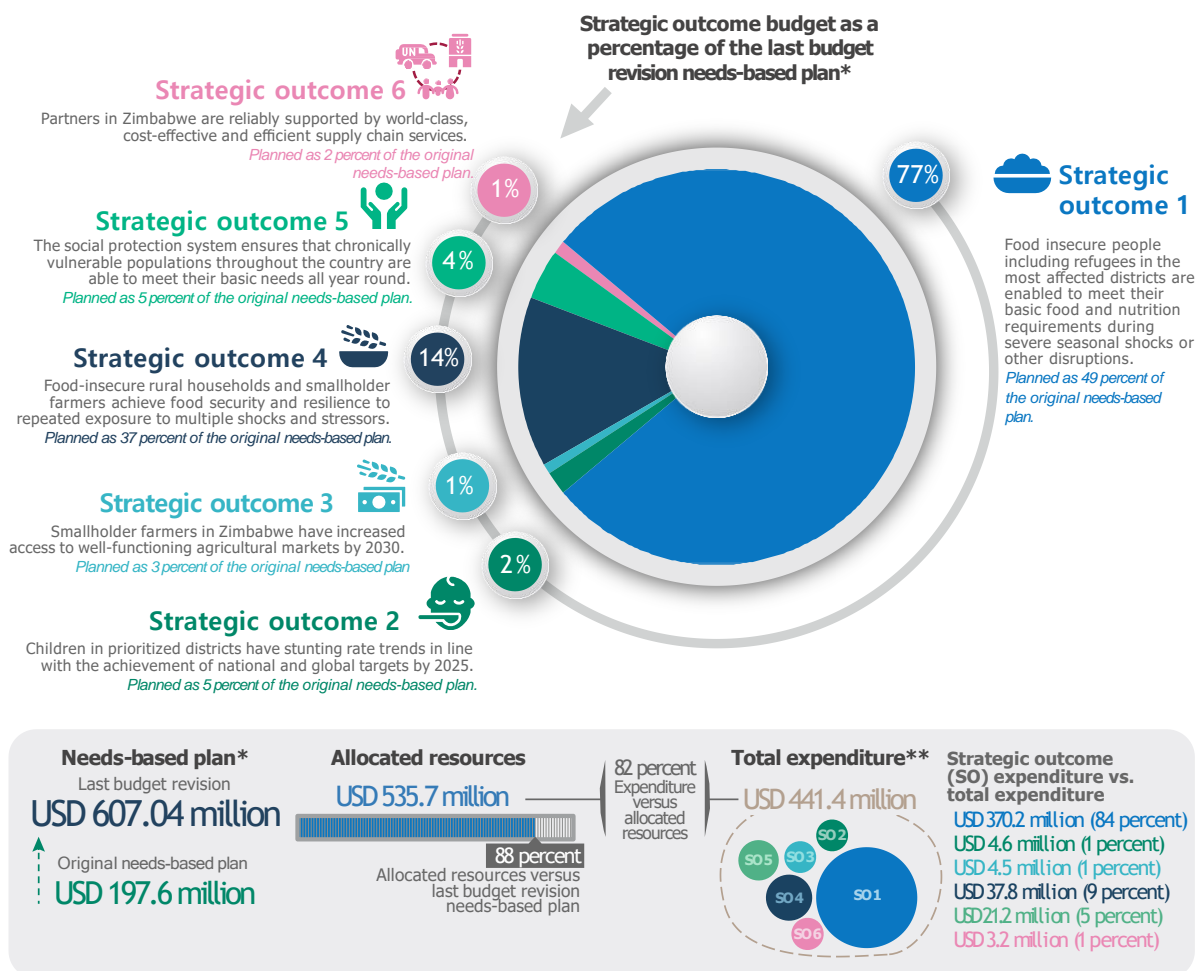
**Figure 3: Overview of major events and policies, WFP strategies and activities and Government of Zimbabwe and United Nations strategies in Zimbabwe (2014–2021)**



Abbreviations: DEV = development project; EMOP = emergency operation; IR-PREP = Immediate Response Preparedness and Response Enhancement Programme; NDS1, National Development Strategy 1; PRRO = protracted relief and recovery operation; UNSDCF, United Nations sustainable development cooperation framework; R4 = Rural Resilience Initiative; SCOPE = WFP's digital beneficiary information and transfer management platform; TB = tuberculosis; ZimASSET = Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation; ZUNDAF = Zimbabwe United Nations Development Assistance Framework.

10. The CSP had an original budget of USD 197.6 million<sup>5</sup> (figure 4) and aimed to reach 792,656 beneficiaries; however, it was revised six times, resulting in an increase of the budget to USD 607.04 million<sup>6</sup> and a corresponding increase in planned beneficiaries (figure 5). The CSP was 88 percent funded as at November 2020 (figure 4). The United States of America was the main donor, providing nearly half (48 percent), followed by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (11 percent) and the Central Emergency Response Fund (8 percent).

**Figure 4: Zimbabwe country strategic plan (2017–2021) strategic outcomes, budget, funding and expenditures**



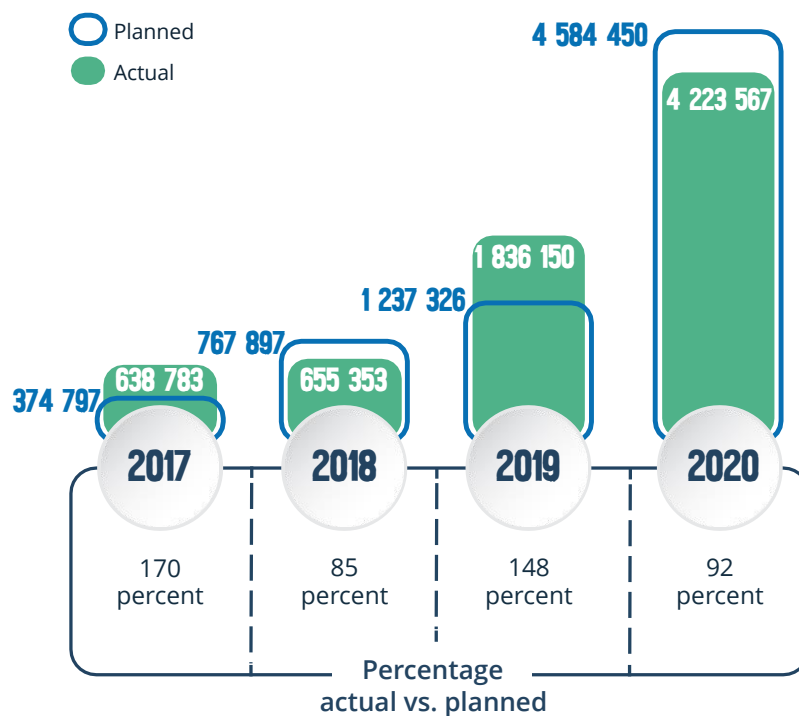
\* Not including 2021 values or direct or indirect support costs. *Source:* Original country portfolio budget: strategic partnership agreement; budget in the last budget revision: evaluation team calculation based on WFP Information Network and Global System (WINGS) country portfolio budget, Cumulative by Cost Element and Activity (accessed on 24 November 2020).

\*\* Including both expensed and committed budget. *Source:* Evaluation team calculation based on WINGS country portfolio budget, Cumulative by Cost Element and Activity (accessed on 24 November 2020).

<sup>5</sup> Excluding direct and indirect support costs.

<sup>6</sup> Excluding direct and indirect support costs.



**Figure 5: Annual overall actual versus planned beneficiaries (2017–2020)**

Source: WFP COMET Report CM-R001b.

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

#### ***Coherence and alignment***

11. The CSP was aligned with the Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation (ZimASSET) and a wide range of other sectoral strategies for food and nutrition security and agriculture.
12. In some cases, a selective approach was taken to alignment of the CSP with national policies and strategies; for example, it had to be adaptive in supporting national priorities focused on supporting marketing systems for drought-tolerant crops while not supporting cash crops production and marketing. It balanced the priorities of the Government and its development partners by supporting the development of national social protection policies, which was high on the agenda of WFP and its partners but a lower priority for the Government.

#### ***Addressing the needs of the most vulnerable***

13. The CSP was appropriately focused on the needs of the main food- and nutrition-insecure populations and other highly vulnerable groups, including women. The targeting of lean season assistance and resilience beneficiaries was judged as broadly appropriate. Targeting of urban beneficiaries remained challenging because the resources available were not commensurate with the needs.
14. The introduction of the IPC system in Zimbabwe did not result in a clear consensus on the number of people requiring assistance. The Government's reference point was the Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee (ZimVAC) assessment, which placed the country at the forefront of global crises in 2020, and WFP staff generally referenced programmes against those figures; however, a lack of consensus on the degree of national food insecurity and needs had operational consequences for WFP in that the main donors did not fully align their support for WFP and earmarked their contributions for specific geographic areas of the country.

***Coherence with other United Nations agencies***

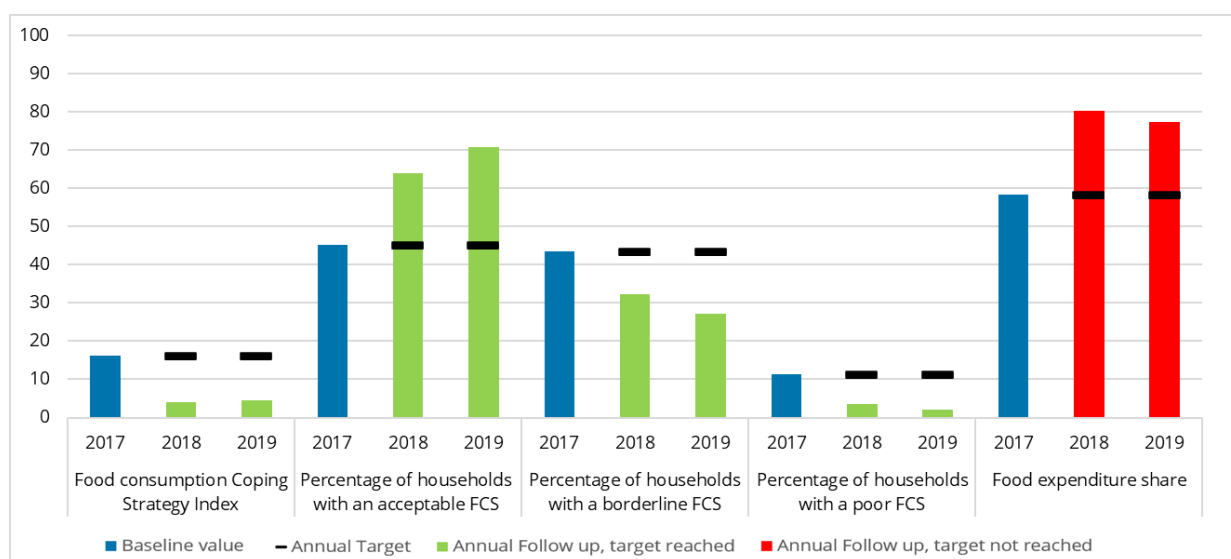
15. Through the CSP, WFP committed to the goals of the Zimbabwe United Nations Development Assistance Framework for 2016–2020 (ZUNDAF), which in turn supported ZimASSET and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; however, the evaluation revealed challenges in coordination between the United Nations and the Government, with several national stakeholders perceiving the ZUNDAF to be donor owned and driven.
16. A coordination group was established, involving the United Nations Children’s Fund, WFP, the United Nations Development Programme, the International Labour Organization and the World Bank, and collaboration on social protection improved; however, a fully unified position was still lacking in discussions with the Government.

***Adaptations to changing circumstances***

17. The CSP envisaged a significant reduction in crisis response over the course of implementation, but severe natural and socioeconomic shocks led to food security shocks and resulted in a massive expansion of strategic outcome 1. Early warning and other assessment data – including from the partnership in the ZimVAC process – helped WFP respond to these shocks, but greater recognition of the highly dynamic context could have been factored into the CSP design from the outset.
18. Policy and regulatory changes led to significant changes in CSP activities and plans. For example, the ban on the use of United States dollars forced a shift, initially to local currency and increasingly to in-kind food transfers. The country office adapted to those changes and minimized the disruption of distributions, although some stakeholders argued that the changes could have been timelier.
19. Another important adaptation was the inclusion of an urban food assistance component in response to evidence that the macroeconomic crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic had severely affected the urban poor. The inclusion of an urban pilot was regarded as an important achievement by a wide cross section of stakeholders.

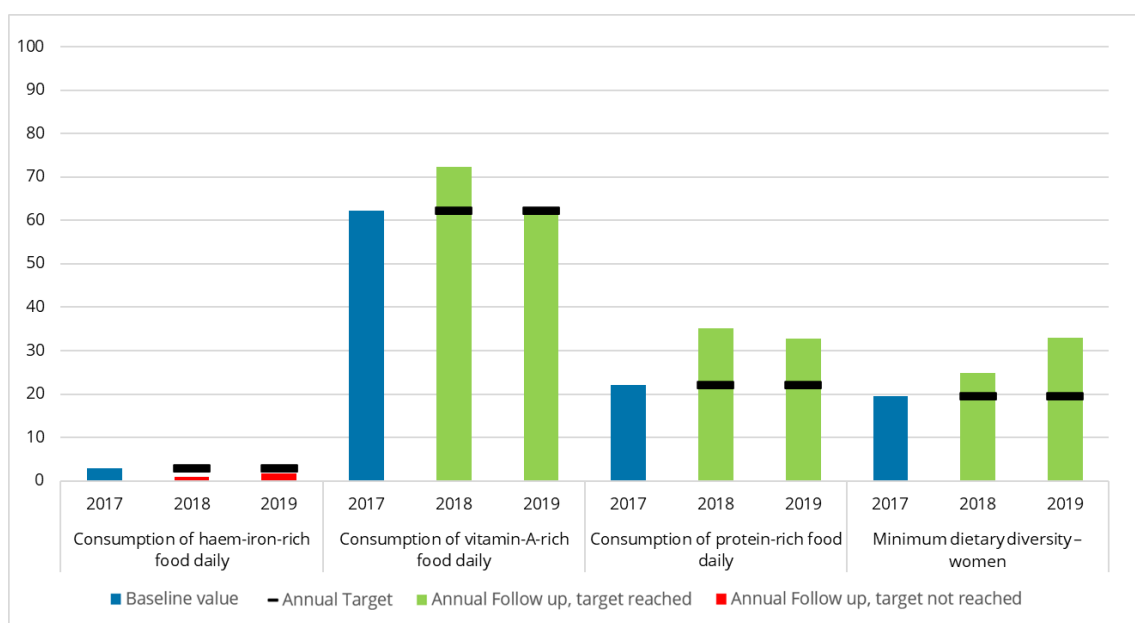
**What are the extent and quality of WFP’s specific contribution to country strategic plan outcomes in the country?**

20. Strategic outcome 1, which was aimed at enabling food-insecure people, including refugees, to meet their basic food and nutrition requirements during crises through provision of cash and/or food transfers, achieved broadly positive food security and nutrition outcomes among lean season assistance beneficiaries (see figures 6 and 7).

**Figure 6: Progress towards food security outcome targets for activity 1 (2017–2019)**

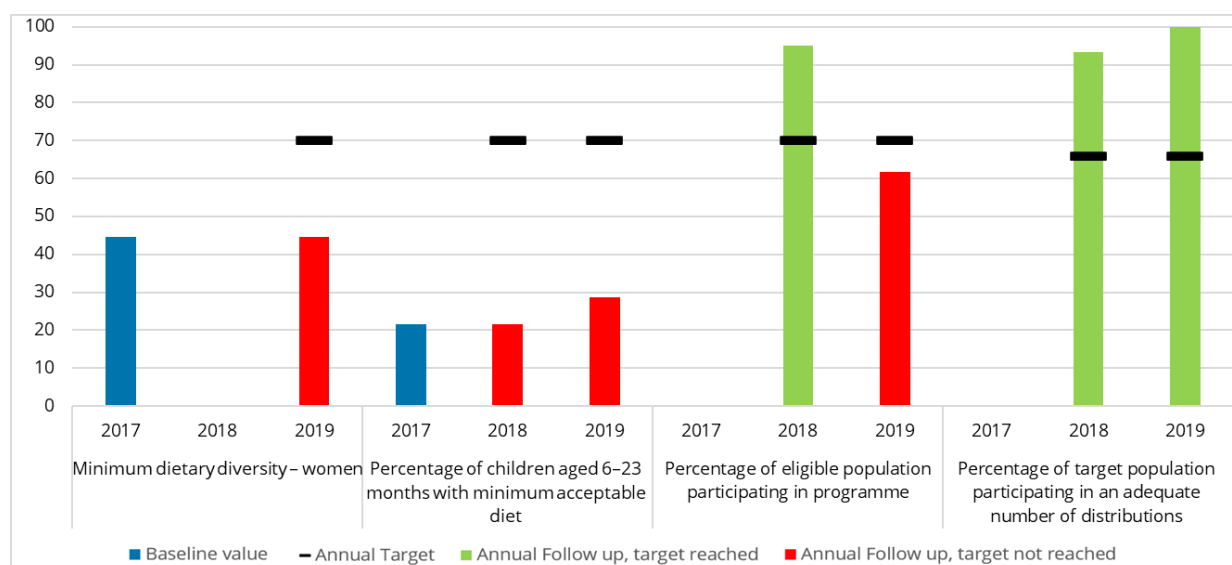
Abbreviation: FCS = food consumption score.

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

**Figure 7: Progress towards nutrition outcome targets for activity 1 (2017–2019)**

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

21. The food security and nutrition outcome indicators for refugees and asylum seekers fluctuated over the CSP period, in part because of rising food prices.
22. Under strategic outcome 2, WFP aimed to reduce stunting rates for children in prioritized districts, in line with national and global targets for 2025. WFP supported a range of nutrition interventions that contributed to improved health outcomes, but nutrition outcomes were either not achieved or not monitored.
23. WFP contributed to government-led pilot projects to prevent stunting and support maternity waiting homes. The outcome indicator for the government-led project was the percentage of children 6-23 months of age that consumed a minimum acceptable diet, which was 28.6 percent in 2019, well short of the target of 70 percent (see figure 8); however, the evaluation team considered the target too optimistic.

**Figure 8: Progress towards outcome targets for activity 4 (2017–2019)**

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

24. Under strategic outcome 3 WFP aimed to increase access to well-functioning markets for smallholders through the development of efficient local food marketing and procurement mechanisms. Targeting of farmers' organizations to link to market support displayed a degree of tension, however, between targeting of farmers with the most potential for marketing surpluses and targeting of more vulnerable farmers. There was no evidence regarding whether this market benefited small-scale food-insecure producers or large-scale farmers, or even whether the grain purchased was imported rather than produced domestically.
25. Under strategic outcome 4 WFP aimed to achieve food security and resilience to shocks and stressors. The transfers received by food assistance for assets beneficiaries had a positive impact on short-term food security. This was reflected in increased food consumption scores and marginal improvements in other food-security-related indicators in an otherwise worsening food security situation.
26. WFP also developed the capacity of national and subnational authorities for WFP's three-pronged approach to strengthening programme design, planning and implementation: integrated context analysis at the national level, seasonal livelihood programming at the subnational level and community-based participatory planning at the local level. There was consensus among stakeholders that three-pronged approach tools were a considerable improvement over existing local plans; however, significant barriers to institutionalization were identified, as the tool did not fit well with national priorities. Furthermore, resource constraints meant that implementation remained reliant on external support.
27. Under strategic outcome 5, WFP aimed to ensure a social protection system for chronically vulnerable populations. Activities included the R4 Rural Resilience Initiative, which incorporated a number of risk-management activities aimed at improving household resilience. Monitoring suggested overall positive trends, with participants successfully diversifying their income sources.
28. Other activities included consolidation and administration of social transfers under the national social protection system; in practice, however, only a single registry was piloted and some support was provided to re-establish a national school feeding programme. The framing of capacity strengthening support for the national social protection system was

limited to discrete technical inputs that did not generate system-level improvements. Overall capacity strengthening was not systematically addressed or monitored.

29. Strategic outcome 6 was aimed at ensuring that partners in Zimbabwe were reliably supported by world class supply chain services. WFP supported the procurement, shipping, customs clearing, handling and transportation of food and non-food items for a number of agencies. Monitoring showed high user satisfaction, which was also confirmed in the evaluation interviews.

### ***Humanitarian principles and protection***

30. WFP actively promoted humanitarian principles. Distribution plans took into account assessment findings to ensure that they were “needs-based”, and WFP worked to ensure that partners understood that decisions were based on the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality. Although the evaluation team heard isolated reports of interference in the targeting process to promote local interests, WFP took appropriate steps to investigate and respond.

### ***Gender***

31. WFP made an effort to ensure that food assistance was adapted to women’s specific needs and that other vulnerable groups were included in all activities. For example, the refugee baseline survey revealed that women of reproductive age suffered from poor nutrition, prompting targeted initiatives to improve their nutrition.
32. Multiple stakeholders argued, however, that a clear understanding of gender equality and women’s empowerment issues within a food systems framework was missing. Likewise, the safety or personal security risks associated with giving women cash were not seen as adequately understood or mitigated.
33. WFP made a significant effort to ensure the equal participation of women and men in the implementation and monitoring of food security and nutrition programmes and policies; however, there was little evidence that activities supported transformative change in gender relations.

### ***Sustainability***

34. There was a general consensus that the long-term goal of the CSP was to enable emergency assistance to be provided through a government-led social protection system; however, a clear strategy for the progressive handover of responsibility from the international community to the national authorities was not established.
35. Some activities were intended to serve as pilot projects for scale-up by national authorities; however, there was no clear strategy for domestication of the pilots. Critically, convincing evidence of impact that would allow WFP to advocate the scale-up of pilot activities by other actors – such as rates of return or cost-benefit analyses of livelihood interventions – was lacking.

### ***Humanitarian–development–peace nexus***

36. With six strategic outcomes and 13 activities, the fragmented structure of the CSP created challenges to the delivery of an integrated programme across the nexus; however, managers from the various activity areas were actively encouraged to identify opportunities to break down humanitarian and development silos. While these efforts were welcomed, the effectiveness of enhanced internal synergies was compromised by the fact that while WFP provided crisis response at scale, its work in resilience building and addressing root causes was far more limited, with many activities only operating as pilots. In addition, there was limited evidence that WFP established successful synergies with other actors in the sector.

## To what extent has WFP used its resources efficiently in contributing to the country strategic plan outputs and strategic outcomes?

### **Timeliness**

37. The main time-sensitive activities under the CSP were carried out within the planned timeframes. The timely delivery of lean season activities was particularly impressive. On 28 November 2019 WFP declared a Level 2 corporate emergency that targeted over 4 million beneficiaries, more than four times the number reached in the 2018/2019 season. Despite the associated challenges, by December 2019 WFP had completed distributions in 28 of 31 targeted districts.
38. The available funds were generally put to good use. The percentage of available resources expended or committed ranged from 81 to 102 percent.

### **Coverage and targeting**

39. WFP was the predominant provider of humanitarian food assistance in Zimbabwe during the CSP period. There were no other major food aid pipelines outside the Government. WFP covered a significant proportion of the assessed needs, ranging from 36 to 67 percent of the ZimVAC assessed needs during the period.
40. WFP also extended food assistance to urban areas, progressively scaling up from 100,000 beneficiaries in January–June 2019 to 326,000 beneficiaries in December 2020; however, even with the increase in numbers, that represented less than 15 percent of those requiring assistance.
41. The number of food assistance for assets beneficiaries ranged from 99,559 (2017) to 48,363 (2018). Assuming that the objective of the food assistance for assets activities was to improve the livelihoods of households to prevent the need for future food assistance, the number of beneficiaries remained very modest compared to the number of lean season assistance beneficiaries or the proportion of the population classified as IPC phase 2.<sup>7</sup> WFP's coverage was also lower than that of other actors.

### **Cost-efficiency**

42. WFP improved the cost efficiency of the programme in line with economies of scale. Specifically, the direct support cost chargeable on activities fell as the overall size of the programme grew. This represented significant savings, with a reduction of over 3 percentage points in direct support costs, equating to USD 6.8 million "savings" on direct support costs charged on the USD 191 million direct operating cost in 2020.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Direct support costs as a percentage of total direct operating costs</b>	<b>Total direct operating costs (USD)</b>
2017	6.59	20 423 204
2018	8.46	39 283 943
2019	3.81	109 492 643
2020	3.06	191 304 114

Source: Evaluation team, calculation based on Integrated Road Map Resourcing Detail Report (2017–2020).

<sup>7</sup> The October 2020 IPC analysis classified 2.7 million people as being in IPC phase 2.

43. A variety of examples of management decisions to control costs were provided. One major area of cost control was through field-level agreement negotiations with cooperating partners with tight budget limits. Staff were placed in districts to reduce transport costs and engineers were recruited to support food assistance for asset activities rather than use consultancy services. Common logistics services were provided on a full-cost recovery basis.
44. The cost efficiency of alternative transfer modalities was analysed; however, while WFP switched between cash transfers, vouchers and in-kind commodities several times during the course of the CSP, this was driven by regulatory changes rather than cost efficiency considerations.
45. While there was evidence that specific management decisions took into account cost considerations, there was much less evidence of strategic analysis of the CSP's cost efficiency. There was a strong stated emphasis on cost efficiency in the annual performance plans, but the cost efficiency of activities was not analysed in the annual and other relevant reports.
46. WFP staff made repeated reference to cost efficiency and cost savings in respect of specific activities, but these assertions were not supported by cost benefit analyses return on investment studies or other documentary evidence.

**What factors explain WFP's performance and the extent to which WFP made the strategic shift expected under the country strategic plan?**

***Predictability, adequacy and flexibility of funding***

47. Funding under the CSP was heavily skewed, and contributions were almost entirely earmarked at the activity level or below. Over 80 percent of contributions were earmarked for crisis response. The other significant contribution was to resilience building, specifically support for food assistance for assets activities. The remaining 11 activities shared less than 10 percent of the total available funding.
48. The consequence of earmarking was a loss of programmatic flexibility and an inability to implement several activities. Major donors indicated that earmarking was driven by their own policies. The continuing split of donor funding between development and humanitarian assistance also contributed to earmarked funding. All the main donors in Zimbabwe remained hesitant to fund development activities given persistent concerns over government transparency and accountability.
49. There was no evidence that any significant funding opportunities were missed, and the relationship with donors was rated as good; however, it was suggested that a more compelling and coherent case at the strategic outcome level – strategic outcome 5 (social protection) in particular lacked an overarching logic – might have encouraged flexible funding. Some donors also considered that the CSP was still rooted in a humanitarian logic and lacked the deeper analysis needed for robust development plans.

***Strategic partnerships***

50. There was improved alignment with national policies, plans and priorities, and WFP established strong relationships across a range of ministries. Government counterparts reported excellent relationships with WFP based on strong communication and engagement in decision making.
51. Partnerships with non-governmental organizations, both international and local, remained essential to CSP implementation. While the majority of partners were international non-governmental organizations, WFP made some efforts to support localization.

52. WFP benefited from a wider variety of partnerships when compared to the preceding operations. This included new partnerships with academic and private sector actors. These relationships strengthened access to technical expertise and provided complementary channels for sustainability.

### ***Responsiveness in dynamic operating contexts***

53. The flexibility of the WFP response to changing conditions was framed by two main considerations: the flexibility to scale the emergency response component up and down; and the flexibility to work across the humanitarian-development nexus.
54. The CSP proved to be adaptable. WFP was able to scale up its response in the face of a series of unforeseen emergencies. Using CSP revisions, the country office rapidly increased beneficiary numbers as conditions changed. The CSP was adapted to incorporate a new urban pilot relatively quickly and also accommodated the response to Cyclone Idai.
55. From a strategic point of view, the CSP was aimed at improving flexibility in moving between humanitarian and development responses within the nexus. In practice the linkages proved challenging to realize, and the built-in divisions between these areas – in the form of strategic outcomes and activities – created internal silos to be bridged.

### ***Knowledge management***

56. Overall, the use of the available monitoring information was heavily oriented towards external reporting and accountability rather than learning. Activity managers were only responsible for the collection of output data and displayed an incomplete knowledge of performance at higher levels, which was “owned” by the monitoring unit. This made it difficult to access or disseminate data. Overall, there was little evidence of an approach that was structured to ensure that lessons were being learned internally and best practices shared externally.

### ***Human resources***

57. WFP human resources were relatively strong for most areas. Strong technical and administrative support and guidance were provided by several advisors from the Regional Bureau for Southern Africa and headquarters. In addition, there was an effective surge of experienced staff on secondment to the country office to support the emergency scale-up and provide a bridge until the office was able to hire and train staff. The latter was done rapidly and effectively, with the number of staff more than doubling between 2015 and 2020. Staff retention was also high, which was associated with a 90 percent national staffing ratio and a management decision to place national staff on long-term contracts. Gender targets were also met: women accounted for 41 percent of country office national staff in 2017 and 55 percent in 2020.<sup>8</sup>

## **Conclusions**

58. The CSP was designed to shift WFP to a more developmental role, as the need for crisis response was expected to diminish; however, a series of climatic and economic shocks and the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic required urgent reassessment. The CSP proved sufficiently flexible to allow a rapid pivot back to a large-scale emergency response. That said, the country office was overly optimistic in its initial assessment of the food security and economic trends and could have anticipated a range of alternative scenarios over the CSP implementation period.

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<sup>8</sup> Staff statistics, 2016–2020 (country office document).



59. Although alternative scenarios were not anticipated, the country office was able to rapidly adapt and respond to the deteriorating food security situation and the emergence of COVID-19. The latter resulted in piloting and scale-up of the urban programme, a major innovation in the landscape of food assistance; however, the increased focus on emergency response diverted funding and attention from work on resilience and root causes.
60. Overall, owing to its structure and ambition, the CSP constituted an important step forward from the previous collection of fragmented programme documents. The introduction of a multi-year approach provided an opportunity to improve the conceptual links between WFP's humanitarian and development work; however, the approach did not automatically create stronger operational linkages between humanitarian and development activities because the assignment of activities to crisis response, resilience building and root causes categories created a set of silos.
61. A key assumption underpinning the CSP – that donors would respond to increased transparency with funding that could be flexibly used across the nexus – was ill-founded. Although the total resources increased, earmarking also increased. In the current political situation, many donors are constrained in terms of the direct support they can offer the Government.
62. WFP has faced the challenge of maintaining expertise in humanitarian response while convincing partners that it is able to work effectively along the nexus. The evaluation found evidence that WFP was adapting to this through the recruitment of specialist staff and the development of new tools and guidance in areas such as social protection, capacity strengthening, resilience building and conflict sensitivity.
63. Success in delivering against the ambitious goals of the CSP increasingly required WFP to collaborate and draw on external expertise. To address continued scepticism about its competence and mandate in some areas, WFP will need to clarify and optimize complementarity and partnership – particularly in the resilience building and response to root causes areas of the CSP.
64. Adequate monitoring and evaluation systems were not yet in place, jeopardizing the organization's reputation and compromising its ability to learn from performance to improve programme design and implementation.
65. The CSP did not enable WFP to become more effective in achieving its gender equality and women's empowerment goals. A strengthened approach to gender equality, underpinned by improved analysis and adequate human and financial resources, is still required.
66. The long-term goal of supporting national ownership remains important and valid; however, there are important questions regarding how to achieve change at a realistic pace. In this regard, WFP could act as a broker between the Government and donors, building trust through strengthened transparency and accountability.

## Recommendations

67. The evaluation generated five recommendations. Two strategic recommendations identify ways for WFP to make the most effective contribution in Zimbabwe, through a more focused strategy organized around its comparative advantages and demonstrated results, with a focus on crisis response and resilience building. As those recommendations affect the future strategy of WFP in Zimbabwe, they are expected to be addressed in the new CSP, meaning by June 2022. The strategic recommendations are complemented by three operational recommendations, some of which have a longer timeframe for implementation given their operational nature.

Recommendation	Type	Responsibility	Other contributing entities	Priority	By when
<b>Recommendation 1: Refine WFP's strategic focus on the core areas of its comparative advantages in Zimbabwe and improve and simplify the organization of the strategic outcomes and activities of the new country strategic plan around those focal areas.</b>	Strategic	Country Director		High	Include in the new CSP (by June 2022) with reassessment during the CSP mid-term review (2024)
1.1 While continuing to focus on crisis response and resilience building, carefully and periodically (during country strategic plan formulation) reassess the case for continued support for addressing root causes, such as increasing overall agricultural production and improving long-term nutrition.		Country Director and Deputy Country Director			June 2022 (with reassessment by June 2024)
1.2 Maintain responsibility for complementing the Government's provision of humanitarian food assistance and emergency nutrition to crisis-affected rural and urban populations and refugees, including by strengthening the capacity of national institutions and programmes to address food crises. Continue to provide common logistics services to support partners on a cost recovery basis.		Country Director and Deputy Country Director			June 2022
1.3 Consolidate activities that contribute to resilience building under a unified strategic outcome with the aim of understanding the most effective and context-specific mix of interventions for building resilience, including food assistance for assets activities and the R4 Rural Resilience Initiative.		Country Director and Deputy Country Director			June 2022
1.4 Review the objectives and activities related to supporting nutrition, assessments (including the three-pronged approach) and local procurement. Where these primarily support the implementation of other country strategic plan activities, reclassify them as services – rather than as stand-alone activities – in order to simplify management and financing.		Country Director and Deputy Country Director			June 2022

Recommendation	Type	Responsibility	Other contributing entities	Priority	By when
<b>Recommendation 2: Develop an enhanced strategy for reducing reliance on humanitarian assistance through supporting the Government in delivering on its responsibility to provide social assistance and increase community resilience.</b>	Strategic	Country Director		High	
2.1 Review national food insecurity needs assessments to identify overlaps and challenges in current assessment methods and use the results of the review to persuade the Government and other partners to adopt a unified and strengthened approach.		Country office head of programme	Regional Bureau research, assessment and monitoring and vulnerability assessment and mapping staff		December 2022
2.2 Building on current efforts, identify opportunities to provide enhanced technical assistance to the national social assistance systems in areas such as registration, targeting and beneficiary selection, determination of levels of assistance, selection of transfer modalities and mechanisms and monitoring.		Country office head of programme	Regional Bureau social protection lead		December 2022
2.3 Examine the feasibility of establishing a joint safety net programme in partnership with the Government and its development partners, including donors and the World Bank, drawing inspiration from similar programmes elsewhere in Africa, to channel and coordinate government, humanitarian and developmental assistance to crisis-affected populations at scale.		Country Director	Regional Bureau social protection lead		June 2022
2.4 Explore increased inter-agency coordination in the programming of resilience building activities, including with the Zimbabwe Resilience Building Fund. Specific objectives should include to increase the scale of synergies with, and potential graduation from, the food and cash assistance provided by WFP and, in the longer term, to establish the foundations for the coordinated incorporation of resilience activities into a potential joint safety net programme.		Deputy Country Director and country office head of programme	Regional Bureau resilience lead		June 2022

Recommendation	Type	Responsibility	Other contributing entities	Priority	By when
<b>Recommendation 3: Invest in building the necessary capacities, skills and attitudes to create, access, retain and share knowledge generated under the country strategic plan to achieve zero hunger. Use this knowledge both internally, to improve performance, and externally, to persuade partners (including the Government and its development partners) to replicate and scale up successful innovations.</b>	Operational	Country Director		Medium	
3.1 Invest further in the capacity of the Regional Bureau for Southern Africa to support knowledge management processes. Appoint a knowledge management focal point at a sufficiently senior level in the country office.		Regional Director and Country Director			December 2022
3.2 Develop a knowledge management plan and system for capturing, storing and disseminating relevant information internally and externally. Include evidence to support internal decision-making in order to improve effectiveness and efficiency and evidence for the purpose of advocacy with external stakeholders. Pay specific attention to the gathering of robust evidence on the effectiveness and economic returns of resilience building interventions and strengthened conflict and gender analysis.		Deputy Country Director and country office head of programme	Regional Bureau resilience, gender and humanitarian and protection staff		December 2022
3.3 Explore how the evaluation function could enhance its contribution to learning and knowledge management. Include a costed multi-year strategic evaluation agenda, to be defined within the first six months of the country strategic plan cycle, that clearly identifies learning needs and a rational sequencing of different types of evaluations, including centralized and decentralized evaluations. Explicitly design the evaluation agenda to complement programme monitoring and ensure a regular flow of information for decision making throughout the country strategic plan cycle and prepare it in dialogue with key stakeholders, including national counterparts, the United Nations country team and donors, in order to optimize synergies with external evaluation and monitoring activities.		Deputy Country Director	Regional Bureau evaluation officer Office of Evaluation		June 2025

Recommendation	Type	Responsibility	Other contributing entities	Priority	By when
3.4. Conduct stakeholder mapping and analysis, to be completed by the time the next country strategic plan is adopted, in order to identify partnerships with relevant actors – including academic institutions – that can contribute to the implementation of the knowledge-management plan.		Deputy Country Director and country office head of programme			December 2022
3.5 Include explicit strategies, timelines and monitoring and evaluation frameworks in all pilot activities to support taking pilots to scale, with explicit arrangements for sharing knowledge with the Government of Zimbabwe and other partners, and put monitoring and evaluation and knowledge management plans in place by the middle of the next country strategic plan cycle.		Country office head of programme			June 2024
<b>Recommendation 4: Deepen WFP's strategic and operational partnerships with a range of actors for planning and delivery of the country strategic plan.</b>	Operational	Country Director		Medium	
4.1 Include partnership arrangements in the new country strategic plan, within the first year of country strategic plan implementation. Deepen and strengthen WFP's partnerships with other United Nations entities and the World Bank, in areas of complementary expertise, including social protection, resilience building and nutrition.		Country Director and Deputy Country Director			December 2022
4.2 Explore the use of multi-year strategic agreements with partners. Agreements should outline long-term objectives and proposed activities while being complemented by annual budget negotiations, subject to the availability of funds. In addition, continue to campaign for multi-year funding from donors to facilitate multi-year agreements with partners.		Deputy Country Director and country office head of programme			December 2022
4.3 Deepen partnerships with other United Nations entities under the United Nations sustainable development cooperation framework and with the World Bank to assess gaps in the capacity of national institutions and contribute to coordinated capacity strengthening plans.		Country office head of programme and country office senior management			June 2023

Recommendation	Type	Responsibility	Other contributing entities	Priority	By when
<b>Recommendation 5: Support and encourage results-based management with improved monitoring, evaluation and accountability in order to improve internal management and enhance transparency and accountability to donors.</b>	Operational	Country office head of programme		Medium	
5.1 Define, track and analyse a comprehensive set of indicators across all country strategic plan activities, including improved indicators for monitoring capacity strengthening, gender-transformative actions and resilience building. Draw on the updated corporate results framework and define and improve supplementary country-specific indicators to ensure full monitoring coverage.		Country office head of programme	Regional Bureau monitoring officer		June 2022
5.2 Review the management structure and responsibilities of the country office programme unit and introduce revised management responsibilities for the start of the new country strategic plan cycle to ensure integrated responsibility for the monitoring of outputs and contribution to outcomes by the relevant managers.		Country office head of programme			December 2022
5.3 Strengthen management of cost efficiency through the development of appropriate cost-efficiency metrics, clarification of managerial responsibilities for the regular analysis of cost efficiency and training of country office staff.		Country office head of programme	Regional Bureau monitoring officer		December 2022

## Acronyms

COMET	country office tool for managing effectively
CSP	country strategic plan
IPC	Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
R4	R4 Rural Resilience Initiative
WINGS	WFP Information Network and Global System
ZimASSET	Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation
ZimVAC	Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee
ZUNDAF	Zimbabwe United Nations Development Assistance Framework