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Summary report on the evaluation of the interim country strategic plan for South Sudan (2018–2022)

Executive summary

An evaluation of the interim country strategic plan for South Sudan for the period 2018–2022 was undertaken between July 2021 and April 2022, covering WFP's strategy, activities and systems under the plan. Taking a utilization-focused, consultative approach, the evaluation served the dual purpose of accountability and learning and informed the preparation of a new country strategic plan. The evaluation assessed the relevance of WFP's strategic positioning, its contribution to outcomes, its efficiency and the factors explaining its performance.

South Sudan is a low-income country marked by a long history of conflict. It faces catastrophic food insecurity and a critical nutrition situation owing to protracted conflict and repeated extreme environmental shocks, which have led to infrastructure damage, crop loss, asset depletion and population displacement.

The interim country strategic plan was developed to provide WFP with a medium-term strategy for responding to a multi-year acute crisis and was intended to serve as a bridge to a full country strategic plan.

Overall, the interim country strategic plan during the period under review was relevant to national priorities for food security, nutrition and resilience. Given the scale of the humanitarian crisis, the protracted and frequent shocks – including the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic – the greater emphasis on life-saving interventions compared to life-changing resilience-building interventions was appropriate.

The plan's four strategic outcomes were relevant to the needs of people and remained so as WFP adapted its programmes to respond to new shocks, including the pandemic. The design of the

In line with WFP evaluation policy (2022) (WFP/EB.1/2022/4-C), to respect the integrity and independence of evaluation findings the editing of this report has been limited and as a result some of the language in it may not be fully consistent with the World Food Programme's standard terminology or editorial practices. Please direct any requests for clarification to the Director of Evaluation.

Focal points:

Ms A-C. Luzot
Deputy Director of Evaluation
email: anneclaire.luzot@wfp.org

Ms J. Thoulouzan
Senior Evaluation Officer
email: julie.thoulouzan@wfp.org

interim country strategic plan included appropriate consideration of the target groups for each strategic outcome, with priority given to the most vulnerable based on the principle of reaching those “furthest behind”. Despite WFP’s efforts to address the needs of the most vulnerable in hard-to-reach locations, however, targeting remained a persistent challenge owing to the scale of need and funding shortfalls.

WFP’s work was aligned with the United Nations cooperation frameworks and humanitarian response plans for South Sudan. Stakeholders from other United Nations entities recognized the advantages of working in partnership with WFP, which included WFP’s extensive humanitarian reach, large geographic footprint and strong understanding of beneficiary communities.

Under strategic outcome 1, WFP was effective in saving lives and improving the food security of populations in phases 4 and 5 of the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification. However, the level of assistance was not sufficient to reach food security targets. Under strategic outcome 2 WFP was effective in the treatment of moderate acute malnutrition, but the coverage of preventive activities was insufficient. Under strategic outcome 3 WFP gradually scaled up its resilience building activities, which helped to improve self-reliance, food security and nutrition and to reduce tensions and violence. The United Nations Humanitarian Air Service and common logistics services provided through the logistics cluster (under strategic outcome 4) were seen as key enablers of the collective humanitarian response. Gender equality and gender-transformative objectives featured prominently in the design and implementation of the interim country strategic plan. A gender-focused situational analysis highlighted good practices in gender mainstreaming, despite challenges that included a lack of resources and a gender imbalance among the staff of WFP and its cooperating partners.

WFP’s adaptive and innovative approaches to tackling shocks by drawing on its strong emergency response capacity were effective drivers of performance. However, WFP faced unprecedented challenges with rising needs and declining funding. Increases in donor earmarking of contributions limited WFP’s flexibility and efficiency. In addition, a highly challenging environment during a very turbulent period, combined with limited government capacity, inevitably affected WFP’s performance and impeded progress in the strategic shift to long-term approaches.

The evaluation made six recommendations regarding the need for WFP to avoid spreading its resources too thinly; maximizing the long-term and sustainable impact of its interventions and enhancing their coherence across the portfolio; taking various steps to increase its focus on resilience building in the new country strategic plan; improving the efficiency of beneficiary registration and verification processes and better integrating the use of evidence and data into decision making; continuing to strengthen approaches to accountability to affected populations, conflict sensitivity and gender equality; and strengthening partnership arrangements in several areas.

Draft decision*

The Board takes note of the summary report on the evaluation of the interim country strategic plan for South Sudan (2018–2022) (WFP/EB.2/2022/6-I) and management response (WFP/EB.2/2022/6-I/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. An evaluation of the South Sudan interim country strategic plan (ICSP) for 2018–2022 was conducted between July 2021 and April 2022 with fieldwork carried out in November 2021. Combining accountability and learning objectives, the evaluation provides evidence of WFP's strategic positioning and results and was timed to inform the design of a new country strategic plan (CSP) for South Sudan.
2. The evaluation covers WFP activities implemented under the ICSP. The main users of the evaluation are the WFP country office, the Regional Bureau for Eastern Africa and headquarters units.
3. The evaluation used mixed methods, drawing on monitoring data, document review, an e-survey, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with 419 individuals representing a range of stakeholders, including 202 beneficiaries and representatives of the Government of South Sudan, United Nations and non-governmental organization partners and donors. Due consideration was given to accountability to affected populations, gender equality and women's empowerment, and inclusion and ethical issues.
4. The evaluation methodology and schedule were developed taking into consideration possible limitations related to evaluability and travel challenges arising from the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and insecurity. Information was triangulated using various sources to validate findings.

Context

5. South Sudan is marked by a long history of conflict. Following independence in 2011 a civil war broke out in 2013 and concluded in 2018 with the signing of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan. However, violent conflict has continued since then, despite the formation of the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity in February 2020.
6. A low-income country, South Sudan ranks 185th of 189 countries in the 2020 Human Development Index.¹ It is characterized by a high level of inequality, notably for women and girls.

¹ United Nation Development Programme. 2020. *Human Development Report 2020. The next frontier: Human development and the Anthropocene. Briefing note for countries on the 2020 Human Development Report: South Sudan.*

| TABLE 1: SOCIOECONOMIC INDICATORS | | | |
|---|---|------------------|------|
| | Indicator | Value | Year |
|  | Total population (million) (1) | 11.06 | 2019 |
|  | Human Development Index (rank) (2) | 185 (out of 189) | 2020 |
|  | People experiencing extreme food insecurity (projected millions) (6) | 7.24 | 2021 |
|  | Children <5 affected by acute malnutrition and in need of treatment (million) (4) | 1.4 | 2021 |
| | Global chronic malnutrition, prevalence for <5 (%) (4) | 15.6 | 2021 |
|  | Gender Development Index (rank) (5) | 169 (out of 188) | 2018 |
|  | Share of agriculture in gross domestic product (%) (3) | 15 | 2020 |

Sources: (1) World Bank. 2019. [Data: South Sudan](#); (2) United Nations Development Programme. 2020. [Human Development Report 2020. The next frontier: Human development and the Anthropocene](#); (3) African Development Bank Group. 2022. [South Sudan Economic Outlook](#); (4) United Nations Children's Fund. 2021. [Nutrition in South Sudan: Briefing Note](#); (5) United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. 2018. [UN Women Country Portfolio Evaluation. Final Evaluation Report. South Sudan Strategic Note 2014–2018](#); (6) Integrated Food Security Phase Classification. 2020. [South Sudan IPC Acute Food Insecurity and Acute Malnutrition Analysis October 2020–July 2021](#).

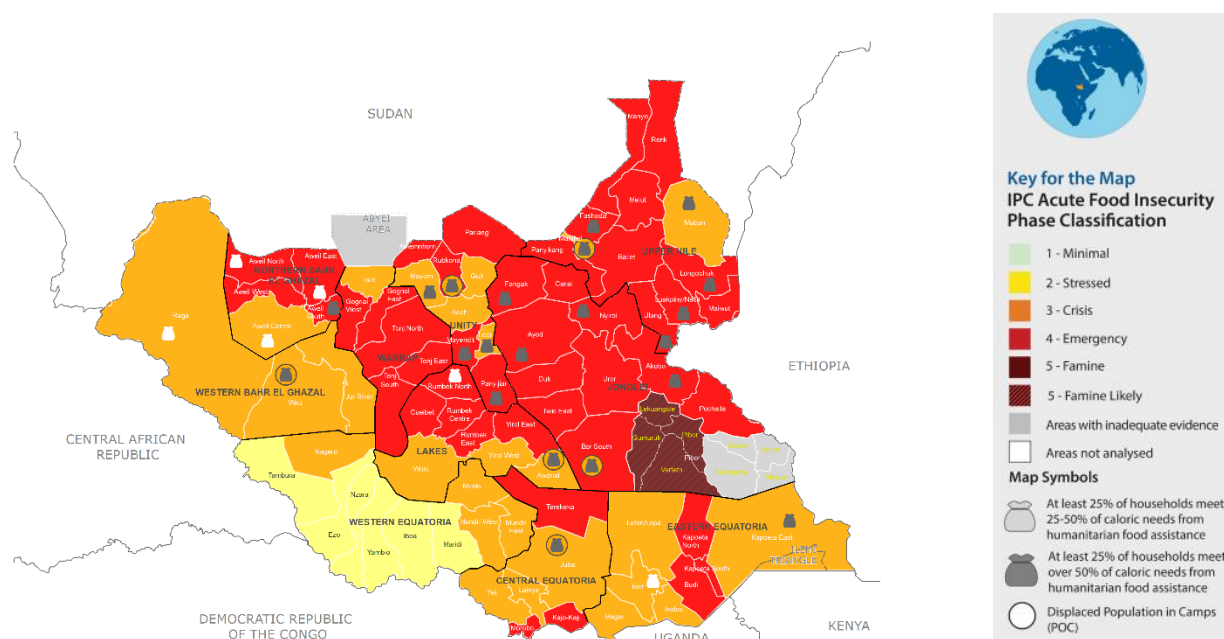
7. South Sudan is experiencing catastrophic food insecurity owing to protracted conflict and repeated extreme droughts and floods, which have led to infrastructure damage, crop loss, asset depletion and population displacement. A weakened economy and high inflation have affected the affordability of food. In addition, the lockdown in response to the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the supply chains for commercial goods and humanitarian assistance.
8. According to the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), the number of people experiencing extreme food insecurity was projected to increase to 7.24 million by 2021.² The nutrition situation was critical between 2018 and 2021, with 57 counties projected to be in IPC phase 3 (acute malnutrition) or worse between April and July 2021.³ In 2021, 1.4 million children under 5 were reported to be suffering from acute malnutrition, and 15.6 percent of children were suffering from chronic malnutrition.⁴

² Integrated Food Security Phase Classification. 2020. [South Sudan: IPC Results October 2020–July 2021](#).

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ United Nations Children's Fund. 2021. [Nutrition in South Sudan: Briefing note](#).

**Figure 1: IPC projected acute food insecurity map
April–July 2021**



Source: IPC. December 2020. *South Sudan: IPC Results October 2020–July 2021*.

The designations employed and the presentation of material in this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the World Food Programme (WFP) concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its frontiers or boundaries.

9. An estimated 1.3 million people in South Sudan are internally displaced⁵ and more than 2 million have sought refuge in neighbouring countries.⁶ The country also hosts 264,540 refugees, mostly from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Sudan.⁷
10. Protracted conflict, localized violence, impassable roads, bureaucratic impediments, operational interference, violence against humanitarian personnel and COVID-19 travel restrictions hamper humanitarian access.
11. The education system lacks adequate infrastructure, human resources and institutional capacity. With 2.8 million children out of school in 2020, predominantly in rural areas, the country has the highest proportion of out-of-school children in the world.⁸

WFP interim country strategic plan

12. The ICSP was developed to provide WFP with a medium-term strategy for responding to a multi-year acute crisis by building on existing synergies between humanitarian and development work to address immediate needs and underlying constraints. The shift from a series of operations to an ICSP encompassing all WFP interventions was expected to facilitate the scale-up of resilience interventions that require long-term planning and execution and to serve as a bridge to a full CSP. The ICSP was designed based on the most likely scenario of increasing countrywide conflict spreading to new areas and population

⁵ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. 2022. *Global Focus. South Sudan: Latest updates*.

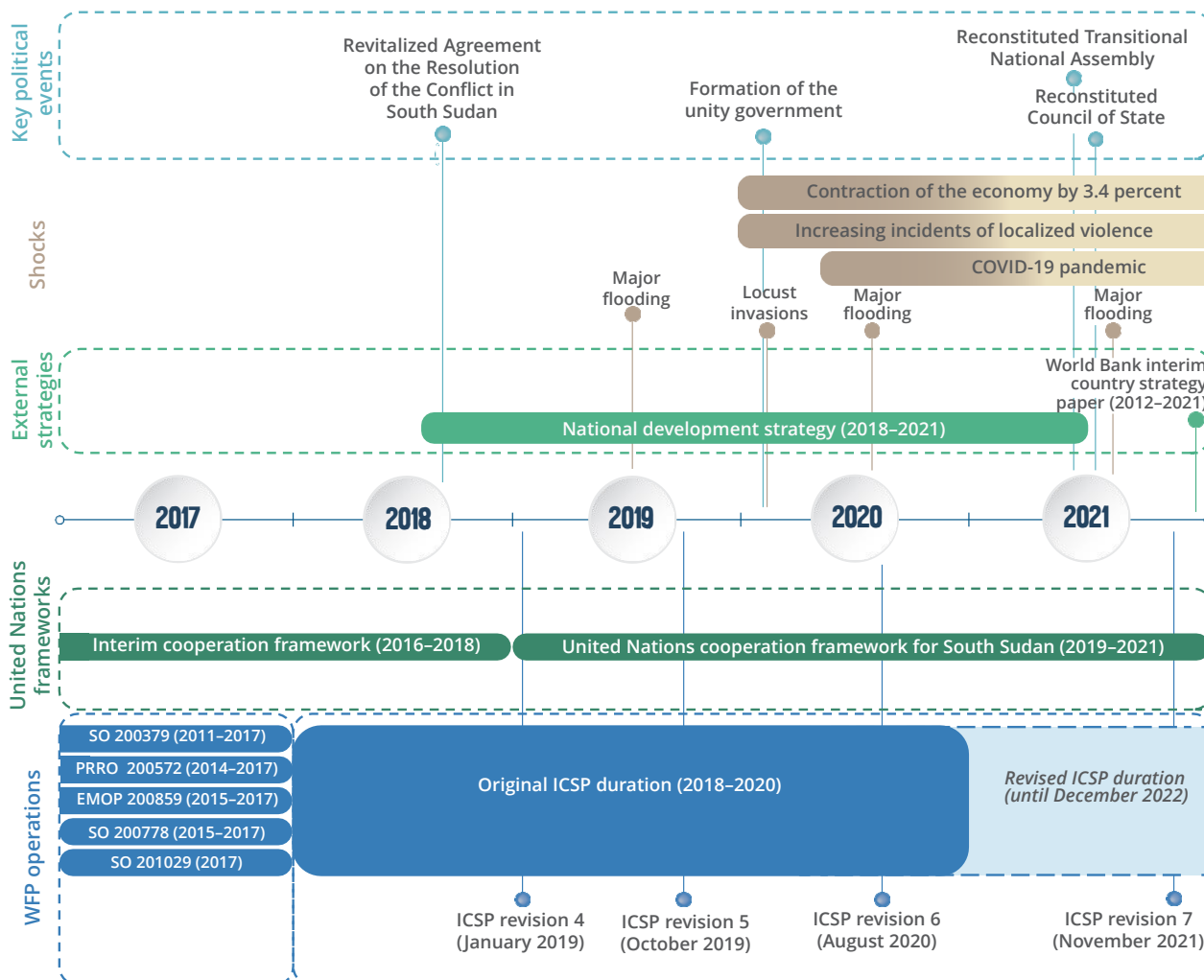
⁶ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. 2021. *Operational Data Portal: Refugees from South Sudan*.

⁷ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. 2022. *Global Focus. South Sudan: Latest updates*.

⁸ United Nations Children's Fund. 2019. *The State of the World's Children 2019. Children, food and nutrition: Growing well in a changing world*.

groups, political instability, displacement and economic collapse leading to a worsening of livelihood opportunities. Figure 2 illustrates the major changes in the situation in South Sudan, the United Nations cooperation frameworks and WFP's interventions from 2017 to 2021.

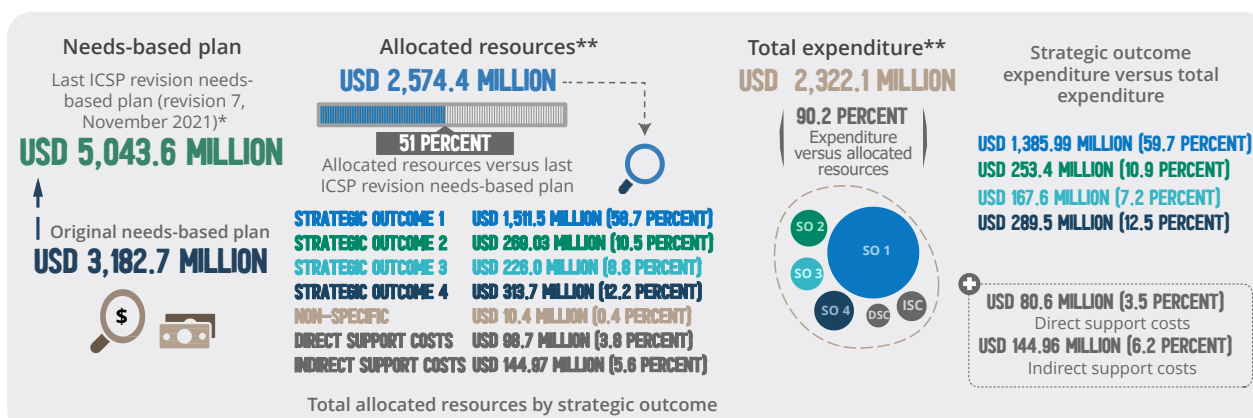
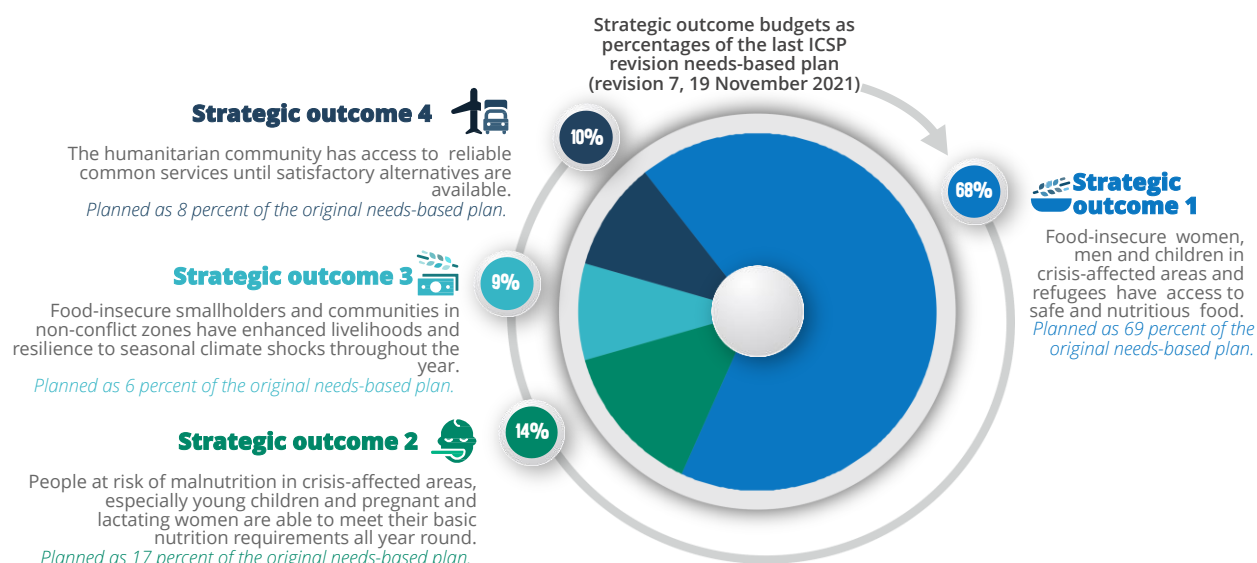
Figure 2: Country context and WFP operational overview, South Sudan, 2017–2021



Source: Office of Evaluation, based on the full evaluation report.

Abbreviations: EMOP = emergency operation; PRRO = protracted relief and recovery operation; SO = special operation.

- Following a series of ICSP revisions (figure 3) the ICSP budget increased from USD 3.18 billion in 2018 to USD 5.04 billion in 2021, and the duration of the ICSP was extended until December 2022 to allow the alignment of the new CSP with the cycle of the United Nations sustainable development cooperation framework starting in 2023. As of December 2021, 66 percent of the ICSP needs-based plan for the period 2018–2021 had been funded and 51 percent for the period 2018–2022.

Figure 3: Resource overview: South Sudan interim country strategic plan (2018–2022)

* The needs-based plan budget percentages by strategic outcome have been calculated at the level of total transfer and implementation costs, excluding direct support costs (USD 204 million in the last ICSP revision and USD 105.7 million in the original budget) and indirect support costs (USD 306.2 million in the last ICSP revision and USD 208.2 in the original budget).

** Allocated resources and expenditures figures are cumulative, covering the period from January 2018 to December 2021.

Sources: Country portfolio budget, seventh ICSP revision and Integrated Road Map analytics from annual country reports.

Evaluation findings

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

Relevance to national policies, plans and strategies

- WFP opted to develop an interim CSP because it was not possible to conduct a full strategic review of government priorities for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals; such a review is a prerequisite to the adoption of a full CSP, but it was not possible to conduct one owing to ongoing conflict. The ICSP was nevertheless aligned with government policies and priorities, notably on food security, nutrition and resilience; the national development plan;⁹ and relevant sectoral policies on agriculture, education, health and other subjects. In addition, WFP supported the development of other strategies such as the 2019 national home-grown school feeding strategy.

⁹ Government of South Sudan. 2018. *National Development Strategy 2018–2021: Consolidate Peace and Stabilize the Economy*.

15. Given the scale of the humanitarian crisis and the protracted and frequent shocks affecting South Sudan, including COVID-19, the ICSP's greater emphasis on life-saving interventions versus life-changing resilience building was found to be appropriate.
16. The ICSP served as a useful framework for WFP's engagement in South Sudan but as a transitional document it lacked a long-term approach to addressing the root causes of hunger. However, a shift in thinking took place over the duration of the ICSP, with a move to a more forward-looking approach that reflected the Government's growing interest in resilience building.

Addressing the needs of the most vulnerable people and communities

17. The strategic outcomes of the ICSP were relevant to people's needs. With a projected 7.2 million people living in IPC phases 3 and 4 in 2021,¹⁰ strategic outcomes 1 and 2 focused on life-saving assistance for food-insecure households and individuals at risk of malnutrition in crisis-affected areas. Strategic outcome 4 addressed severe infrastructure gaps and provided common transport and logistics services for partners. Given the frequency of seasonal climate shocks, the focus of strategic outcome 3 on improving the resilience of food-insecure households was also appropriate.
18. The design of the ICSP included appropriate consideration of the target groups for each strategic outcome and emphasized addressing the needs of vulnerable women and girls. WFP's targeting strategy prioritized the most vulnerable based on the principle of reaching those "furthest behind". WFP used a range of assessments and deployed rapid monitoring teams to assess the needs arising from new emergencies. IPC classifications were a central driver of WFP's geographic targeting.
19. Despite great efforts to address the needs of the most vulnerable in hard-to-reach locations, targeting was a major challenge owing to the scale of need and funding shortfalls. Although they met the targeting criteria, some vulnerable groups may have been underserved – notably pastoralists, older persons and persons with disabilities – because of delivery challenges. WFP acknowledged the need to continue to improve its delivery approaches in order to reach those groups.

Adaptation

20. The ICSP's four strategic outcomes remained relevant, although protracted crises and funding constraints affected WFP's ability to focus on long-term needs. Nonetheless, WFP actively engaged in joint resilience programmes and is developing a resilience strategy.
21. WFP identified and managed risks appropriately, including those related to the COVID-19 pandemic, and operated in a flexible way, adjusting its activities and delivery approaches through seven ICSP revisions in response to changes in circumstances, including the level of need. During the COVID-19 pandemic WFP and the nutrition cluster developed revised protocols for the distribution of food assistance, and through the logistics cluster WFP addressed supply chain issues. WFP also made programme adaptations, such as the doubling of rations for general food distribution, the introduction of take-home rations in school feeding programmes and the provision of food assistance through the urban safety net programme.

United Nations partnerships

22. WFP's work was fully aligned with the United Nations cooperation framework pillar 3 on improving food security and recovering local economies, which it co-led with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). WFP interventions were also relevant to the empowerment of women and young people, the building of peace and the

¹⁰ Integrated Food Security Phase Classification. 2020. *South Sudan: IPC Results October 2020–July 2021*.

strengthening of governance priorities. In line with the United Nations cooperation framework and successive humanitarian response plans, which call for integrated multisectoral approaches, partnership was a core feature of WFP's work. In addition to WFP's leadership of the logistics cluster, co-leadership of the food security and livelihoods cluster and engagement in the nutrition cluster, United Nations stakeholders also recognized the advantages of working in partnership with WFP, including WFP's extensive humanitarian reach, large geographic footprint and strong understanding of beneficiary communities.

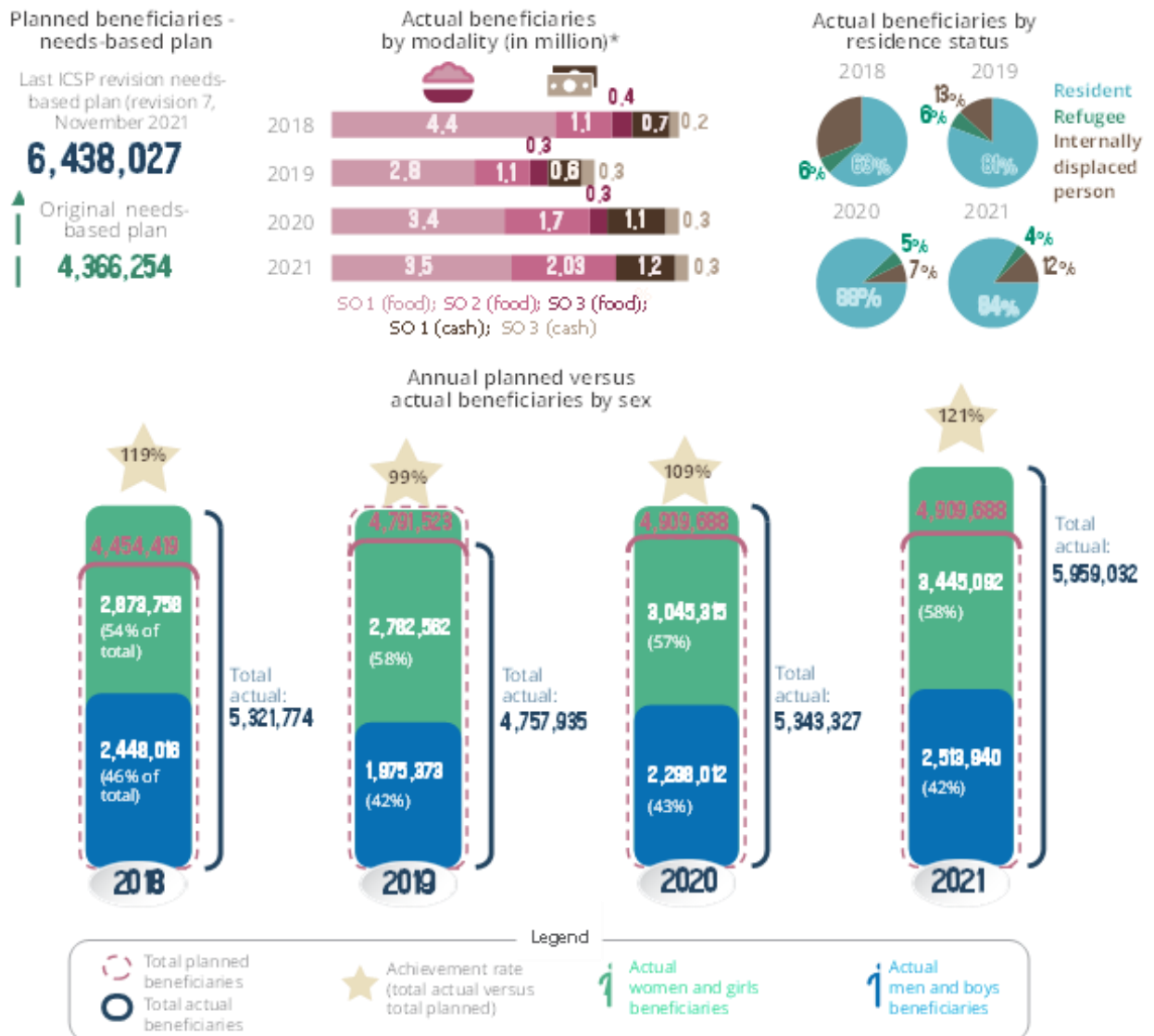
What are the extent and quality of WFP's specific contribution to interim country strategic plan outcomes in South Sudan?

Delivery of outputs and contribution to outcomes

23. Under strategic outcome 1, WFP was effective in saving the lives and improving the food security of people and communities in IPC phases 4 and 5. However, the level of assistance provided was not sufficient to reach food security targets. In all years of ICSP implementation, the actual amounts of food and cash-based transfers under strategic outcome 1 were 70 percent and 50 percent below target, respectively. The most food-insecure households were prioritized, and not all beneficiaries received full rations. Food consumption scores improved over time but coping strategy indicators showed a mixed picture. The level of assistance was not sufficient to offset the impact of recurrent shocks and crises including insecurity, flooding, increased food prices, poor infrastructure and restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The school feeding programme made a positive contribution to school enrolment and attendance, but its impact on education outcomes was limited by structural barriers to the provision of high-quality education.
24. Under strategic outcome 2 WFP was effective in the treatment of moderate acute malnutrition and in improving the quality of diets. However, the coverage of the preventive blanket supplementary feeding programme was insufficient owing to security, procurement and logistics challenges and funding constraints. Community nutrition volunteers jointly supported by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and WFP played a vital role in fostering programme effectiveness and sustainability.
25. Under strategic outcome 3, resilience building activities constituted a small but important and gradually increasing component of WFP's overall support. Performance against targets in terms of outputs was broadly good, although there was some disruption owing to COVID-19. Food assistance for assets activities were effective in improving self-reliance, food security and nutrition and reducing tensions and violence. Evidence on the effectiveness of efforts to build resilience to floods was unclear, with some farmer groups reporting increased self-reliance while others mentioned the devastating impact of flooding on dikes and vegetable gardens.
26. Under strategic outcome 4, the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) played a vital role in securing access to, and facilitating emergency response in, remote locations. The logistics cluster was seen as a key enabler for the successful implementation of the collective humanitarian response; strong support for the cluster helped to sustain well-managed and fully funded common logistics services.¹¹ Both air and logistics services operated with flexibility and registered high levels of user satisfaction.

¹¹ Logistics Cluster. 2020. *South Sudan – Lessons Learned Report, February 2020*.

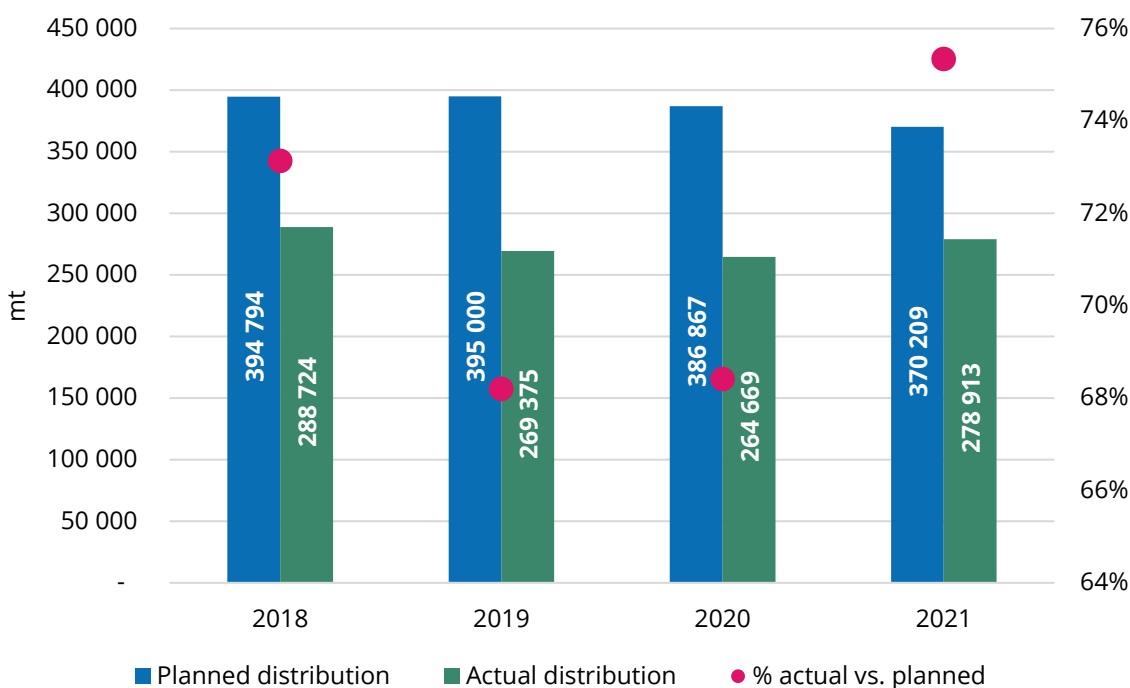
Figure 4: Interim country strategic plan beneficiaries, 2018–2021



* The numbers in this section might contain overlaps because some beneficiaries might receive both food and cash-based transfers and receive transfers under more than one strategic outcome.

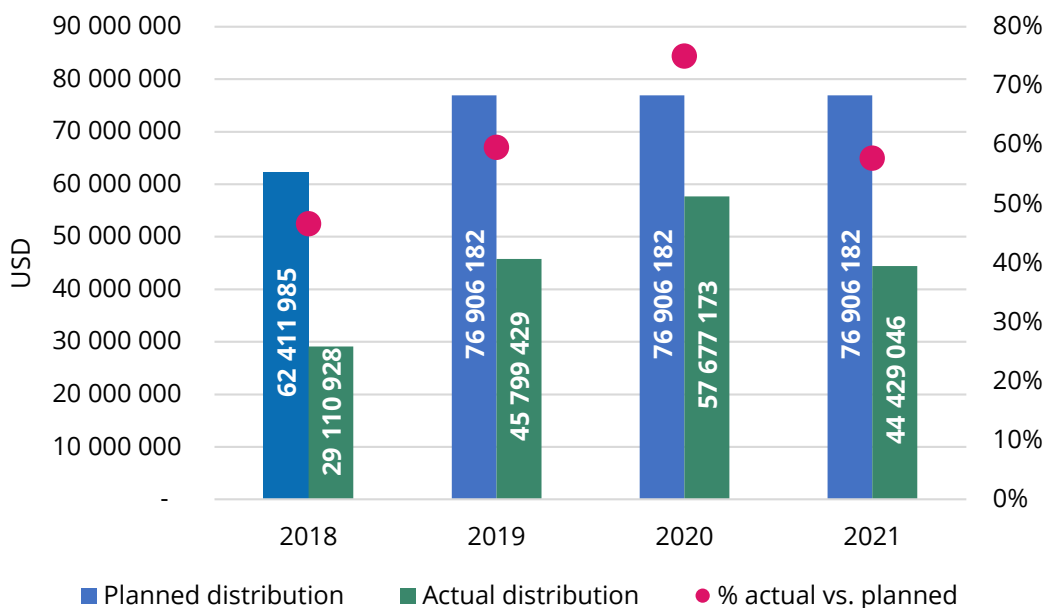
Sources: WFP South Sudan annual country reports, WFP country office tool for managing effectively (COMET) reports CM-R001b and CM-R020, covering 2018–2021.

Figure 5: Interim country strategic plan food transfers, 2018–2021



Source: WFP COMET report CM-R014, covering 2018–2021.

Figure 6: Interim country strategic plan cash-based transfers, 2018–2021



Source: WFP COMET report CM-R014, covering 2018–2021.

Gender and cross-cutting aims

27. WFP was committed to ensuring adherence to humanitarian principles and well positioned to do so thanks to its considerable presence in South Sudan, but staff faced a growing number of operational, security and safety challenges.

28. The South Sudan country office was the first WFP country office to develop a conflict sensitivity action plan, which it did in 2020 in collaboration with the Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility.¹² To address the challenges of conflict-sensitive programme design and delivery, WFP invested considerably in capacity strengthening for its staff.
29. Under the overarching South Sudan humanitarian country team protection strategy,¹³ WFP took steps to identify and mitigate the protection risks related to its activities. About 82 percent of interviewed beneficiaries reported that WFP assistance contributed significantly to ensuring the protection of their rights. WFP made an important contribution to beneficiary protection during the COVID-19 pandemic by supporting the raising of beneficiary awareness of COVID-19-related risks and transporting testing and personal protective equipment.
30. WFP launched and scaled up community feedback mechanisms, including a telephone hotline, helpdesks at distribution centres and community outreach. The staff of WFP and cooperating partners received training, a community feedback mechanism database was set up, and follow up exercises were conducted to facilitate the closure of feedback loops. However, the number of beneficiaries making complaints was small relative to the total number of beneficiaries, with underreporting by cooperating partners and insufficient visibility of the mechanisms among beneficiaries.
31. Gender equality and gender-transformative objectives featured prominently in the ICSP design, which received a gender and age marker code of 4. WFP provided cooperating partners with strong guidance and reached more women than men with its interventions, reflecting the priority given to pregnant and lactating women and girls and the fact that female-headed households are the most vulnerable. Examples of gender mainstreaming included involving male caregivers in nutrition counselling and engaging men and boys as change agents for nutrition improvement. Beneficiary feedback emphasized the positive impact of training men on the importance of women and girls' participation in community projects. WFP undertook a gender-focused situational analysis highlighting good practices. Some challenges were also highlighted, including in mainstreaming gender into every programme and achieving gender balance in WFP and cooperating partner staff.
32. Environmental risks were identified and managed appropriately by, for example, undertaking environmental screening for asset creation projects and reducing the amount of food delivered via airdrop by using road and river transport where possible in order to reduce carbon emissions.

Sustainability

33. The potential for sustainable impact was undermined by the challenging conditions in South Sudan, including extreme levels of acute food insecurity, political instability, violence and poor infrastructure, high dependence on food imports, climate-related crises and the COVID-19 pandemic. WFP's efforts to facilitate people's graduation from food assistance were compromised by new crises that lengthened the lean season. The capacity limitations, high staff turnover and resource constraints faced by the Government also affected the likelihood of sustainability.
34. Conceived as a transitional plan, the ICSP lacked a long-term vision and a road map for the delivery of sustainable results. Most outputs addressed immediate needs, and less effort was devoted to resilience building, sustainability and system strengthening. Such limited consideration of sustainability in the ICSP design was understandable given the prevailing

¹² [Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility: South Sudan](#).

¹³ South Sudan HCT. 2020. *Centrality of Protection: Strategy 2020*.

conditions at the time, which made it reasonable to assume that significant food insecurity would last throughout 2018–2022.

35. Despite the challenging environment, over time WFP increased its focus on resilience building. WFP staff suggested that WFP should consider more deeply how it might ensure that its resilience building work produced sustainable results and how it could better target and focus resources to prevent assistance under the ICSP from being "spread too thinly". The frequency of climate-related shocks, leading to widespread displacement and the destruction of livelihoods, requires a long-term approach to climate adaptation. WFP therefore needs to consider a time horizon of 15 years when defining how to promote people's transition away from food assistance.
36. WFP's experience indicates that some initiatives have the potential to be sustained into the future; these include, among other things, cash assistance, which supports local markets. WFP and cooperating partner staff considered that the conditions necessary for sustainability included deeper community engagement, more government capacity strengthening and more work on the humanitarian–development–peace nexus.

Links between humanitarian and development work

37. Throughout ICSP implementation, WFP took into account the strong interconnections among long-term food security, resilience and peacebuilding. In 2020, WFP sought to strengthen its position as a peacebuilding actor in South Sudan through partnerships. The community violence reduction programme being implemented jointly with other United Nations entities in Jonglei State is an example of how WFP is supporting targeted peacebuilding work with other actors. While the country office expressed the intention of increasing such work in the future, it is fully aware that it will need to work with partners that are more focused on, and have greater expertise in, peacebuilding.
38. WFP faced significant challenges in making progress in its work on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus during ICSP implementation because of weak governance at the national and state levels and the scale of humanitarian need. WFP made a strong contribution to the use of social protection approaches, implementing three of South Sudan's six main non-contributory social protection programmes.

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

Timeliness of delivery

39. WFP could not fully deliver planned outputs owing to funding constraints and shortfalls. Underfunding forced WFP to reduce the scale of its programmes, particularly those under strategic outcome 3 (resilience building). WFP demonstrated its ability to deliver emergency assistance rapidly. The use of technology, such as the introduction of biometric registration systems through WFP's digital beneficiary information and transfer management platform (SCOPE), facilitated the timely delivery of assistance. However, some delays were reported, particularly in the timing of food assistance for assets support, which was not always optimal.
40. Multiple factors outside the control of WFP affected the timeliness of assistance. Access challenges due to insecurity, flooding and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the pre-positioning of food and gaps in warehousing facilities in remote areas were the most frequently cited factors. In some instances, they led WFP to adjust the frequency of food distributions, which resulted in unintended consequences for beneficiaries and cooperating partners, such as the need to manage large rations and the risk of resale of rations.

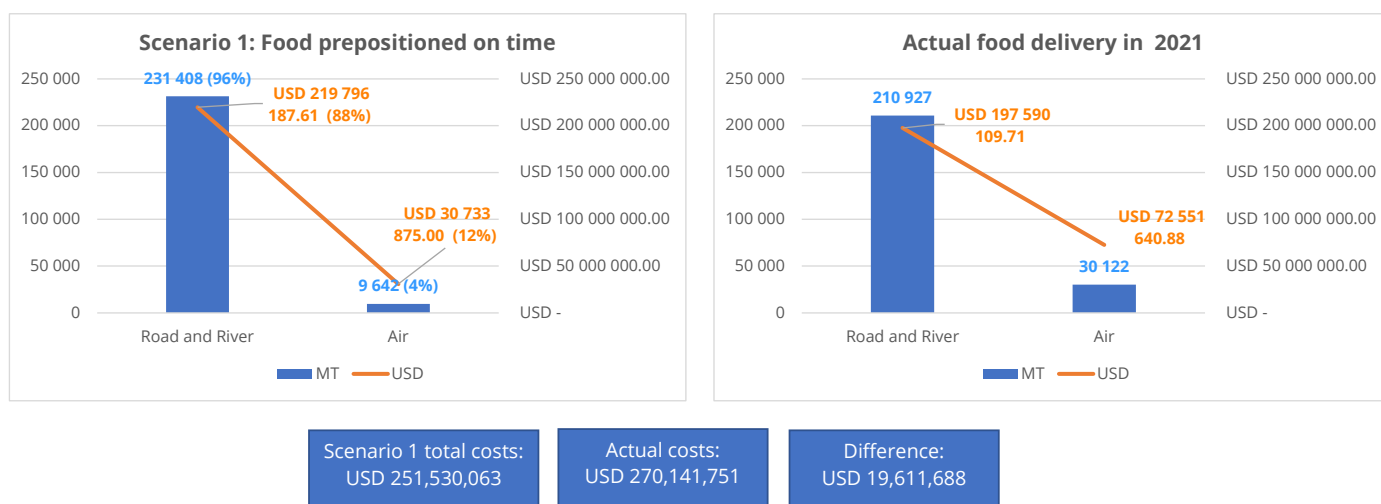
Coverage

41. Analysis of acute food insecurity and malnutrition carried out through the interagency food security and nutrition monitoring system and from IPC reports was used to inform geographic targeting and resource allocation. Since its resources were insufficient to cover all needs, WFP had to deliver assistance on a reduced scale, including by reducing rations or shortening the duration of the support provided to beneficiaries. Cash-based transfers were in some cases not possible because of donor conditions requiring that donations be used to purchase food. Beneficiaries reported that they were not always appropriately informed when assistance was reprioritized, although the country office reported taking various actions to clarify communications with beneficiaries. WFP's extensive geographic coverage across the country, coupled with funding constraints, led to the perception that WFP support was "spread too thinly".

Cost-efficiency and cost-effectiveness

42. Given the funding constraints it was critical for WFP to explore ways to improve cost-efficiency. Cost savings were achieved by reducing the number of airdrops used and expanding river and road transport. WFP also expanded the area in which it pre-positioned supplies through the use of mobile storage structures and innovative transport solutions. However, pre-positioning can only take place during a three month period in the dry season when roads are passable and requires early confirmation of funding. In 2021, the late confirmation of certain contributions resulted in additional costs of USD 19.6 million (see figure 7).

Figure 7: Financial impact of delayed pre-positioning of food and increased use of airdrops in 2021



Source: WFP South Sudan country office.

43. Changing the type of nutritious food products used also lowered transport and distribution costs. The quantity of locally procured food increased over time but remained relatively low as a result of systemic challenges. The country office regularly monitored market prices and conducted cost-effectiveness comparisons between transfer modalities, using cash rather than food whenever feasible.
44. UNHAS operations in South Sudan were well funded through donor contributions, and UNHAS was able to raise up to 50 percent of its funding through cost recovery mechanisms, making it one of the best performing UNHAS operations worldwide.

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

Use of existing evidence

45. Significant data were generated by WFP's monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning system, particularly on food assistance for assets activities, but fewer on other programmes. While decisions were made on the basis of available data, additional efforts are required to strengthen the link between evidence generation and decision making.

Resource mobilization

46. WFP faced unprecedented challenges with rising needs and declining funding. To mobilize resources, the country office held regular meetings with donors and improved its reporting on the use of funds. An increase in donor earmarking of contributions limited WFP's flexibility and efficiency. Pipeline sustainability was facilitated by use of the Global Commodity Management Facility, but the funding environment has become more challenging with clear signs of donor fatigue.

Partnerships

47. WFP's engagement with the Government of South Sudan was framed by memoranda of understanding with several ministries, but some key informants suggested that WFP engage more strategically with senior members of the national Government. The decentralized nature of governance and the absence of functional governance structures at the state and national levels limited WFP's ability to engage effectively in country capacity strengthening activities. Nonetheless, WFP was able to make progress by, for example, supporting the Ministry of General Education and Instruction in launching a national home-grown school feeding strategy and by seconding staff to the Ministry of Health's Nutrition Department. WFP also supported the establishment of resilience platforms that facilitated the engagement of state-level ministries in resilience building programmes in two states.
48. Good collaboration supported delivery and results, particularly with FAO the International Organization for Migration and UNICEF. The Partnership for Recovery and Resilience involving United Nations entities, donors and non-governmental organizations was an example of WFP and other agencies working together to deliver results across sectors. There was also good cooperation on advocacy, the conduct of food and nutrition studies, including for the inter-agency food security and nutrition monitoring system and IPC reports, and the joint emergency response in hard-to-reach areas through an integrated response mechanism with FAO and UNICEF.

Flexibility of the ICSP

49. WFP was adaptive and flexible in its approach to tackling shocks, drawing on its strong emergency response capacity. While WFP was dynamic in targeting and reprioritizing, the country office recognized the need for a more structured approach.
50. WFP's adaptive and innovative approaches were effective drivers of performance despite the highly challenging and complex environment. For example, the use of technology made an important contribution to the maintenance of business continuity and the reduction of health risks during the COVID-19 crisis. WFP field monitors and cooperating partners expressed the view that the use of technology had substantially improved WFP's ability to serve its beneficiaries despite the lack of digital infrastructure in the country.

Other factors that explain WFP's performance and strategic shift

51. Under the ICSP WFP increased its attention to resilience building, but its focus remained mainly on life saving rather than life changing. Resilience building results were also hampered by limited internal staff capacity and expertise.

52. Limited government capacity, combined with a number of other external factors, obstructed WFP's performance in making the strategic shift expected under the ICSP. In addition, WFP was confronted with numerous difficult challenges in implementing the ICSP during a highly turbulent period, which inevitably affected its performance.

Conclusions

53. WFP is the leading provider of humanitarian assistance in South Sudan, reflecting its strong comparative advantage in that area. The ICSP was well aligned with national priorities and the United Nations cooperation framework, but stronger engagement with national and state government is needed to allow an increased focus on sustainability and country capacity strengthening.
54. The ICSP was a useful transitional framework for WFP interventions that by design did not include a long-term approach to addressing the root causes of hunger. Sustainability was also not sufficiently considered. However, there was a shift in thinking over time, with a move to a more forward-looking approach to sustainable resilience building.
55. Targeting was strongly informed by evidence on the needs of the most vulnerable people and communities, but it was a huge challenge because of the scale of need arising from protracted crises and funding constraints. Given the resources available, WFP assistance was perceived to be spread too thinly and was insufficient to fully address all needs. During ICSP implementation, the launch and scale-up of the SCOPE beneficiary registration system as a common service was a major improvement, although the efficiency of SCOPE needs to be further strengthened.
56. WFP was successful in adapting its activities, particularly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. While it collected a strong body of evidence to inform the design and targeting of the ICSP, more work is needed to better integrate research, assessment, monitoring and evaluation systems into decision making processes.
57. WFP's specific contribution to ICSP strategic outcomes was strongest in the case of strategic outcome 2 (nutrition). Assistance provided under strategic outcome 1 was life-saving, particularly in extremely food-insecure areas, but insufficient to achieve the ICSP's planned food security outcomes given the deteriorating food security situation. School feeding programmes were rated as very beneficial in the alleviation of hunger and malnutrition among schoolchildren. Resilience building work under strategic outcome 3 was effective in improving self-reliance, food security and nutrition in communities and in reducing tensions and violence, but effectiveness in building resilience against seasonal shocks was not clear. The services of UNHAS and the logistics cluster under strategic outcome 4 were essential to supporting collective humanitarian assistance, but the effectiveness of strategic outcome 4 was compromised by movement restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.
58. WFP performed well in promoting cross-cutting issues such as protection, adherence to humanitarian principles and the consideration of environmental risks. However, WFP needs to continue to build on its work to mainstream conflict sensitivity into programmes and delivering a gender-transformative approach.

59. Throughout ICSP implementation, WFP took into account the strong interconnections among measures to promote long-term food security, resilience and peacebuilding. WFP faced significant challenges that impeded progress on the triple nexus. Most notable of those challenges were weak governance at the national and state levels, the limited availability of development funding, beneficiaries' dependence on food assistance, and the ICSP's lack of a long-term vision focused on the nexus. WFP has a solid reputation as a rapid emergency responder, but the efficient and timely delivery of planned outputs was hindered by factors that were mostly outside WFP's control, some of which led to unintended consequences for beneficiaries and cooperating partners.
60. Funding shortfalls were a major issue in the implementation of the ICSP and were a key driver of WFP's serious consideration of cost-efficiency in the delivery of assistance, including through cost-sharing with other agencies and significant reductions in the use of air transport.

Recommendations

| # | Recommendation | Level/nature | Responsibility | Other contributing entities | Priority | Action deadline |
|-----|---|--------------|----------------|---|----------|-----------------|
| 1 | In its next country strategic plan for South Sudan, WFP should avoid spreading its resources too thinly. | Strategic | Country office | Regional bureau | High | November 2022 |
| 1.1 | To avoid spreading its resources too thinly, WFP should align the ambitions of the country strategic plan with the forecasted level of funding and, going forward, should focus on priority areas where long-term impact can be achieved in coordination with other humanitarian and development actors. | Strategic | Country office | Regional bureau | High | November 2022 |
| 2 | WFP should consider a number of opportunities to maximize the long-term and sustainable results of its interventions with a view to ensuring greater coherence throughout its portfolio – including synergies among strategic outcomes – and better supporting the transition of beneficiaries from activities under strategic outcome 1 to activities under other strategic outcomes. | Strategic | Country office | Regional bureau, United Nations country team, Government of South Sudan, headquarters divisions | High | November 2022 |
| 2.1 | To guide the formulation of an explicit vision of how it will deliver long-term change and impact through its next country strategic plan, WFP should develop a theory of change and a supporting narrative describing how it will deliver sustainable impact during implementation of the country strategic plan and beyond, including in addressing the underlying causes of food insecurity. | Strategic | Country office | Regional bureau | High | November 2022 |
| 2.2 | To support progress on the humanitarian–development–peace nexus, in the next country strategic plan WFP should more explicitly set out its framework for supporting that progress and should recruit or deploy from the regional bureau specialists in social protection and peacebuilding who will promote a stronger emphasis on those areas in the country strategic plan. | Strategic | Country office | Regional bureau, Emergencies and Transitions Service | High | December 2023 |

| # | Recommendation | Level/nature | Responsibility | Other contributing entities | Priority | Action deadline |
|-----|--|--------------|----------------|---|----------|-----------------|
| 2.3 | Given the increasing malnutrition rates in South Sudan WFP should work more proactively with humanitarian and development partners (including the United Nations Children's Fund and the World Health Organization) with a view to better understanding the causes and implications of malnutrition and supporting nutrition-related programming in the next country strategic plan. | Strategic | Country office | Regional bureau, United Nations country team, Nutrition Division | High | December 2023 |
| 2.4 | Building on the findings from political economy analyses and the identification of champions in national, state and local government, WFP should articulate the short-, medium- and long-term objectives of its country capacity strengthening work and set out a plan for that work based on its corporate country capacity strengthening framework and in coordination with other United Nations entities. | Strategic | Country office | Regional bureau, United Nations country team, Government of South Sudan | High | November 2022 |
| 2.5 | WFP should strengthen advocacy on integrated school-based health and nutrition programmes and place school feeding at the core of those programmes. WFP should work with communities, faith-based organizations, local governments and national and international non-governmental organizations to examine how complementary interventions that better support improved education outcomes and gender equality can be fostered in order to increase the contribution of the school feeding programme to those objectives. WFP should continue to work with the United Nations Children's Fund as a key partner in its education and nutrition activities. | Strategic | Country office | Regional bureau, School-based Programmes unit, Nutrition Division | High | June 2023 |
| 2.6 | In the next country strategic plan, WFP should give greater consideration to addressing the access constraints faced by some groups (such as older persons, persons with disabilities and pastoralists) with a view to ensuring that their food and nutrition needs are met. | Strategic | Country office | Regional bureau | Medium | November 2022 |

| # | Recommendation | Level/nature | Responsibility | Other contributing entities | Priority | Action deadline |
|-----|--|--------------|----------------|--|----------|-----------------|
| 3 | To deliver on its ambition to increase the focus on resilience building in the next country strategic plan, WFP needs to take various steps. | Strategic | Country office | Regional bureau, Resilience and Food Systems Service | High | January 2023 |
| 3.1 | WFP should give greater consideration to its long-term vision for resilience building work and the approaches (market systems, food systems, community empowerment) that are the most appropriate for various groups and settings. | Strategic | Country office | Regional bureau | High | January 2023 |
| 3.2 | To inform strategic insights into, and the scale-up of approaches to, the transition from unconditional food assistance to resilience-oriented activities, and to support the tailoring of WFP interventions to better fit the needs and aspirations of beneficiaries, WFP should conduct research (possibly behavioural insight research) to increase its understanding of behaviours and the underlying objectives, constraints, situations and triggers that drive the transition of beneficiaries from dependence on relief support to self-reliance. Across WFP, there is a need for more sharing of good practices on and positive experiences of beneficiaries' transition from humanitarian to development-oriented support in order to inform the formulation of a strategy in that area. | Strategic | Country office | Regional bureau, Resilience and Food Systems Service | High | June 2023 |
| 3.3 | WFP should scale up the development of integrated teams with a view to moving from some degree of siloed implementation of activities to fully incorporating a resilience lens into its portfolio of activities in South Sudan and shifting the mindset of WFP and cooperating partner staff from humanitarian to development thinking. | Strategic | Country office | Regional bureau | High | January 2023 |

| # | Recommendation | Level/nature | Responsibility | Other contributing entities | Priority | Action deadline |
|-----|--|--------------|----------------|---|----------|-----------------|
| 4 | Beneficiary registration and verification processes need to be made more efficient and research, assessment, monitoring and evaluation data and analyses should be better integrated into decision making structures. | Operational | Country office | Regional bureau | Medium | April 2023 |
| 4.1 | WFP should continue to improve the efficiency of biometric registration and verification processes to reduce the time that they require and the stress they cause for beneficiaries. | Operational | Country office | Regional bureau | Medium | April 2023 |
| 4.2 | WFP should address the gaps in capacity for the assessment of research, assessment and monitoring data in the country office and field offices and conduct a specific diagnostic review of monitoring, evaluation and learning systems with a view to informing better integration of those systems into decision making structures and data use by senior management and to improving knowledge management practices, including the sharing of data and evidence with partners. | Operational | Country office | Regional bureau | Medium | January 2023 |
| 5 | WFP should continue to strengthen approaches to a number of cross-cutting themes, including accountability to affected populations, conflict sensitivity and gender equality. | Operational | Country office | Cooperating partners, regional bureau, headquarters divisions | High | January 2023 |
| 5.1 | To address beneficiaries' concerns regarding inadequate communication on ration cuts and reprioritization exercises, WFP and cooperating partners should expand the channels they use for sharing information by, for example, recording messages in local languages, broadcasting them at distribution sites and monitoring the effectiveness of communications with the involvement of local government. | Operational | Country office | Cooperating partners | High | June 2023 |

| # | Recommendation | Level/nature | Responsibility | Other contributing entities | Priority | Action deadline |
|-----|---|--------------|----------------|---|----------|-----------------|
| 5.2 | WFP should work closely with field offices and cooperating partners to ensure that all feedback from beneficiaries (including feedback received via informal channels) is logged and recorded on community feedback mechanisms, and the issues raised are addressed in a timely manner. Furthermore, helpdesks should be reinstated at all distribution sites (where not yet the case). To provide incentives for senior managers (those at head of field office level and above) to pay due attention to accountability to affected populations, the subject should be included in their performance appraisals. Feedback loops and reporting to beneficiaries on the outcomes and programmatic adjustments resulting from their feedback need to be strengthened. | Operational | Country office | Regional bureau, Human Resources Division, cooperating partners | High | June 2023 |
| 5.3 | WFP should take a long-term approach to achieving its aspirations regarding the progressive application of a gender-transformative approach by defining short-term activities that contribute to that long-term goal. Further research on identifying the enabling factors and good practices in the application of a gender-transformative approach is also recommended. WFP should consider investing in gender-related stand-alone projects that can be implemented by partners. | Operational | Country office | Regional bureau, Gender Office | High | January 2023 |
| 5.4 | WFP should build on its work to ensure that conflict sensitivity is mainstreamed into programme design and delivery by continuing to enhance internal capacity to promote consensus on a conflict-sensitive approach to all of its engagement in South Sudan and, in so doing, to contribute to corporate-level learning. | Operational | Country office | Cooperating partners, regional bureau, Emergencies and Transition Service | Medium | Ongoing |

| # | Recommendation | Level/nature | Responsibility | Other contributing entities | Priority | Action deadline |
|-----|---|--------------|----------------|--|----------|-----------------|
| 6 | WFP needs to strengthen partnership arrangements in several areas. | Operational | Country office | Headquarters divisions, regional bureau | High | January 2023 |
| 6.1 | To address funding constraints going forward, the country office should engage with headquarters and the regional bureau on revising the fundraising strategy for South Sudan by proactively exploring and considering new funding streams such as climate funds and international financial institutions and defining a fundraising strategy for its resilience building activities. | Operational | Country office | Regional bureau, Private Partnerships and Fundraising Division, Washington Office, Climate and Disaster Risk Reduction Programmes Unit | High | January 2023 |
| 6.2 | In the light of the annual delays in the procurement of food supplies, the country office and regional bureau should proactively encourage headquarters to more flexibly support pre-financing of food procurement in order to bridge the gap between the confirmation of donor contributions and the deadlines for food procurement and delivery and enable effective pre-positioning of supplies in advance of flooding or rainy seasons. | Operational | Country office | Regional bureau, Strategic Resource Allocation Committee, Supply Chain Operations Division | High | January 2023 |
| 6.3 | Where possible, WFP should sign field-level agreements of three years duration with its cooperating partners and should advocate multi-year funding commitments. The annual funding commitments made by certain donors, and the two-year duration of most field-level agreements, affect the forward planning of WFP activities. | Operational | Country office | Regional bureau, Private Partnerships and Fundraising Division | Medium | January 2023 |
| 6.4 | While planning the next country strategic plan WFP should seek to broaden its engagement with South Sudanese stakeholders such as the Ministry of Peacebuilding with regard to peacebuilding interventions and the Ministry of Environment and Forestry for work on climate adaptation. | Operational | Country office | Government of South Sudan | High | November 2022 |

Acronyms

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| COMET | country office tool for managing effectively |
| COVID-19 | coronavirus disease 2019 |
| CSP | country strategic plan |
| FAO | Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations |
| ICSP | interim country strategic plan |
| IPC | Integrated Food Security Phase Classification |
| SCOPE | digital beneficiary information and transfer management platform |
| SDG | Sustainable Development Goal |
| UNHAS | United Nations Humanitarian Air Service |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund |