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Summary report on the evaluation of the country strategic plan for the Sudan (2019–2023)

Executive summary

The evaluation of the country strategic plan for the Sudan was conducted between May 2021 and January 2022 and focused on WFP's strategic positioning, its contribution to outcomes, efficiency in implementation and the factors explaining its performance. It was conducted using a theory-based mixed methods approach to serve the dual purpose of accountability and learning and to inform the preparation of a new country strategic plan.

The Sudan's population is mostly rural (64.7 percent) and young (39.8 percent younger than 14). Sixteen percent of the population suffers from acute food insecurity, and chronic malnutrition affects an estimated 34 percent of children. The country strategic plan was implemented during a tumultuous period that included political upheaval, a growing influx of refugees from Tigray and disruption caused by the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic, resulting in increasing food insecurity. The share of the population living in extreme poverty increased over the last four years to an estimated 54.8 percent.

The country strategic plan focused on food assistance for food-insecure people, school meals programmes, nutrition, asset creation and service provision. It envisaged a strategic shift in WFP operations, combining direct delivery with technical assistance and national capacity strengthening to enhance the organization's effectiveness and the sustainability of its work across the humanitarian–development–peace nexus.

The plan was aligned with national policies and objectives and with the Sustainable Development Goals. It focused on the most pressing issues facing the country's poor and supported strategies to address them.

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.

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WFP responded effectively to increasing food insecurity in the Sudan, confirming its lead role in delivering humanitarian assistance. It adapted well to the volatile country context and its response to COVID-19 was highly appreciated. Its common services were also valued as a means of ensuring efficient and effective emergency response.

There are good examples of WFP taking a conflict-sensitive approach through its offices in two rebel-held areas. However, the evaluation found that effectiveness across the triple nexus was hindered by limited programme integration and internal coordination and limited synergies with other national and international humanitarian and development actors.

WFP's performance and results were affected by factors related to programme design, the country office structure and capacity, its approach to partnerships and donor relations, funding and country context. Political turbulence and uncertainty put extra pressure on WFP and the United Nations country team while reducing the prospects for establishing strong partnerships with the Government.

The evaluation concluded that the country strategic plan was appropriately aspirational and its implementation provided an opportunity to learn what might be required to achieve the envisaged strategic shift and embed new ways of working. The country office responded timely and effectively to various emergencies and unforeseen developments. However, partly because of the need to scale up its humanitarian response, WFP was not entirely successful in making the strategic shift central to the country strategic plan and should consider how best to take on its envisioned role of enabler.

The evaluation made four strategic recommendations and one operational recommendation aimed at strengthening WFP's positioning and its contributions across the triple nexus.

Draft decision*

The Board takes note of the summary report on the evaluation of the country strategic plan for the Sudan (2019–2023) (WFP/EB.2/2022/6-K) and management response (WFP/EB.2/2022/6-K/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. Country strategic plan (CSP) evaluations are the primary instrument for accountability and learning at the country level. They provide evidence of WFP's strategic positioning and results to inform the design of successive CSPs and potentially contribute to the design of United Nations sustainable development cooperation frameworks.
2. The evaluation of the Sudan CSP for 2019–2023 was conducted between May 2021 and January 2022. It covered WFP's activities from 2017 to September 2021. The primary users of the evaluation are the WFP country office and its internal and external stakeholders, including beneficiaries.
3. The evaluation adopted a theory-based mixed-methods approach. Data collection included a desk review, key informant interviews and focus group discussions. Findings were validated through triangulation of sources and methods, and conclusions and recommendations were discussed with internal and external stakeholders during two online workshops in January and February 2022.

Context

4. The Sudan is the third largest country in Africa, with a population of approximately 44 million in 2020. Almost 65 percent of its people live in rural areas, and 39.8 percent are under 14.¹ Chronic child malnutrition is estimated at 34 percent.² According to Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) data for April and May 2021, an estimated 7.3 million people (16 percent) suffer from acute food insecurity.
5. Since 2017 economic conditions have deteriorated, with high inflation and rising prices. The percentage of people living in extreme poverty increased to an estimated 54.8 percent;³ gross domestic product (GDP) contracted by 1.3 percent in 2019 and by 1.6 percent in 2020.⁴
6. Agriculture accounted for 21 percent of GDP in 2020.⁵ However, agricultural productivity is low and the Sudan has been affected by increasingly unpredictable climate events, which are expected to reduce GDP dramatically.
7. The Sudan ranks 138 of 162 countries in the 2019 Gender Inequality Index. Food security and nutrition outcomes differ by gender, with women and girls facing greater barriers and faring worse than men and boys.
8. The CSP was implemented during a tumultuous period that included political upheaval, a growing influx of refugees from Tigray and disruption caused by the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.











¹ World Bank. [Sudan country page](#). Data extracted in 2021.

² United Nations Children's Fund. 2021. *The State of the World's Children 2021: On My Mind – Promoting, protecting and caring for children's mental health*.

³ World Bank Group. 2020. *Macro Poverty Outlook for Sub-Saharan Africa: Country-by-country analysis and projections for the developing world* and World Bank. 2020. *Country Engagement Note: Sudan – For the Period FY21-FY22*.

⁴ World Bank. [Sudan country page](#). Data extracted in 2021.

⁵ *Ibid.*

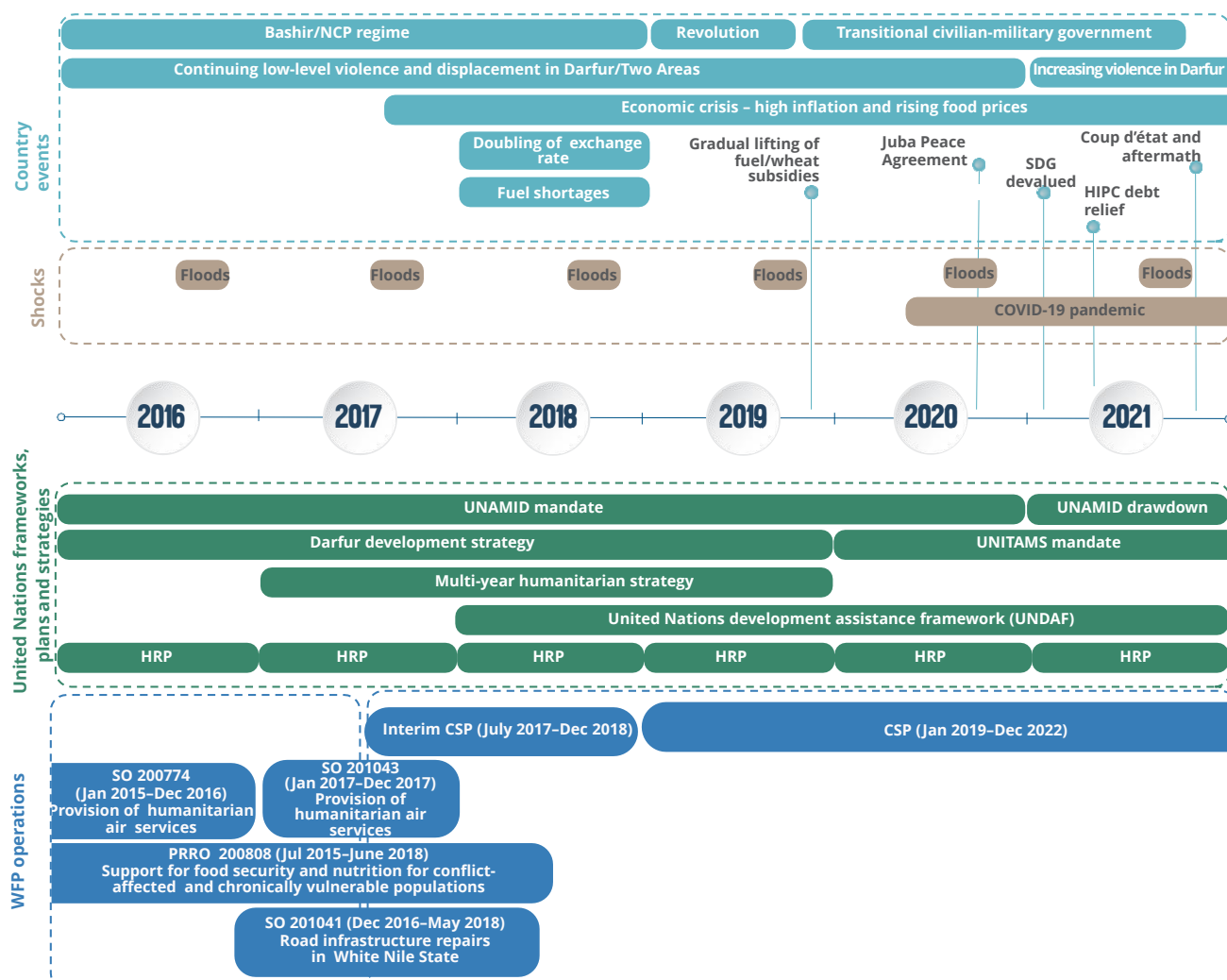
TABLE 1: SOCIOECONOMIC INDICATORS			
	Indicator	Value	Year
	Life expectancy at birth (years) (1)	65.3	2020
	Gender Inequality Index (1)	0.545 (138 out of 162)	2019
	Literacy rate (% , > 15 years) (2)	60.7	2018
	Primary and secondary school enrolment (2)	79 and 46	2018
	Under-5 chronic malnutrition (%) (3)	34	2021
	Under-5 acute malnutrition (%) (3)	16	2021
	Under-5 mortality rate (per 1,000 live births) (3)	58	2021
	Population with high levels of acute food insecurity (Phase 3+) (4)	7.3 million (16 percent)	2021
	Share of agriculture in gross domestic product (%) (2)	21	2020
	Maternal mortality ratio (per 100,000 live births) (1)	295	2020

Sources: (1) United Nations Development Programme. 2020. *Human Development Report 2020: The next frontier – Human development and the Anthropocene*; (2) World Bank. *Sudan country page*. Data extracted in 2021; (3) United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). *The State of the World's Children 2021, interactive dashboard and statistical tables*; (4) IPC. 2021. *Sudan: Acute Food Insecurity Situation April–May 2021 and Projections for June–September 2021 and October 2021–February 2022*.

WFP country strategic plan

9. Following the 2017–2018 interim CSP, WFP put forward a long-term vision that recognizes the humanitarian–development–peace nexus and reflects national objectives and capacities.
10. Originally planned to run from 2019 to 2023, the CSP was due to be shortened by one year to bring it in line with the United Nations development assistance framework for the Sudan. However, political events in October 2021 brought consultations on the new United Nations sustainable development cooperation framework to a standstill. And, in line with an inter-agency decision, WFP reinstated the original CSP timeframe.⁶
11. The CSP was designed around four strategic outcomes and nine activities focusing on food assistance for food-insecure people, school meals programmes, nutrition, asset creation, service provision and capacity strengthening. However, several CSP revisions between 2019 and 2021 expanded the CSP to five strategic outcomes and twelve activities. Figure 1 illustrates the major changes in the country context, WFP's strategic focus and the United Nations development assistance framework.

⁶ WFP. 2021. *Crisis response revision of the Sudan country strategic plan (2019–2023) and corresponding budget increase*. Revision 4 was approved by the WFP Executive Director and the Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in December 2021. The budget revision maintained the strategic orientation of the CSP. It increased the budget to USD 3.4 billion and increased the number of beneficiaries by 5 million.

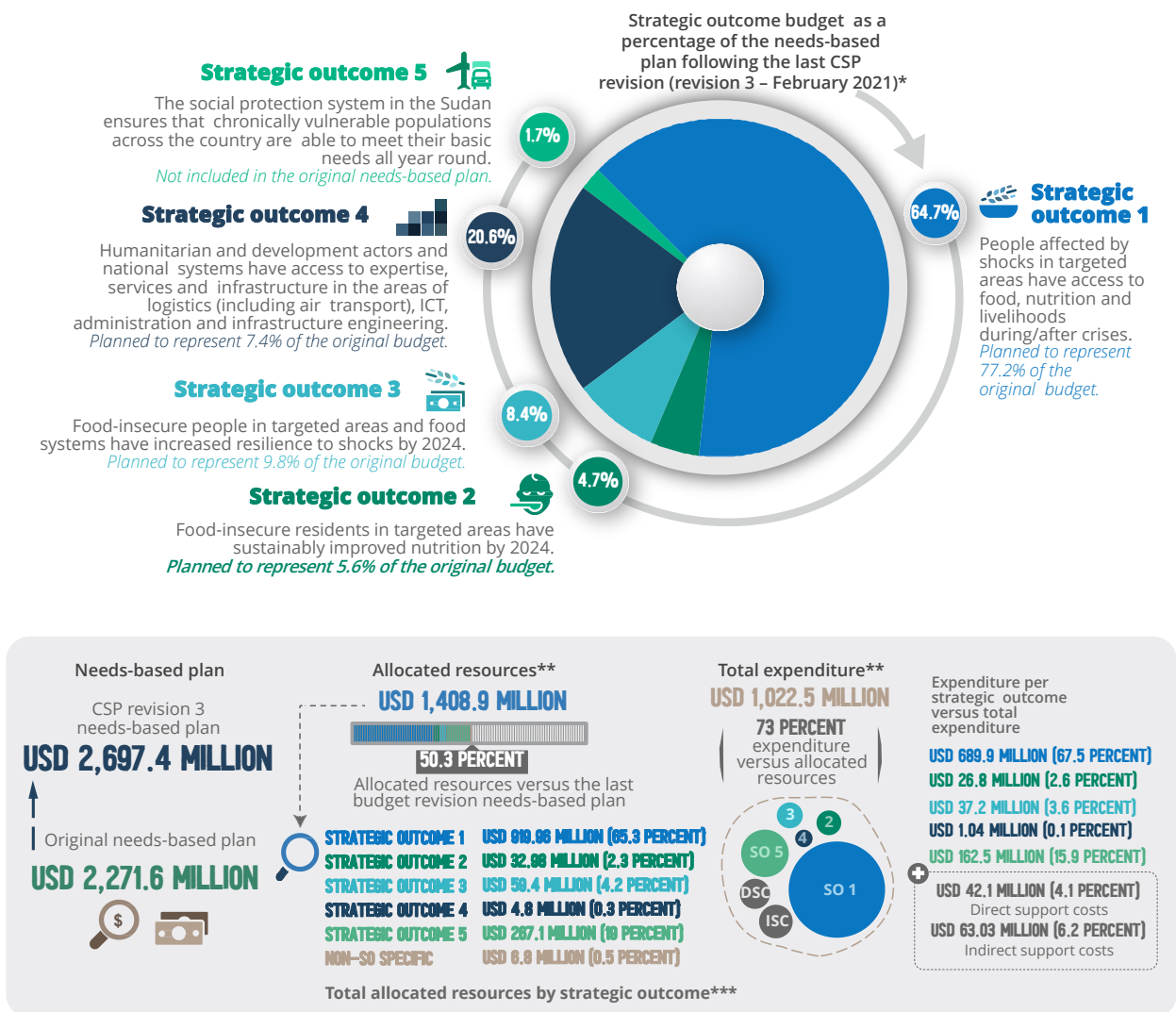
Figure 1: Country context and WFP operational overview of the Sudan (2016–2021)

Source: Integrated Road Map analytics ACR1 report and System for Programme Approval Plus.

Abbreviations: HIPC = heavily indebted poor country; HRP = humanitarian response plan; NCP = National Congress Party; PRRO = protracted relief and recovery operation; SDG = Sustainable Development Goal; SO = special operation; UNITAMS = United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan; UNAMID = African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur.

12. The CSP had an original budget of USD 2.27 billion for the period 2019–2023 (figure 2) and was intended to reach 6,251,700 beneficiaries (figure 3). During implementation, however, the budget was increased to USD 2.7 billion and there were no changes in the number of planned beneficiaries.
13. By August 2021, the CSP was 50.3 percent funded, with 64.7 percent of total resources allocated to emergency response (figure 2). The United States of America was the main donor, providing 51 percent of CSP funding, followed by regional trust funds (10 percent), the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (7 percent) and the European Commission (6 percent); 11 percent of the funding came from miscellaneous income.

Figure 2: The Sudan country strategic plan (2019–2021) strategic outcomes, budget, funding and expenditures

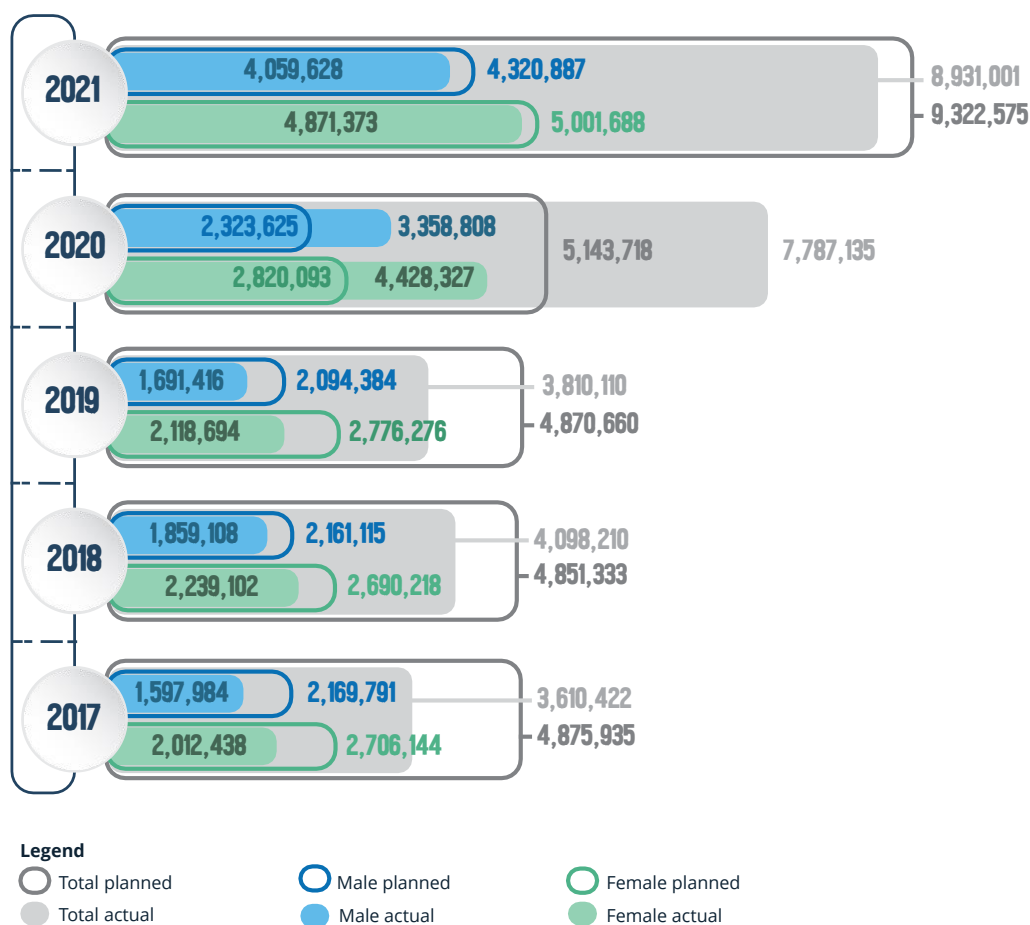


* The needs-based plan budget percentages by strategic outcome have been calculated at the grand total costs level, including direct (USD 117.5million) and indirect (USD 139.3 million) support costs. This data refers to CSP revision 3, approved in February 2021.

** Allocated resources and expenditures figures are cumulative, covering the period January 2017–31 December 2021.

*** Allocated resources by strategic outcome do not add up to USD 1,408.9 million because resources were also allocated to direct (USD 54.9 million, or 3.9 percent of total allocated resources) and indirect (USD 63.03 million, or 4.5 percent of total allocated resources) support costs.

Source: Graphic by the Office of Evaluation based on the full report on the evaluation of the Sudan CSP for 2019–2023.

Figure 3: Annual overall actual versus planned beneficiaries by sex (2017–2021)

Sources: Annual country reports for 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020; draft annual country report 2021.

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 and alignment

- Developed within a challenging political context, the CSP was grounded in national priorities and the most pressing issues facing the country's poor. It was successfully aligned with relevant national policies and goals and with the SDGs. The CSP drew on the zero hunger strategic review for 2017–2030 and was informed by extensive consultations with national institutions at the central and state levels, civil society and other United Nations entities. The CSP built on WFP's proven strengths and comparative advantages in food distribution and delivery, common services and geographic reach.

Addressing the needs of the most vulnerable

- Through its strong data collection and rapid response capability, WFP confirmed its leadership and demonstrated strong overall performance in mitigating food insecurity in the Sudan.
- Detailed analysis reveals, however, that centralized approaches to general food distribution and other delivery methods do not always adequately adjust and respond to local needs, and there can be trade-offs between enhanced coverage and the adequacy of rations.

17. The CSP design was gender-sensitive and reporting was largely disaggregated; however, the mainstreaming of gender in implementation did not go beyond the gender-balanced coverage of beneficiaries. Disability was acknowledged and data on its prevalence among vulnerable households were collected, but programming did not seem to pay attention to the special needs of people living with disabilities or their families.

Strategic position and responsiveness to a dynamic context

18. WFP responded strongly to the challenge of increasing food and cash distribution in the context of COVID-19, both in terms of the number of beneficiaries reached and the areas covered, and its common services are highly valued as a means of ensuring efficient and effective emergency response. Overall, WFP's operational response to the pandemic was highly appreciated; the organization significantly contributed to saving lives and reinforced its position as a leader in humanitarian response.
19. WFP adapted relatively well to a volatile political context. However, its ability to reposition its "changing lives" work was limited by donor funding frameworks, its own programming structures and the need to focus on humanitarian assistance.

Coherence with the United Nations cooperation framework

20. The CSP reflected shared United Nations priorities in the Sudan. Synergies have been established with various entities, including UNICEF to support the Ministry of Health on nutrition policy development and implementation and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to establish relief operations for the Tigray refugee population in eastern Sudan. WFP also worked with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) on crop and food assessments. In other cases, however, the respective roles of cooperating entities were not clear.

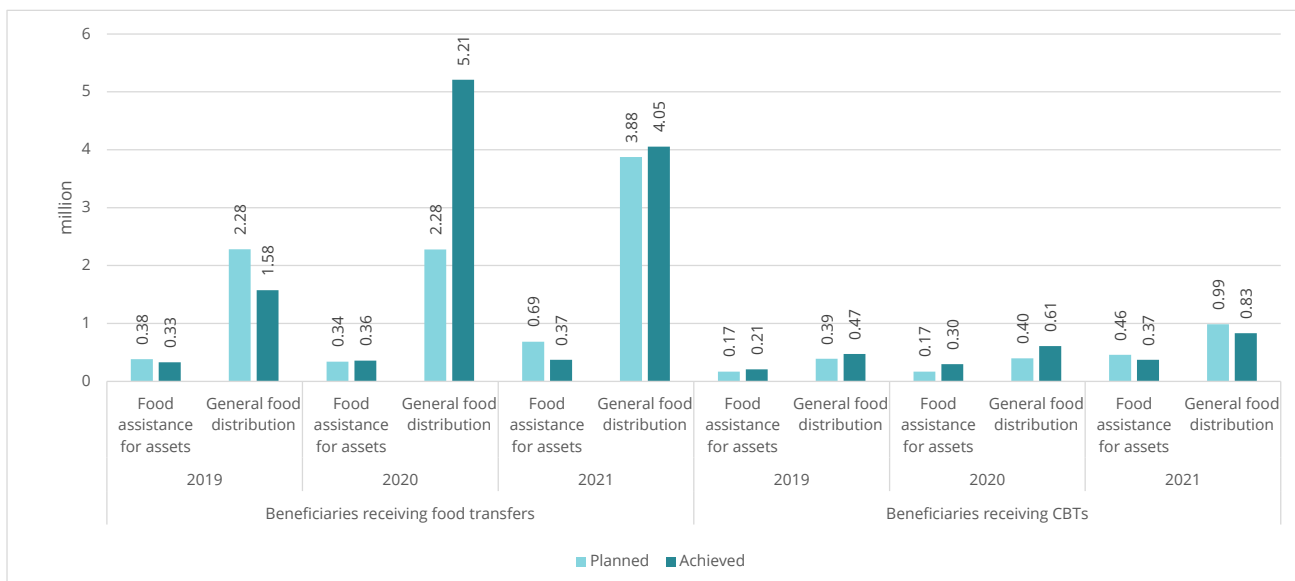
What are the extent and quality of WFP's contribution to country strategic plan outcomes in the Sudan?

21. The CSP spreads school feeding and the provision of nutrition support in health centres across strategic outcomes 1 and 2. Similarly, WFP engagement with the Government on the Sudan family support programme features under two activities linked to two different strategic outcomes. The cash transfer service delivery component is formally linked to strategic outcome 4, while the social protection capacity strengthening component is categorized as a contribution to strategic outcome 5. This structure did not result in double-counting of beneficiaries but presented challenges for results-based reporting.

Unconditional resource transfers contributing to strategic outcome 1: People affected by shocks in targeted areas have access to food, nutrition and livelihoods during and after crises

22. Strategic outcome 1 absorbed almost 70 percent of all CSP resources. Unconditional food and cash transfers accounted for 80 percent of the budget for this strategic outcome.
23. WFP operations were significantly scaled up in 2020 in response to rising food insecurity and in support of the Government's initiative to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 containment measures on vulnerable urban and peri-urban populations in Khartoum State. At the same time, increased humanitarian access to previously inaccessible areas in South Kordofan, Blue Nile and Jebel Marra (Central Darfur) enabled the provision of humanitarian assistance in those locations for the first time since 2011.
24. Targets related to food assistance for assets, general food distribution and cash-based transfers (CBTs) were largely achieved and sometimes exceeded (figure 4). In some cases, challenges related to the operating environment brought assistance to an abrupt halt and can explain differences between planned and actual beneficiaries.

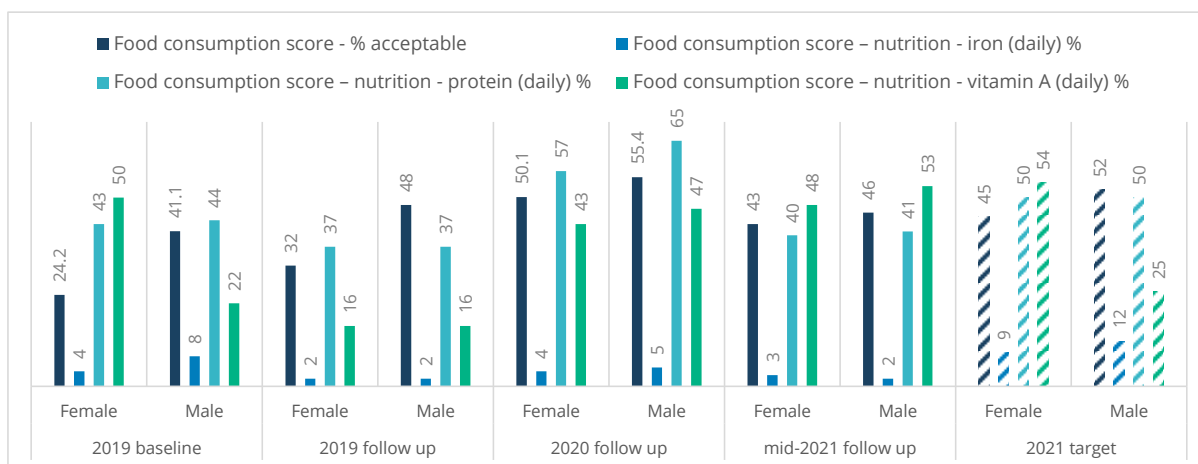
Figure 4: Provision of food and CBTs to people affected by shocks



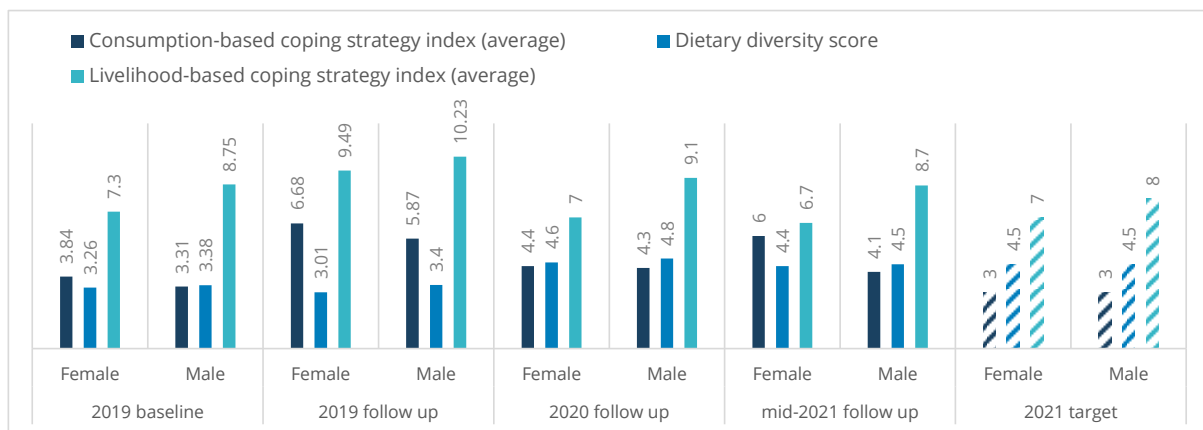
Sources: Annual country reports for 2019 and 2020; draft annual country report 2021.

25. As illustrated in figures 5 and 6, outcome results were mostly encouraging. Food consumption scores, coping indices, nutrition scores and dietary diversity generally improved for the sampled beneficiaries, although indicators fluctuated across years. For example, iron, vitamin A and protein consumption deteriorated in 2019, while in 2020 targets for the daily consumption of protein were met or exceeded and iron consumption by both men and women and vitamin A consumption by women remained at or below baseline levels. By mid-2021 daily iron and protein consumption had decreased again and vitamin A consumption had increased slightly.

Figure 5: Food consumption and nutrition indicators



Sources: Annual country reports; food security monitoring system data (June 2021).

Figure 6: Coping indices and dietary diversity scores

Sources: Annual country reports; food security monitoring system data (June 2021).

26. Average figures across a sampled population do not account for variables beyond WFP control that can heavily influence food and nutrition security. For example, household consumption and nutrition scores can deteriorate quickly if breadwinners lose their jobs or access to markets is curtailed.

Malnutrition interventions and school feeding, contributing to strategic outcome 1 and strategic outcome 2: Food-insecure residents in targeted areas have sustainably improved nutrition by 2024

27. In partnership with the Ministry of Health and state health authorities, WFP supported community nutrition centres in the treatment of moderate acute malnutrition in children age 6–59 months and pregnant and lactating women and girls, complementing treatment with food-based prevention of malnutrition and micronutrient supplementation. Outcome indicator targets for malnutrition treatment were met: 97 percent of targeted children age 6–59 months and pregnant and lactating women and girls enrolled in moderate acute malnutrition treatment programmes were cured.
28. School feeding activities had a positive effect on school retention levels. Anecdotal evidence suggests that examination results also improved. However, output level results from nutrition-related interventions were severely constrained by funding shortfalls.
29. In response to school closures due to COVID-19, WFP provided take-home rations in lieu of school meals in 11 states; this assistance included for the first-time primary schoolchildren in Khartoum State.⁷
30. WFP also contributed to increasing the coverage of the school feeding programmes implemented by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health and in 2021 a budget line for school feeding was included in national and state budgets for the first time, suggesting increased national ownership. However, the CSP had no clear parameters for capacity strengthening and efforts to that end mostly resulted in one-off CBT training and in filling capacity gaps in the Ministry of Education through the secondment of national WFP staff, with no clear long-term strategy for going beyond temporary capacity substitution.

⁷ WFP. 2020. [School feeding in Sudan: Before the coronavirus and beyond](#).

Productive safety net and post-harvest losses programmes contributing to strategic outcome 3: Food-insecure people in targeted areas and food systems have increased resilience to shocks by 2024

31. Through the CSP, WFP seeks to contribute to enhancing livelihoods by increasing the productive capacity of food-insecure rural populations and creating community-based assets. It also seeks to strengthen national institutions operating at the state and community levels.
32. Activities were generally implemented as planned. However, limited financial and human resources limited the effectiveness of WFP's response to beneficiary needs. The evaluation also found that a more consultative approach to identifying and following up on beneficiary needs would have improved relevance, ownership and effectiveness. Focus group discussions with farming communities during the evaluation field work revealed that if they had been consulted, they would have prioritized improved access to farming inputs rather than reducing post-harvest losses. Asset-creating training activities were perceived relevant by beneficiaries but without further assistance and the provision of the necessary equipment and raw materials the learned skills are of limited use in improving livelihoods.
33. The range of programming options is very limited, particularly in respect of post-harvest losses, but WFP has ambitions to expand. Some area offices are trying to offer more integrated programming at the community level, with good prospects for enhancing the effectiveness of development-oriented programming.

United Nations Humanitarian Air Service, logistics/supply chain services and wheat procurement contributing to strategic outcome 4: Humanitarian and development actors and national systems have access to expertise, services and infrastructure in the areas of logistics (including air transport), information and communications technology, administration and infrastructure engineering

34. United Nations Humanitarian Air Service services were essential to supporting the safe and effective delivery of humanitarian assistance in the Sudan during the period under review. Stakeholders see WFP as having a very strong comparative advantage in supply chain management and logistics, and its services have enabled the humanitarian and development community to reach the most vulnerable populations to provide critical assistance.
35. However, some stakeholders have voiced concern about the functioning of the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service steering committee, which is perceived as too large (with over 40 members) and poorly governed; no meetings were held between November 2020 and September 2021.
36. WFP helped to balance local currency expenditure with foreign exchange in the Sudan and helped improve the supply of bread to the population. Following a request by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, WFP purchased wheat on the international market on behalf of the Government. Currency devaluation posed a significant challenge to procurement: between 2018 and 2021 the Sudanese Pound to USD exchange rate plummeted from SDG 9.00 to SDG 445.00. WFP continued the wheat import support programme in 2021 but was not able to achieve the same level of exchange rate gains as in previous years.

Social protection system capacity strengthening contributing to strategic outcome 4 and strategic outcome 5: The social protection system in the Sudan ensures that chronically vulnerable populations across the country are able to meet their basic needs all year round

37. Activities under these outcomes were aimed at supporting the Sudan family support programme, which was conceived by the transitional Government of the Sudan and co-financed by the World Bank to provide cash transfers to 80 percent of the population. Although the United Nations country team initially declined to be involved with the programme, WFP later offered to provide technical assistance with regard to cash-based transfers.
38. WFP support included communications, software development, payments, system architecture, business analysis, data centre management, finance and budget data analysis and relationship management.
39. The evaluation found that WFP over time gained recognition for its capabilities, demonstrating agility in a context of shifting external expectations, changing government interlocutors and challenging operational dynamics.
40. However, WFP lacked a coherent and consistent strategy, not only for working with the Government and the World Bank but also for articulating its own objectives. Coupled with a challenging political landscape, this hampered the effectiveness of capacity strengthening initiatives.
41. Although WFP's long-term role in relation to the Sudan family support programme is uncertain, the organization remains an essential partner able to contribute on-the-ground expertise and experience in cash delivery, beneficiary enrolment and registration.

Sustainability

42. For reasons largely beyond the control of WFP, sustainability of results has been elusive. An integrated approach to policy development and institutional capacity strengthening, supporting the enhancement of core competencies needed to carry out essential tasks at the national and local levels will be critical to enhancing sustainability. Also, under current conditions there is little prospect for refugee and internally displaced communities to become self-reliant in the near future.

Cross-cutting aims: Humanitarian principles, protection, disability, accountability to affected populations, gender and equity considerations

Humanitarian principles

43. The design of interventions was informed by WFP vulnerability analysis and mapping assessments using standard vulnerability criteria and well-defined vulnerable groups. Programme activities are founded on the principle of equity, targeting and supporting the most vulnerable women, men, boys and girls. The rigor of vulnerability assessments and needs-based plans is key to WFP impartiality and has enabled WFP to adhere to international humanitarian principles.
44. Several evaluation respondents indicated that WFP faced difficulties in ensuring operational independence or in being perceived as independent when working with the Government. In the Sudan's highly politicized environment WFP staff are very aware of this issue, although it applies to certain regions more than others.

Accountability to affected populations and protection

45. Accountability to affected populations (AAP) and protection mechanisms are in place and operationalized in the Sudan. However, a gender analysis conducted by WFP in 2017 indicated that sexual abuse and rape were underreported due to a lack of protection, cultural issues and social stigma. To address this challenge, the country office established a

24/7 free-of-charge centralized call centre. In parallel, help desks are being set up at distribution sites for beneficiaries who may feel uncomfortable or may not be able to report serious incidents by telephone.

46. Consultations with beneficiaries in White Nile, South Darfur and Red Sea revealed that they were often unaware of the existence of feedback mechanisms despite WFP efforts to publicize them. Beneficiaries said that although WFP conducted satisfaction surveys it did not respond adequately to issues raised. WFP staff interviewed pointed to a gap in protection capacity and skills in the country office.

Gender equality and empowerment of women

47. The CSP succeeded in setting the direction for gender-transformative programming and effectively contributed to achieving medium-term results for women's empowerment.
48. Evidence suggests that women's representation on project management committees and decision making about the use of food by both women and men were strongly promoted.
49. Despite this encouraging progress, the scale of activities and their relatively short duration limit the prospect for bringing about sustainable transformational change and the evaluation revealed that country office capacity for in-depth gender analysis was less than optimal.

Humanitarian-development-peace nexus

50. There are good examples of conflict-sensitive approaches in the CSP such as work carried out at the WFP offices in two rebel-held areas.
51. However, the evaluation found that effectiveness across the triple nexus was hindered by limited programme integration and internal coordination and limited synergies with other national and international humanitarian and development actors.

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

Timeliness

52. Overall, emergency assistance was timely. Timeliness in supply chain performance was generally favourable compared to other country offices in 2017 and 2018, but less so from mid-2019 to 2020. Significant efforts were made in 2021 to push commodities further down the supply chain in anticipation of access constraints due to rains and flooding.
53. In a few cases, however, the implementation of non-humanitarian activities was delayed. Examples include the release of grants; the processing of invoices, which can often take double the targeted time; and the provision of cash advances to kick-start programmes. With rising inflation, funds received late are by the time of receipt no longer adequate to meet actual costs.
54. In the case of the White Nile state, field-level data collection revealed that the quality of post-harvest loss activities was compromised by the late delivery of hermetic bags, which were received only after the harvest was completed. This meant that 75 percent of targeted beneficiaries did not benefit from this activity.

Appropriateness of the coverage and targeting

55. Coverage of humanitarian assistance expanded significantly during the CSP in almost all areas of the country in response to the economic crisis and the impact of COVID-19. The geographic targeting of resident populations generally aligned with the levels of vulnerability identified.

56. Targeting of refugees and internally displaced persons in Darfur was appropriate because those groups were the most food-insecure populations in the country. Continued and increased support for displaced populations outside of Darfur was also in line with food insecurity trends.
57. Targeting of activities that address root causes and build resilience was geographically unfocused and could have been better aligned with work under other WFP programmes as well as those of UNICEF, the United Nations Development Programme, the World Health Organization, FAO and other United Nations entities and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) based on joint needs assessments and area-based programming and coordination.

Cost efficiency

58. WFP in the Sudan performed well in minimizing pre- and post-delivery losses compared with other countries in the region and Africa more widely.
59. Costs per beneficiary for food transfers tended to be equal to or lower than global averages. However, costs per beneficiary for CBTs were found to be higher than the global average.
60. The predominance of short-term contracting and funding cycles is a major obstacle to cost efficiency. For example, field-level agreements with cooperating partners last just six months, increasing transaction costs and potentially hampering operational continuity.

Alternative cost-effectiveness measures

61. The country office was successful in implementing a large-scale solar power project, which involved the largest solar power installation ever done by WFP anywhere in the world. This should substantially reduce energy costs and WFP's environmental footprint.
62. Amid the constant pressure to deliver, however, the country office has paid little attention to other cost-effectiveness measures.

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

Evidence base

63. WFP made thorough use of up-to-date analysis of the food security and nutrition situation across the Sudan. By drawing on the zero hunger strategic review, it also ensured that the country analysis was consistent with key components of government policy and strategy for addressing food deficits and the emerging challenges linked to economic insecurity.
64. The CSP captured household and local population needs in a way that previous operations had not, giving WFP a more comprehensive assessment of the nutrition needs of the whole population as well as insight into how the local economy influenced nutrition.

Funding

65. WFP was relatively successful in securing adequate funding, particularly for emergency response. However, funding flexibility remains limited, and 77 percent of multilateral contributions for the Sudan CSP have been earmarked at the activity level.
66. Funding predictability, as measured by the length of time that grant funding may be spent, has not increased with the CSP. Compared to the interim CSP, the proportion of funding provided for more than 25 months has decreased from 25 to 11 percent and the proportion of donor funding that is provided as part of a multi-grant pledge covering multiple years has halved to 8 percent, constraining efforts to build long-term development-oriented programming.

Partnerships

67. Stronger partnership was an important component of the strategic shift envisaged in the CSP; examples of stronger partnerships include joint work with UNICEF and with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, although the range and modality of WFP partnerships within the United Nations system could be expanded and the division of roles and responsibilities made clearer to build on each actor's comparative advantage.
68. Overall, the evaluation found that WFP had not significantly adjusted its approach to partnerships. For example, WFP continued to view civil society organizations mainly as implementers of standardized activities without acknowledging their knowledge and experience or using their input to inform its strategic focus and operational approach. In some cases, this limited the relevance, ownership and ultimately the effectiveness of activities, in particular those designed to tackle the root causes of food insecurity and build resilience.

Flexibility

69. The CSP enabled the country office to adapt to unforeseen challenges in an agile manner. WFP mounted rapid responses, adjusting its operations to meet the needs of the most vulnerable.

Other factors

Perceptions and expectations of WFP's role

70. Despite general support for a move towards a more balanced humanitarian–development portfolio, the Government of the Sudan and some major donors expressed a preference for WFP to focus on its role as lead for humanitarian assistance in the Sudan. This limited WFP's ability to embrace the strategic shift and associated new ways of working, which are central to the CSP.

Programme design, monitoring and reporting

71. The way activities were organized under the five strategic outcomes reflected WFP efforts to mitigate the effects of donor earmarking. However, the separation of food assistance for assets and school feeding from resilience building work made it difficult to build coherent and broad-based programming around social protection aimed at meeting the needs of individual communities. More broadly, this approach posed challenges for results-based management and reporting.
72. Some donors said that CSP reporting should focus on how WFP was making a difference rather than merely list outputs and activities completed. They also called for a more thorough explanation of how WFP's interventions could bring about a strategic shift and how donors could support that. Responding to these requests will be critical to WFP strengthening its partnership with donors.
73. The evaluation also revealed a need to strengthen the use of monitoring data to inform decision making and to ensure that decisions on food or cash distribution and other activities are based on accurate and up-to-date information.

Country office structure and capacity

74. There is a gap between the strategic focus and ambitions set out in the CSP and the organizational structures and arrangements in place to implement it. The country office organizational structure and human resources should be assessed and a change management plan should be prepared to ensure that the country office has the expertise required to manage long-term development-oriented programming.

Context

75. Throughout the implementation of the CSP there was political turbulence and uncertainty. This put extra pressure on WFP and the United Nations country team while reducing the prospects for establishing strong partnerships with the Government. Continual staff turnover at government institutions led to long delays in decision making and disrupted capacity strengthening activities.

Conclusions

76. The evaluation concluded that the CSP developed in 2018 was appropriately aspirational and that its implementation provided an opportunity to achieve a strategic shift in the focus of WFP operations and embed new ways of working. The CSP as designed responded effectively to the principal challenges facing the Sudan while also reflecting government priorities in food security and related matters. The country office demonstrated its strengths in responding to emergencies and unforeseen developments. However, partly because of the need to scale up its humanitarian response, WFP was less successful in making the strategic shift central to the CSP and should consider how best to balance the demand for its support as a service provider and its expected role as enabler in line with the strategic shift envisioned by the CSP.
77. WFP has been a major stakeholder in the political and economic transition of the Sudan. It built appropriately on its comparative advantages in food distribution and service delivery and was able to adapt and adequately respond to several emergencies. However, as WFP did not fully engage in the role of enabler and supporter of strengthening national systems, it did not optimize the effectiveness and sustainability of its work with the Government.
78. WFP was effective in emergency response but the delivery of the development-oriented activities envisaged in the CSP was constrained by factors such as the impact of COVID-19, natural disasters and a dramatic rise in food insecurity. WFP should engage in institutional analysis to help improve national systems. Long-term holistic approaches to resilience building and cooperation with the Government are also needed to support the development of national systems.
79. Although WFP paid considerable attention to gender equality and AAP, a deeper analysis of community-level gender dynamics is needed to inform programming in order to achieve sustained gender-transformative results. Similarly, AAP could be strengthened through a more consultative approach to identifying beneficiary needs and better follow-up to beneficiary complaints and feedback.
80. While WFP undertook some conflict-sensitive initiatives, its approach to partnerships has not engaged sufficiently with the “whole system” to realize the ambitions of the triple nexus. WFP lacks an inter-agency approach to partnering that involves all stakeholders in programme planning and implementation. WFP partnerships have not yet sufficiently acknowledged or built upon WFP’s comparative advantage or the comparative advantages of others. The evaluation also concludes that WFP has not yet fully leveraged its partnerships with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as it largely treats them solely as contractors for the delivery of standardized activities.
81. Emergency assistance was delivered as planned with high levels of budget utilization; targeting was appropriate and coverage was commensurate with the resources available. However, delays in implementing some resilience activities affected their relevance and effectiveness. The cost effectiveness of activities aimed at building resilience and root causes was also hindered by fragmentation and limited integration with other WFP and United Nations country team programming areas.

82. CSP performance and results were affected by factors related to the grouping of activities and the validity of some assumptions at the design stage; the adequacy of WFP human resources systems to attract and retain staff with relevant skills and experience; the timely use of monitoring data to inform decision making during implementation; the need to strengthen partnerships and donor relations; and challenges related to funding flexibility and predictability. The highly complex and dynamic country context and challenging political environment were also key factors influencing operations and performance

Recommendations

#	Recommendation	Level/nature	Responsibility	Other contributing entities	Priority	Action deadline
1	WFP should ensure that the conceptual umbrella of the next country strategic plan matches fully integrated programming on the ground, which will require closer collaboration with development partners, joint programming and drawing on expertise in fields such as conflict sensitivity, peacebuilding and political economy.	Strategic	Country office	Regional bureau	High	November 2023
1.1	The country strategic plan should include closer links between nutrition interventions and recovery and resilience programmes, with a clear plan for beneficiary transition from general distribution to conditional assistance for all populations. This will require oversight management and training for WFP staff to avoid the siloed management of activities.					
1.2	WFP should develop a strategic approach to partnerships with a partnership plan that recognizes different expertise from national and international partners in order to strengthen synergies across the triple nexus.					
1.3	WFP should conduct research on, and work with other United Nations entities, international non-governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations and academic institutions to explore how best to incorporate social protection elements into its core activities and expand existing elements. It is further recommended that expertise necessary for the professional development of WFP staff be externally sourced. For instance, the Better Assistance in Crises Programme funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland encourages collaboration with United Nations entities on social protection capacity strengthening and training.					

#	Recommendation	Level/nature	Responsibility	Other contributing entities	Priority	Action deadline
2	WFP should advocate with donors to secure at least a three-year (or annual recurring) fund to enhance predictability and ensure continuity of processes over the medium to long term.	Strategic	Country office	Regional bureau	High	March 2024
2.1	WFP should give greater emphasis to resilience and livelihoods programming and build systematically on the experience of area offices in community-based integrated programming, linking resilience and recovery programmes. WFP should also increase staffing for such programming at the country offices and area offices and explore options for funding for long-term programming for selected communities, supporting the transition from emergency support to lasting solutions.					November 2023
2.2	WFP should explore options for three-year contracts with reliable international non-governmental organizations and national or local non-governmental organizations. Such contracts would be reviewed annually, with performance assessed against agreed criteria, and continued except where performance is inadequate. This will build local knowledge and programming skills while reducing the transaction costs associated with annual bid review and contract renewal.			N/A	Medium	March 2024
2.3	WFP should provide area offices with adequate resources for monitoring resilience programmes and explore mechanisms for including such programmes in their ongoing work.			N/A	Medium	March 2024
3	Capacity strengthening should play a prominent role in the new country strategic plan, reinforced by appropriate staffing and budget and the development of monitoring and evaluation indicators that measure longitudinal progress.	Strategic	Country office	Regional bureau	High	March 2024
3.1	WFP should conduct a staffing review, assess gaps and weaknesses and redouble its efforts to ensure optimal matching between the skills of its staff and the strategic role it intends to play.					March 2024

#	Recommendation	Level/nature	Responsibility	Other contributing entities	Priority	Action deadline
3.2	WFP should prepare a capacity strengthening strategy to accompany the new country strategic plan. Urgent attention should be given to ensuring that the country office staff have the expertise necessary to support country capacity strengthening work in all programmes, including the Sudan family support programme, and to design additional programming with the Government at the federal and state levels. Such expertise would also be used to advise on and learn from country capacity strengthening work at the local level with civil society, including community-based organizations.			Regional bureau, headquarters Country Capacity Strengthening Unit	High	March 2024
3.3	WFP should develop a regularly updated stakeholder analysis that examines opportunities to work more closely with the Government at the federal and state levels and any risks involved in doing so.			Regional bureau, headquarters	Medium	June 2023
4	WFP should promote a country gender analysis and strategy with realistic gender-based objectives reflected in the results frameworks. This should be accompanied by professional development support and clear, practical guidelines for the country office on how to build gender-transformative activities.	Strategic	Country office	Regional bureau, headquarters Gender Office	High	March 2024
4.1	WFP should provide comprehensive and practical professional development for operational staff – including those at area and field offices – and cooperating partners on gender transformation and its translation into programming under current and planned country strategic plan outcomes. This could involve external experts, possibly from international non-governmental organizations or other United Nations or bilateral agencies with direct, hands-on experience.					March 2024
4.2	An advanced training programme should be offered for those who complete the training referred to in 4.1 and demonstrate interest and capability, with graduates who would be qualified to act as gender equality and women’s empowerment focal points or leaders of thematic groups. The training might be offered by the regional bureau and could involve participants from other country offices in the region. However, some of the training and materials should be focused on the Sudan and informed by the situation there.					

#	Recommendation	Level/nature	Responsibility	Other contributing entities	Priority	Action deadline
5	WFP should urgently review the accountability mechanisms for recipient populations, including complaints procedures and feedback opportunities (for accountability to affected populations), with a view to adopting a plan for improvement.	Operational	Country office (including monitoring and evaluation unit)	N/A	Medium	March 2024
5.1	The plan should include the development of mechanisms to ensure that feedback from affected populations heavily influences annual plans and is used to adjust the implementation of activities.					
5.2	In the spirit of new ways of working, the plan could be developed jointly with other members of the United Nations country team.					
5.3	WFP should undertake local case studies of the experience of beneficiaries in using accountability to affected populations mechanisms and their level of satisfaction that their concerns are heard and acted upon. There should also be selected focus group discussions with community leaders.					

Acronyms

AAP	accountability to affected populations
CBT	cash-based transfer
COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
CSP	country strategic plan
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GDP	gross domestic product
INGO	international non-governmental organization
IPC	Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
NGO	non-governmental organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund