



World Food Programme
Programme Alimentaire Mondial
Programa Mundial de Alimentos
برنامج الأغذية العالمي

Executive Board
Second regular session
Rome, 14–17 November 2022

Distribution: General

Agenda item 6

Date: 5 October 2022

WFP/EB.2/2022/6-L*

Original: English

Evaluation reports

* Reissued for technical reasons on
11 October 2022

For consideration

Executive Board documents are available on WFP's website (<https://executiveboard.wfp.org>).

Summary report on the evaluation of the country strategic plan for Tajikistan (2019–2024)

Executive summary

The evaluation of the country strategic plan for Tajikistan for 2019–2024 was conducted between June 2021 and April 2022. It was aimed at assessing WFP's strategic positioning, its contribution to outcomes, efficiency in implementation and the factors explaining 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.

Tajikistan is a low-income, highly remittance dependent country, vulnerable to climate change and more affected by hunger and malnutrition than other countries in the region. Tajikistan is ranked in the "medium" human development category and in 2015 achieved lower-middle-income status; declining economic progress since then, however, led to its reclassification as a low-income country in 2018. The coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic further slowed economic growth, and together with reduced remittances reduced the prospects for poverty alleviation.

Both the 2018–2019 transitional interim country strategic plan for Tajikistan and the 2019–2024 country strategic plan emphasize strengthening national capacity for school feeding, nutrition and disaster preparedness and response along with the continued direct implementation by WFP of school feeding, treatment of moderate acute malnutrition, asset creation and livelihood activities, and emergency response activities. Both country strategic plans were implemented during challenging periods marked by natural disasters and the effects of the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic.

Overall, WFP implemented its interventions in an efficient and effective manner, with the results of its direct implementation activities more visible than those of capacity strengthening activities. Although positive and important, the contributions of country capacity strengthening activities *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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were nevertheless limited. While WFP is acknowledged as a proactive partner of the Government, civil society and development actors, its role remained more prominent in the humanitarian domain than in the development realm.

WFP's strategic direction under the transitional interim country strategic plan and the country strategic plan was highly appropriate, relevant and well aligned with Tajikistan's national development and sector priorities. However, a shift from discrete activities towards more integrated strategically coordinated programming has not yet fully materialized.

WFP adhered to humanitarian and protection principles, gender issues received much attention, and gender equality and the empowerment of women was mainstreamed throughout implementation. There is, however, room for WFP to improve consultation with and accountability to affected populations with regard to livelihood activities, as well as the focus on disability in its interventions.

While benefiting from increasing awareness of the need for government ownership of the school meals programme and stronger response to natural disasters, WFP performance was affected by several factors, including gaps in the CSP design, funding shortages and delays, reliance on a narrow donor base and the imposition of conditions by donors, slow government processes, turnover of staff and a suboptimal match between the skills of country office staff and the roles that WFP intended to play. The coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic further affected the implementation of activities.

The evaluation made six recommendations. The first two relate to the intervention logic and overall capacity strengthening strategy for the next country strategic plan; the third and fourth focus on capacity strengthening fiscal planning and the development of a road map for the transition and handover of the school meals programme. The fifth recommendation addresses the need to reorganize the country office and the sixth deals with partnership and a diversified donor base.

Draft decision*

The Board takes note of the summary report on the evaluation of the country strategic plan for Tajikistan (2019–2024) (WFP/EB.2/2022/6-L) and management response (WFP/EB.2/2022/6-L/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 main instrument for accountability and learning with regard to CSPs in accordance with the expectations of the WFP Executive Board and WFP management. They provide evidence of WFP's strategic positioning and results to inform the design of the next generation of CSPs and potentially to contribute to the design of United Nations sustainable development cooperation frameworks.
2. The evaluation covered the Tajikistan CSP for 2019–2024 together with the transitional interim CSP (T-ICSP) for 2018–2019 and was conducted between June 2021 and April 2022. The timing of the evaluation took into consideration the planned revision of the CSP and its budget, which provides for the CSP to end in December 2022.¹ It covered WFP's activities from 2018 to September 2021, assessing the quality of the activity design process, and progress towards strategic changes introduced in the CSP. Its main users are the WFP country office and internal and external stakeholders, including beneficiaries. The results of the evaluation informed the preparation of a new CSP for Tajikistan.
3. The evaluation adopted a theory-based mixed-methods approach, drawing on monitoring data, a literature review, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions with beneficiaries, site observations and an online survey. A gender approach was applied throughout the process. Because of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, the evaluation was conducted through a hybrid approach. The inception phase was conducted entirely remotely, while data collection included a mix of remote interviews and in-country field missions. Findings, conclusions and recommendations were discussed with internal and external stakeholders during two online workshops in January 2022.

Context

4. Tajikistan is a low-income, highly remittance dependent country with a population of 9.5 million.² Tajikistan is ranked in the "medium" human development category and in 2015 achieved lower-middle-income status; declining economic progress since then, however, led to its reclassification as a low-income country in 2018.³ The COVID-19 pandemic further slowed economic growth and together with reduced remittances reduced the prospects for poverty alleviation.⁴
5. The people of Tajikistan are more affected by hunger and malnutrition than are people in other Central Asian countries, and the number of households unable to afford quality nutritious diets has substantially increased during the COVID-19 pandemic.^{5, 6, 7}

¹ CSP revision 3 to the Tajikistan CSP was approved in July 2022. The rationale for the budget revision was to reduce the duration of the existing CSP by 18 months to align with the cycle of the United Nations sustainable development cooperation framework 2023-2027 for Tajikistan.

² World Bank, [World Development Indicators \(WDI\) database](#).

³ United Nations Development Programme. 2020. [Human Development Report 2020. The next frontier: Human development and the Anthropocene](#).

⁴ World Bank. 2020. [Poverty in Tajikistan 2020](#).

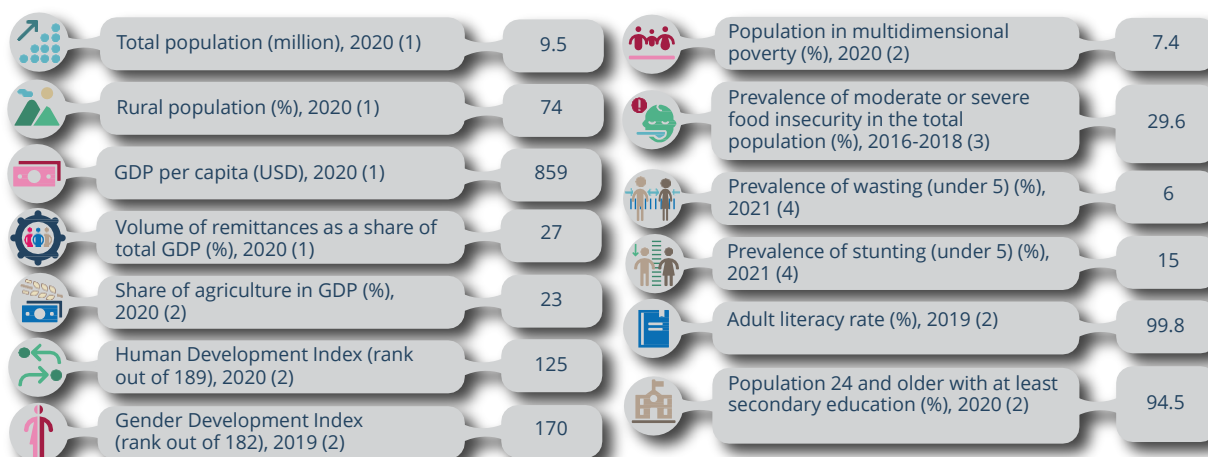
⁵ Global Hunger Index. 2021. [Tajikistan](#).

⁶ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and WFP. 2021. [Special Report 2020 FAO/WFP Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission \(CFSAM\) to the Republic of Tajikistan](#).

⁷ WFP. 2018. [Fill the Nutrient Gap Tajikistan: Summary Report](#).

6. Tajikistan's relative economic exposure to natural hazard losses and climate change is particularly high, as shown by extreme weather events such as floods, droughts, avalanches and landslides.⁸

Figure 1: Tajikistan socioeconomic indicators⁹



Sources: (1) World Bank, [World Development Indicators \(WDI\) database](#) and [country databank](#); (2) United Nations Development Programme, [Human Development Reports 2019](#) and [2020](#); (3) Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, [The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2019](#); and (4) United Nations Children's Fund, [The State of the World's Children 2021](#).

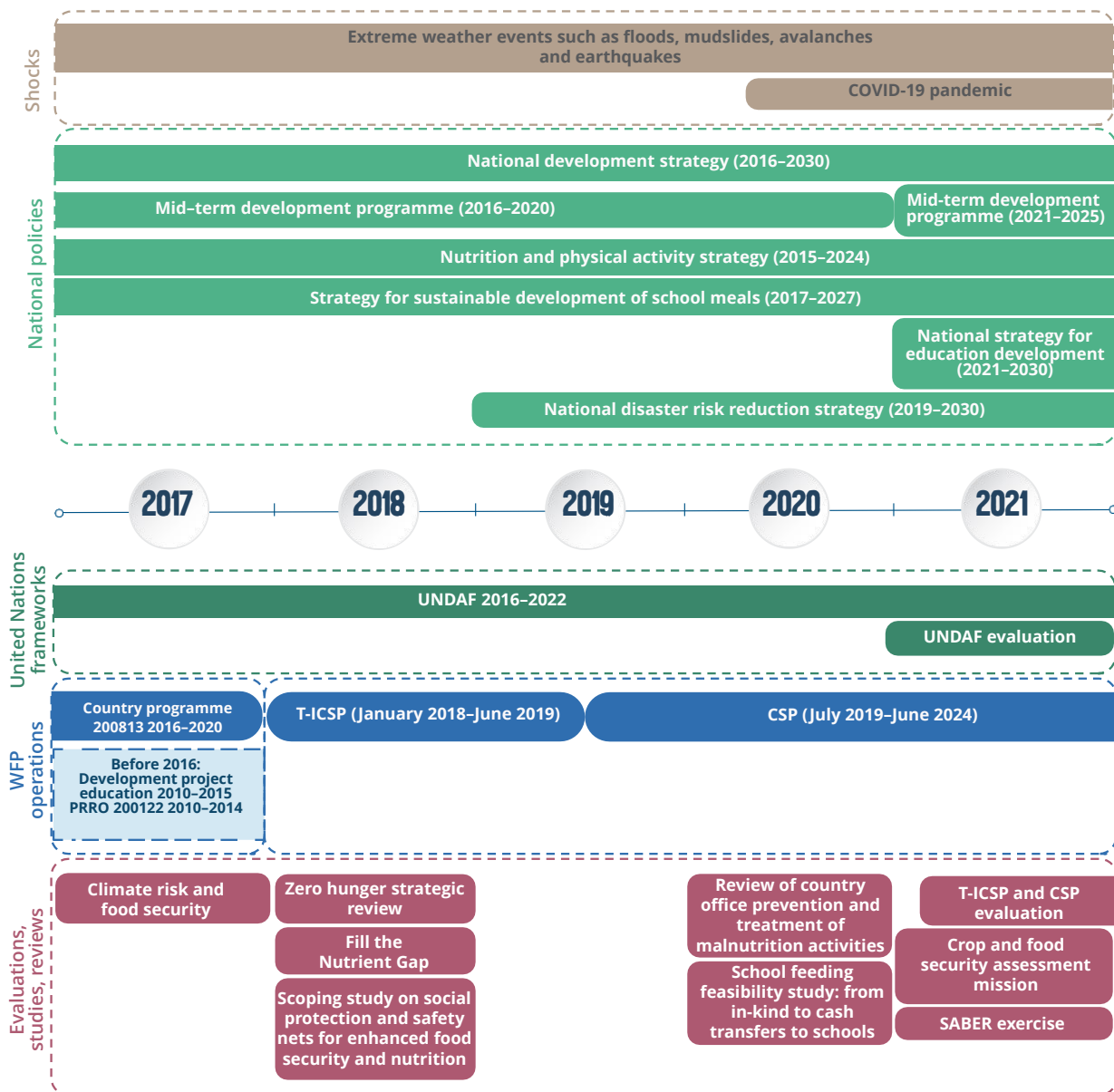
WFP country strategic plans

7. WFP's work in Tajikistan began in 1993 with an emergency operation during the country's civil war. The T-ICSP for 2018–2019 was focused on school feeding, food assistance for tuberculosis patients, treatment of moderate acute malnutrition (MAM), social and behaviour change communication (SBCC), asset creation, livelihood activities, disaster risk reduction and emergency preparedness. The CSP for 2019–2024 continued most of the T-ICSP activities supporting the achievement of sustainable development goal (SDG) 2 and in addition contributed to progress towards achieving SDG 17 through strategic outcome 4 on country capacity strengthening (CCS). While CSS activities were embedded in all strategic outcomes in the T-ICSP, the CSP grouped most of them under one dedicated strategic outcome with more substantial resources, reflecting WFP's strategic shift from direct implementation to enabling national and subnational institutions to design and deliver on their social protection and food security and nutrition priorities.
8. The T-ICSP was designed around four strategic outcomes and five activities, while the CSP was structured around five strategic outcomes and six activities. In order to better respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and with a view towards joint business operations among United Nations entities, the current CSP was revised to include a new crisis response strategic outcome (strategic outcome 5) and a new related activity. Activity modalities include cash-based transfers (CBTs), food transfers, capacity strengthening and service delivery.

⁸ Committee of Emergency Situations. 2021. [Overview of Emergency Situations in the Republic of Tajikistan for 2020](#).

⁹ The socioeconomic indicators have been updated to reflect the latest available data at the time of preparation of this summary evaluation report preparation in June 2022.

Figure 2: Country context and WFP operational overview of Tajikistan (2017–2021)



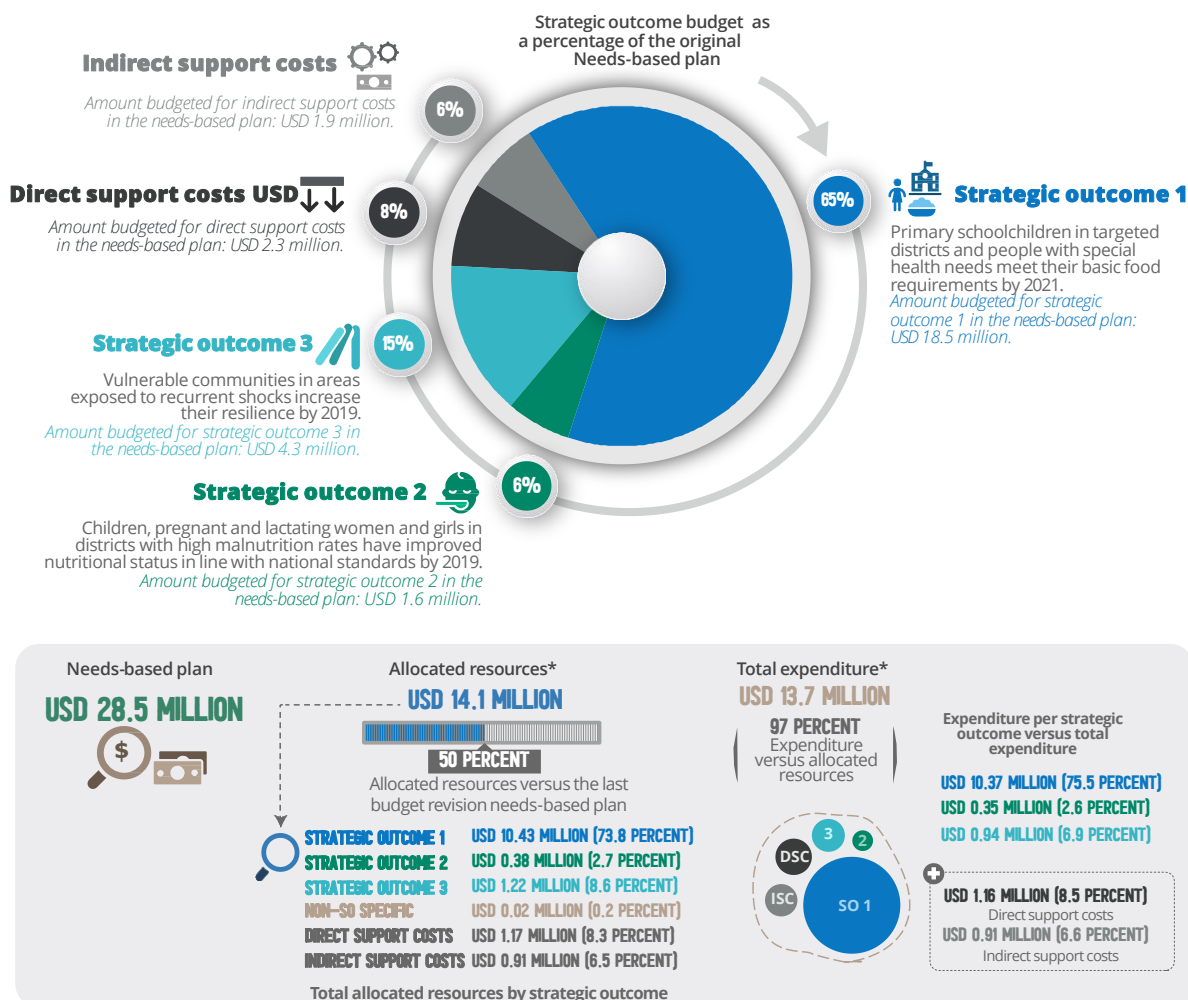
Source: Prepared by the Office of Evaluation based on the full report on the evaluation of the 2019–2024 CSP for Tajikistan.

Abbreviations: PRRO = protracted relief and recovery operation; UNDAF = United Nations development assistance framework.

9. The T-ICSP had a total budget of USD 28,463,468 and a goal of reaching 539,550 direct beneficiaries through food and CBTs during its 18-month duration. The CSP budget was USD 82.04 million over five years for 933,900 direct beneficiaries through food and CBTs; the budget and number of direct beneficiaries were increased to USD 84,918,367 and 963,400 beneficiaries in September 2020 through the first revision of the CSP.

- Total funding over the life of the T-ICSP was 50 percent of the budgeted amount. As of September 2021, 44 percent of the CSP budget (as revised) had been raised and allocated, and 47 percent of allocated resources had been spent.¹⁰

Figure 3: Tajikistan T-ICSP (2018–2019) strategic outcomes, budget, funding and expenditures

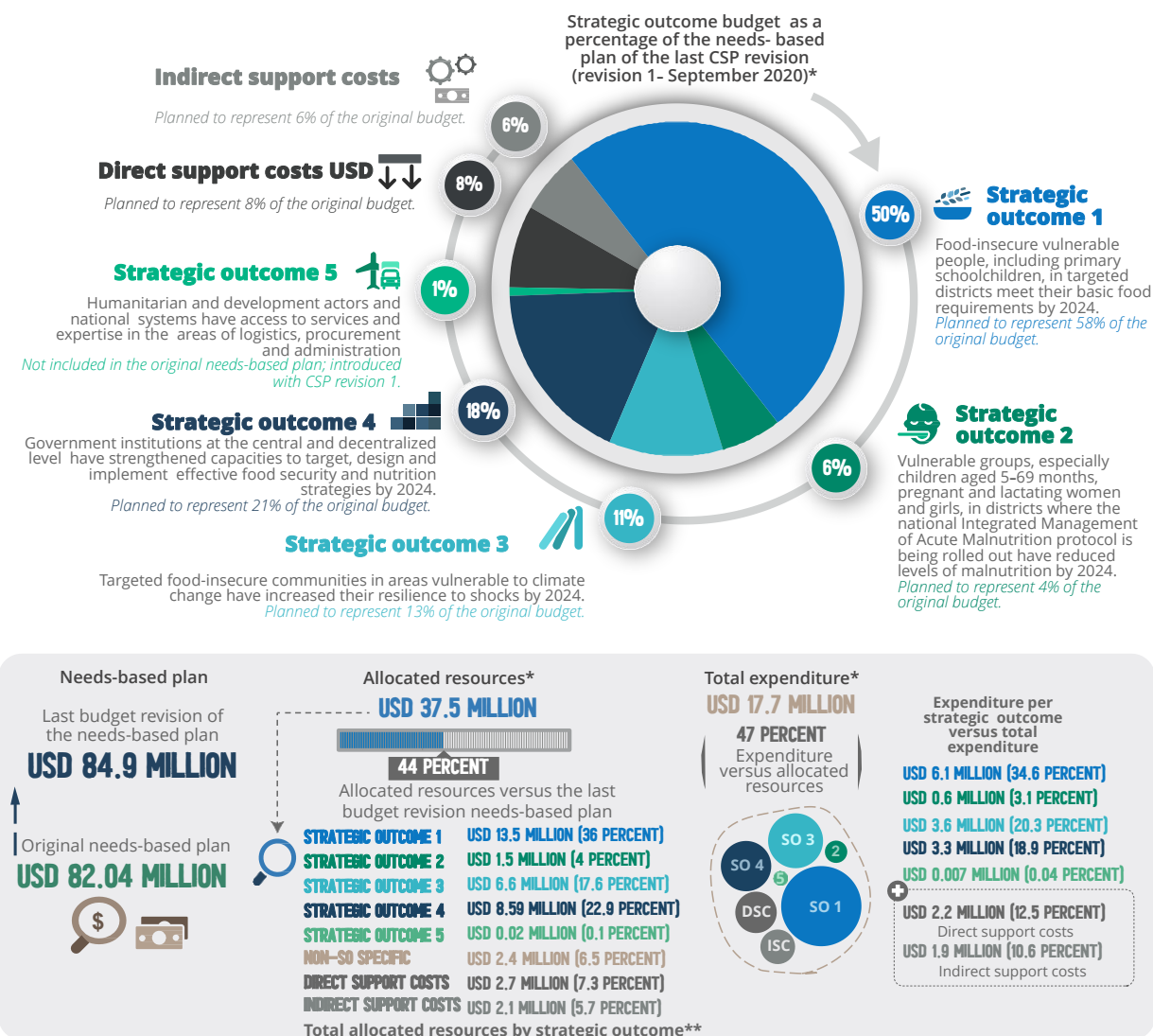


* Allocated resources and expenditures figures are cumulative, covering the period January 2018–June 2019.

Sources: 2018 and 2019 Tajikistan annual country reports.

¹⁰ A second revision of the CSP and its budget introduced a new crisis response strategic outcome 6 and two new activities (7 and 8) in December 2021 while at the same time increasing the needs-based plan to USD 103,333,791 and planned beneficiary numbers to 1,051,713. These changes are beyond the scope of the CSP evaluation because they were introduced and implemented after data collection for the evaluation concluded in September 2021.

Figure 4: Tajikistan CSP (2019–2024) strategic outcomes, budget, funding and expenditures



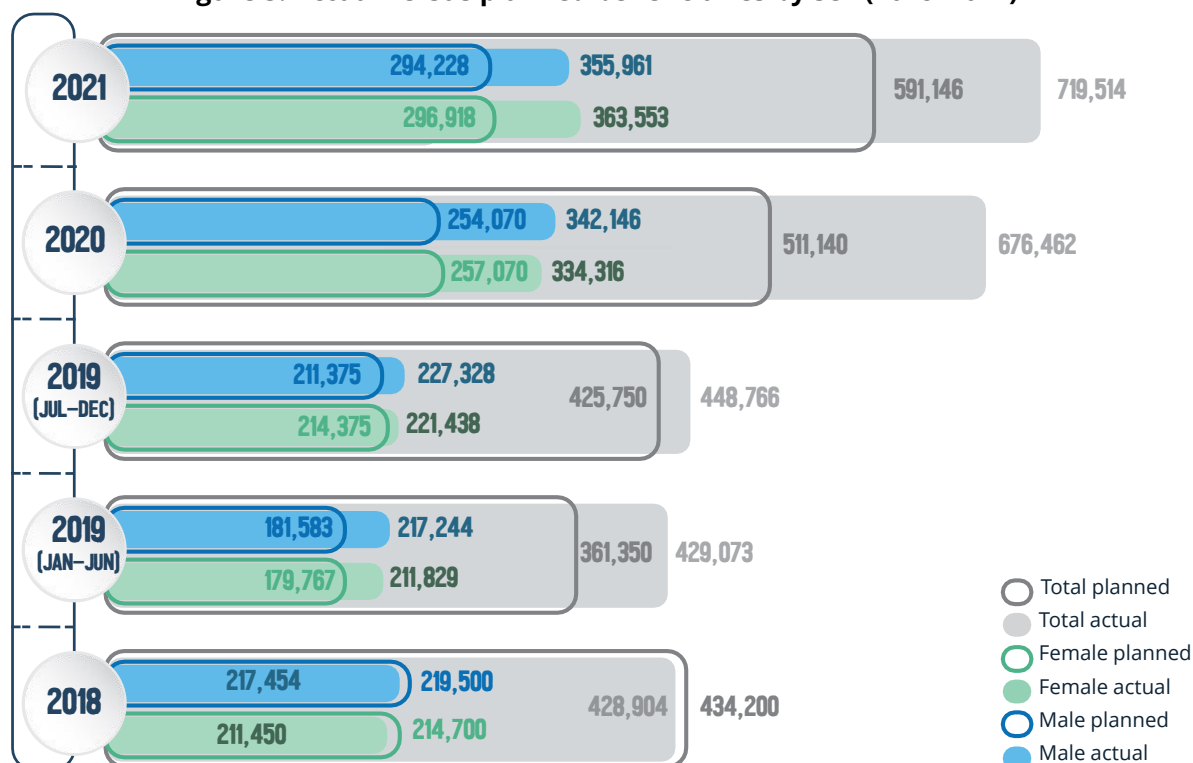
* Allocated resources and expenditures figures are cumulative, covering the period July 2019–September 2021.

** Allocated resources by strategic outcome do not add up to USD 37.5 million because resources were also allocated to non-strategic-outcome-specific purposes (USD 2.4 million), as well as to direct (USD 2.7 million) and indirect support costs (USD 2.1 million).

Sources: 2018–2020 Tajikistan annual country reports and Tajikistan country office for 2021 figures.

11. Apart from the first year under the T-ICSP, actual beneficiary numbers exceeded planning figures. For strategic outcomes 1 and 2 annual beneficiary planning figures were exceeded throughout 2018–2021. The number of actual beneficiaries receiving food under strategic outcome 3 was well below the target, while CBT beneficiaries exceeded targets under the CSP. School feeding beneficiaries constituted 90 percent or more of all beneficiaries across the review period.

Figure 5. Actual versus planned beneficiaries by sex (2018–2021)



Sources: 2018–2020 Tajikistan annual country reports and Tajikistan country office for 2021 figures.

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

- The T-ICSP and CSP are relevant and well aligned with Tajikistan's national development and sector priorities relating to food security and nutrition, education and disaster risk reduction. The country strategic plans are consistent with national SDG priorities and targets, particularly under SDGs 2 and 17. WFP's contribution to SDG 4 is less evident in the context of almost universal primary school enrolment, but school feeding is seen as an important contributor to school attendance, in particular for girls, and thus also contributes to SDG 5.

Addressing the needs of the most vulnerable

- The design of the T-ICSP and the CSP was informed by a scoping study on social protection, a Fill the Nutrient Gap analysis and a zero hunger review.¹¹ Extensive consultations with the Government, United Nations entities, cooperating partners and donors also helped to ensure that activities were responsive to the needs of the most vulnerable in food insecure and climate disaster prone areas. However, there was less evidence of consultations at the subnational level and with beneficiaries.

¹¹ WFP/UNU-MERIT/Maastricht University. 2018. *Scoping Study on Social Protection and Safety Nets for Enhanced Food Security and Nutrition in Tajikistan*; WFP. 2018. *Fill the Nutrient Gap Tajikistan: Summary Report*; Innovation Development Centre Republic of Tajikistan, 2018. *Republic of Tajikistan Country Strategic Review: Food Security and Nutrition*.

Strategic positioning

14. WFP is a key actor in food security, nutrition and resilience building activities. The implementation of flexible strategies allowed WFP to adapt to evolving local circumstances and ensure the continued relevance of its activities, as showcased by its response to COVID-19 and other emerging crises, including an earthquake and floods. Despite its strong emphasis on CCS, WFP's role in humanitarian activities was more prominent.

Coherence and alignment with the United Nations cooperation framework

15. WFP interventions are well aligned and coherent with the United Nations development assistance framework and the organization has built strategic partnerships with other United Nations entities and development partners, utilizing its comparative advantage in Tajikistan.
16. There is need to further strengthen partnerships between United Nations agencies in the areas of school feeding and nutrition, building on each agency's capacities and comparative advantage. The United Nations Strategic Framework for Nutrition adopted by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Children's Fund, the World Health Organization and WFP in July 2021 constitutes a first step in that direction.

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

17. **Strategic outcome 1: School feeding** – The CSP was aimed at providing nutritionally-balanced school meals to children under strategic outcome 1. The school feeding programme is recognized as an important social protection mechanism, but its implementation was impeded by funding shortages and delays. WFP responded by maintaining coverage while reducing ration size and providing a less nutritious food basket, reasoning that local government entities and parent-teacher associations would complement WFP rations. While these important financial and in-kind contributions improved programme results and bode well for the future transition to a government- and potentially community-owned school feeding programme, available information does not allow assessment of the extent to which children received daily nutritionally-balanced meals.
18. Take-home rations provided to the most vulnerable families of schoolchildren in response to the COVID-19 pandemic were timely and are an example of the successful use of the school feeding programme as a shock-responsive safety net. However, the intervention was marked by an inclusion error whereby school management committee members benefited in addition to the targeted low-income households.
19. **Strategic outcome 2: Nutrition** – Strategic outcome 2 was aimed at reducing malnutrition in vulnerable groups by treating MAM in children age 6–59 months and implementing malnutrition prevention activities using SBCC while building the Government's capacity to manage nutrition programmes. The MAM treatment activity achieved high recovery rates through the provision of specialized nutritious foods coupled with nutrition counselling and SBCC and by strengthening the capacity of primary healthcare centre staff in the management of MAM. While beneficiary and commodity planning for MAM treatment assumed a treatment duration of four months, in line with Tajikistan's protocol for the integrated management of acute malnutrition, the actual treatment duration turned out to be shorter in many cases. This allowed coverage to be increased to include more beneficiaries, including beneficiaries in an additional district in 2018.

20. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, WFP in coordination with the Ministry of Health and Social Protection introduced a monthly (instead of weekly) supplementary food ration to minimize patient traffic in primary healthcare facilities, while caretakers were trained in at-home treatment monitoring.
21. A SCOPE CODA¹² pilot with primary healthcare medical staff and communities, facilitating digital registration and management for MAM treatment beneficiaries, faced implementation challenges because the system required continuous technical support and maintenance and because access to the internet was less than optimal in remote areas.
22. **Strategic outcome 3: Asset creation and resilience** – Under strategic outcome 3 WFP carried out climate adaptation, asset creation and livelihood activities aimed at fostering resilience in food-insecure communities and areas vulnerable to climate change and conducted early response activities in response to small-scale disasters. WFP's relief support through food assistance for assets (FFA) has had beneficial effects for targeted populations while remaining small in scope, partially due to delays in initiation of a Green Climate Fund project. Where implemented, interventions resulted in improved food consumption and coping capacity and enhanced community infrastructure despite the negative socioeconomic impact of COVID-19. However, in some communities the sustainability of the community infrastructure was somewhat hindered by a lack of local governance mechanisms for asset maintenance.
23. **Strategic outcome 4: Capacity strengthening** – Strategic outcome 4 was focused on strengthening the capacity of government institutions and schools to implement social protection programmes and on providing policy advice and technical assistance to public institutions and private sector stakeholders involved in advocating and implementing food security and nutrition programmes.
24. WFP proactively supported the development of national policies, in particular those focusing on and ensuring the integration of school feeding and nutrition priorities into social protection, health and education,¹³ and facilitated the development and adoption of a resolution on the procurement procedure for school feeding in October 2019. WFP has been advocating the establishment of multisectoral coordination councils at the subnational level in order to facilitate the mainstreaming of school feeding into district development programmes, and a school feeding centre is being established in the Ministry of Education and Science. Parent-teacher associations are actively engaged in school feeding implementation, providing in-kind or financial support for school meals, but their contributions are variable and not yet formalized, and communities are rarely sufficiently engaged in deciding, managing and monitoring school menus and their quality. In order to develop a plan for sustainable resourcing, WFP recently proposed a public financing mechanism for school feeding.
25. School feeding policy changes are the most substantial achievement thus far, although their operationalization is still pending, and the selection of some policy alternatives has been directly attributed to WFP. The transition of the school meals programme and its handover to the Government has made slow progress since 2018, with further setbacks due to COVID-19 in 2020, despite sustained advocacy, policy dialogue and technical support efforts by WFP.

¹² SCOPE CODA is WFP's beneficiary and transfer management platform for tracking, monitoring and reporting on the MAM treatment process.

¹³ These include the national strategy for education development for 2021–2030 and its mid-term action plan, covering 2021–2023; the national mid-term development programme for 2021–2025; and the national health and welfare strategy for 2021–2030. WFP is currently facilitating the work of a task force established by the interministerial coordination council with WFP impetus for the development of a national school meals policy/action plan.

26. WFP's efforts to strengthen country capacity to target, design and implement effective nutrition strategies and effective emergency preparedness and disaster risk reduction strategies are only emerging, which results in modest outcome level results to date. WFP contributed to the development and adoption of the food fortification law and is undertaking assessments to facilitate its implementation.
27. Despite increasing investment in more upstream CCS work, operationalization of CCS efforts has been slow and focused on the central Government, with some limited and fragmented engagement at the subnational level. Although there have been tangible achievements in school feeding policy and the development of an enabling environment for food fortification, the evaluation found that in other thematic areas WFP's CCS contributions were mainly visible at individual and partially at the organizational levels. Overall WFP's profile is still more focused on direct implementation, and the organization is not yet perceived as an actor with CCS capacity in areas other than school feeding, where its position is visible and strong.
28. **Strategic outcome 5: Crisis response** – Strategic outcome 5 was added through the first revision of the CSP and its budget, which provided for on-demand service provision to government institutions, development actors and other partners in response to COVID-19, in addition to direct support for affected communities reported under other strategic outcomes. WFP's service provision (protective equipment, flights) was found to be appropriate and effective.

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

29. WFP consistently applied humanitarian and protection principles in its activities. While WFP regularly informs beneficiaries about its activities and has implemented a community feedback mechanism since 2019, the evaluation noted some shortcomings in terms of the depth and breadth of consultations with affected populations, in particular for FFA activities.
30. Gender principles, gender equality and women's empowerment are reflected in the T-ICSP and CSP design, with evidence of their mainstreaming also in implementation. WFP's advocacy and awareness-raising efforts, both centrally and locally, include attention to gender and equity issues. However, WFP has done little to conduct more targeted training for women on climate change issues or resilience building or to invest in fostering women's participation not just in implementation or as beneficiaries of assistance but also in decision making processes.
31. Disability was considered as a targeting criterion for the second round of school feeding take-home rations in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. WFP's disability focus, however, was erratic and not consistently mainstreamed in the design or implementation of interventions.
32. WFP has taken environmental considerations into regard through environmental screenings for its asset creation activities, in-office energy and water saving and monitoring of greenhouse gas emissions to reduce its environmental footprint.

Sustainability

33. The demand-driven approach of the CSP helped deliver positive output level results. The evaluation found ample evidence of government ownership of results and programmes implemented by WFP.

34. Moderate prospects for sustainability were noted with regard to nutrition and resilience building. There is a need for more systematic efforts to integrate sustainability measures into FFA activities, as is evident by the persistent difficulty that communities have in sustainably managing and maintaining community assets created through these activities.
35. Sustainability prospects for school feeding are more promising. WFP engaged intensively with government institutions to establish sustainability mechanisms for the school feeding programme; the scale-up of this programme, however, is still vulnerable to many factors, notably financial and human resource availability. A restrained fiscal environment is expected to have repercussions for the transition to full national ownership of the school feeding programme

Humanitarian-development nexus

36. The T-ICSP and CSP do not include explicit strategic links between humanitarian and development work, although both were targeted in efforts to integrate CCS interventions. While WFP's shift to strengthening national and local systems to provide transparent and accessible essential services is relevant, progress remains slow within and outside WFP's activities in Tajikistan. WFP is still seen primarily as a leader in humanitarian assistance rather than CCS.

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

Timeliness

37. Resource allocation and timeliness in the implementation of activities and delivery of outputs was suboptimal across all thematic areas. This was mostly due to delays in funding and lengthy approval processes for new projects, most of which was beyond WFP's control. From 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic caused the cancellation, alteration or postponement of activities as well as some supply chain disruptions, with the impact of the latter partially mitigated by the distribution of fortified wheat flour to schools.

Appropriateness of coverage and targeting

38. While school feeding coverage and targeting were informed by food security assessments at the onset of the school feeding programme, targeting was not updated by a comprehensive situation analysis during the design of the CSP. Likewise targeting for nutrition interventions was appropriate but required updating, considering that more cases of malnutrition were reported in regions not covered by WFP activities since 2017. The coverage of nutrition interventions remained small-scale in relation to needs due to financial limitations.
39. Targeting in WFP's FFA interventions was needs-based and overall adequate, but the evaluation found an uneven approach to consultations with affected populations in the emergency response initiatives.
40. CCS activities focused almost entirely on central government institutions; CCS engagement at the subnational level was narrow, limited to some schools or primary healthcare centres, and was undertaken without a systematic plan of engagement.

Cost efficiency

41. WFP's activities were implemented relatively cost-efficiently, and cost per beneficiary was lower than planned. MAM treatment activities resulted in lower cost per beneficiary because the duration of treatment in many cases turned out to be shorter than originally planned, allowing for an increase in coverage. The lower cost per beneficiary in school feeding was related to the reduced ration provided by WFP, the impact of which was partially mitigated

by the supplementation of school meals through parent-teacher associations. Using bank transfers for CBTs resulted in cost-efficiencies.

Alternative cost-effectiveness measures

42. WFP worked with the Government on potentially more cost-effective alternatives to Super Cereal Plus and embarked on a feasibility study for wheat flour fortification and local production of a specialized nutritious food.
43. WFP conducted a feasibility assessment for CBTs as an alternative modality for school feeding, and the country office is considering linking schools to women's agricultural production groups, which, it is assumed, will in the future be able to provide school meals more cost-effectively.

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

Evidence-based programming and results-based management

44. The T-ICSP and CSP design, implementation and adaptation were informed by WFP-led studies and other analyses. The design and implementation of CCS, however, was affected by a lack of systematic needs assessment and definition of capacity strengthening needs.
45. The evaluation found gaps in the logic of intervention, particularly in the case of resilience building activities. Moreover, shortcomings in the CCS monitoring framework limited WFP's ability to demonstrate contributions to national capacity.

Adequate, predictable, and flexible resources

46. In the implementation of the T-ICSP and the CSP in its early years, overreliance on a narrow donor base in combination with conditions imposed by those donors relating to food procurement and service provider contracting affected programme implementation. Since 2020 the country office has achieved more diversification of its donor base.
47. Multi-year contributions allowed the country office to plan activities adequately. The evaluation found that under the school feeding programme community resource mobilization was well organized and that the programme benefited from private sector resources.

Partnerships

48. WFP is a flexible and open partner to other United Nations entities, the Government and other development actors in Tajikistan and an active member of United Nations thematic groups while leading the coordination of the cash transfer working group in cooperation with the United Nations Children's Fund and co-chairing the food security and nutrition working group under the Development Coordination Council.
49. WFP's engagement with the Government is strong and based on a long-term partnership. The Government values WFP's efficiency and timely support at times of crisis and its open and consultative processes. However, the engagement with the Government often happened in silos, thus diminishing the potential to leverage political support across sectors. School feeding is considered an exception, as it is seen as a multisectoral programme.
50. WFP's engagement with the private sector has been essential for optimizing school feeding, and public-private partnerships are being set up in relation to local food fortification and production of specialized nutritious foods.

Flexibility in dynamic operational contexts

51. There is ample evidence confirming that WFP's CSP approach constitutes a stronger strategic framework for WFP operations and its engagement with the Government, as compared to its previous project-based system. The CSP approach facilitated strategic engagement, which in turn helped WFP to flexibly adapt and respond to a dynamic operational context. It also helped to minimize fragmentation and the volatility of resource mobilization.

Country office structure and staff skills

52. The structure of the country office is solid, and geographic coverage through field offices assisted implementation of the programme. There has been significant turnover of staff, however, especially in the area of resilience building. The evaluation also found something of a silo approach to implementation, and efforts to achieve synergies and develop more coherent approaches, in particular between school feeding, nutrition and FFA activities, have been insufficient. The evaluation also revealed difficulties in vertical and horizontal communication between field offices and the country office. Finally, the evaluation found that the match between the skills of country office staff and the growing role of CCS to be suboptimal.

Conclusions

53. WFP's strategic direction under the T-ICSP and CSP was highly appropriate, relevant and well aligned with Tajikistan's national development and sector priorities and remains so in the light of Tajikistan's macroeconomic status and socioeconomic challenges. Nonetheless, the shift from discrete interventions towards more integrated strategically coordinated programming has not yet fully materialized. Neither the T-ICSP nor the CSP includes explicit strategic links between humanitarian and development work, although this is targeted through efforts to integrate CCS interventions. WFP's role remains more prominent in the humanitarian domain, which may affect its strategic positioning on CCS in the forthcoming CSP cycle.
54. Interventions under the T-ICSP and CSP broadly responded to the needs of the most vulnerable populations. Targeting of groups most vulnerable to disasters, climate change or the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic was appropriate and took into account the varying needs and challenges encountered by communities in disaster prone areas. School feeding and MAM treatment targeting, however, was guided by outdated assessments, while more recent data suggested a need to review the current geographic coverage of interventions to address potential exclusion errors.
55. WFP adhered to humanitarian and protection principles, maintaining a neutral and impartial stance in providing services and responding to crises. Gender issues received strong attention and gender equality and women's empowerment were mainstreamed throughout implementation, although there is room for WFP to improve consultation with and accountability to affected populations regarding the provision of FFA activities, as well as the focus on disability in its interventions.

56. While the strategic shift towards CCS is relevant, WFP's capacity to implement CCS activities beyond the individual level is still emerging. WFP's CCS strategy was not informed by a comprehensive assessment of needs and gaps and lacked an activity logic building on WFP's comparative advantage. CCS activities yielded positive policy level results for school feeding. CCS interventions in nutrition and resilience building were limited to a narrow group of predominantly national-level institutions. The current monitoring framework, moreover, does not allow WFP to meaningfully demonstrate its contribution to national capacity. These shortcomings, coupled with the country office's emerging CCS expertise, have hindered WFP's support from translating into improved institutional capacity and a better enabling environment.
57. WFP's direct delivery of services (in school feeding, nutrition, disaster risk reduction and COVID-19 emergency response) generated positive output-level results and confirms WFP's strength and value added, while contributions to outcome-level results show a mixed performance, particularly in terms of scalability and sustainability. Local government entities and parent-teacher association contributions to school feeding bode well for a future transition to a government- and potentially community-owned school feeding programme and reflect the overall more promising prospects for the sustainability of school feeding, while the sustainability potential of nutrition and resilience building remains moderate.
58. WFP's work under the T-ICSP and CSP built on positive momentum characterized by perception by the Government itself, development actors and donors that the Government should take ownership of the school feeding programme and should more fully engage in responding to natural disasters. Programme efficiency, however, was affected by staff turnover and funding shortages and delays. Weaknesses in CSP activity design, reliance on a narrow base of donors who impose conditions, limited absorption capacity on the Government side and the COVID-19 pandemic further affected the implementation of activities. WFP's collaborative and flexible programme approach helped the organization to maximize its potential despite these challenges.

Recommendations

59. The evaluation made six recommendations. The recommendations focus on seeking a stronger, more realistic focus, with efforts to develop strategic partnerships. Recommendations are directed mainly to the country office, but also call for contributions by headquarters divisions and the regional bureau.

#	Recommendation (specific steps for implementing the recommendations are outlined in the sub-recommendations following each recommendation)	Level/nature	Responsibility	Other contributing entities	Priority	Action deadline
2	<p>Develop and implement a country capacity strengthening strategy focusing on areas where WFP can add value</p> <p>The Tajikistan country office should assess its strategic positioning and opportunities as a provider of country capacity strengthening in the context of school feeding, nutrition, climate change and resilience. The assessment should serve as a basis for articulating a sound country capacity strengthening activity logic with strategic vision and direction for at least a 5–10-year horizon.</p>	Strategic	Country office	Regional bureau	High	June 2023
	2.1 Conduct an assessment of the country capacity strengthening needs of government institutional partners at the national and subnational levels with regard to the five policy pathways, collecting data on capacity gaps, needs and priorities. Functional and/or fiscal analyses could be considered as useful tools for such an assessment, as exemplified by the school feeding public financing analysis.					March 2023
	2.2 Based on the findings of the assessment in 2.1, conceptualize Tajikistan-specific country capacity strengthening approaches for the five policy pathways. Include WFP's main partners (the Government, cooperating partners, donors, etc.) in the consultation on country capacity strengthening approaches and their conceptualization.					March 2023
	2.3 Mainstream country capacity strengthening activities across all WFP thematic activities. The new country strategic plan should have country capacity strengthening fully (and visibly) mainstreamed into all thematic activities, with clear country-specific capacity strengthening activities, outputs and outcomes.					March 2023
	2.4 The country capacity strengthening monitoring framework should include a set of intermediate objectives, baselines, process milestones and targets, along with their accompanying qualitative and quantitative indicators. The indicators should go beyond WFP's corporate indicators to include country-specific indicators, to help WFP to understand the effectiveness, impact and sustainability of country capacity strengthening efforts in Tajikistan.					March 2023
	2.5 Implement country capacity strengthening efforts in conjunction with national entities, applying a cascade approach to transfer information to the sub-national level as appropriate.					December 2023

#	Recommendation (specific steps for implementing the recommendations are outlined in the sub-recommendations following each recommendation)	Level/nature	Responsibility	Other contributing entities	Priority	Action deadline
3	<p>Support government fiscal planning and optimization processes for school feeding and resilience building.</p> <p>In the light of the fact that budget and fiscal planning issues are obstacles to implementation of the school feeding programme, WFP should consider expanding its country capacity strengthening interventions to support the Government in terms of fiscal planning in targeted sectors, building upon the currently ongoing school feeding public financing analysis.</p> <p>As school feeding demands the inclusion of and collaboration with various sectors (education, social protection, finance, etc.) and entities (national and regional planning entities), WFP should assist the Government in reinforcing and optimizing national institutional structures to ensure that results (particularly policy and institutional mechanisms and models) are implemented for the benefit of the most in need populations in Tajikistan. Such support could be operationalized through the provision of expertise and international best practices in the optimization of fiscal planning, organization and implementation of school feeding and disaster risk reduction activities.</p>	Operational	Country office	Regional bureaux	High	December 2023
4	<p>Develop, in close consultation with the Government and other key stakeholders, a school feeding transition and handover plan for gradual transfer of direct implementation and oversight responsibility to national and subnational authorities and parent-teacher associations. The plan should include priority objectives, time-bound targets, activities and responsibilities and should clearly define the scope of and modalities for WFP assistance throughout the transition process and after handover.</p> <p>4.1 <i>Phase 1:</i> Assist the Government in finalizing the national school feeding policy and plan of action, ensuring that it meets the five Systems Approach for Better Education Results goal standards in terms of a stable funding mechanism; oversight, management and coordination; adoption of a contextually relevant school feeding model or models based on well-defined criteria; establishment of a monitoring and evaluation system; and institutionalization of the role and contribution of communities and other stakeholders.</p> <p>4.2 <i>Phase 2:</i> Conduct an assessment of capacity gaps (see recommendation 2.1) and develop a capacity strengthening strategy geared towards building national and subnational management, resourcing and monitoring and evaluation for the school feeding programme based on the Systems Approach for Better Education Results goals pathways and continue to strengthen and systematize the role of parent-teacher associations to ensure full and coherent empowerment of community members enabling them to contribute to local decision making.</p>	Operational	Country office	Regional bureau	High	<p>June 2023</p> <p>March 2023</p> <p>June 2023</p>

#	Recommendation (specific steps for implementing the recommendations are outlined in the sub-recommendations following each recommendation)	Level/nature	Responsibility	Other contributing entities	Priority	Action deadline
5	Continue to reorganize the country office structure to optimize delivery of stronger, integrated results. WFP should consider further reorganizing the country office to ensure that the key cross-sectoral priority areas are adequately integrated and thus ensure stronger synergies, leverage and the catalytic potential of results, particularly in the light of the cross-cutting nature of food security and country capacity strengthening interventions.	Operational	Country office	Regional bureau	High	December 2022
	5.1 Enhance country capacity strengthening expertise in the country office by including specific country capacity strengthening positions that will ensure that WFP's corporate perspective is incorporated into programme design and implementation. Consider providing further learning opportunities to existing staff and/or bringing in (or outsourcing) such expertise for the short, medium and long term.					December 2022
	5.2 Reinforce the country office structure to enable synergies and more coherent and holistic delivery of the programme. Apply further efforts to seek synergies and enhance coherence across thematic interventions and thus ensure that the programme maximizes its results within resource limitations and that the entire team is on-board with changing WFP's corporate focus (including country capacity strengthening).					December 2022
6	Continue strengthening strategic and operational partnerships and efforts to diversify the donor base.	Operational	Country office	Regional bureau, headquarters	Medium	June 2023
	6.1 <i>School feeding</i> : Undertake with various government bodies (e.g., the Ministry of Agriculture) ¹⁴ and United Nations entities joint assessments to identify needs and design joint and complementary activities for safeguarding and promoting healthy school environments and access to nutritious, safe and affordable diets in schools.					June 2023
	6.2. <i>Nutrition</i> : Establish partnerships with other United Nations entities, cooperating and development partners and private sector entities in order to scale up malnutrition prevention and moderate acute malnutrition treatment in line with relevant national strategies (e.g., "First 1,000 days of a child's life" and the multisectoral plan of action for nutrition for 2021–2025) and the 2021 United Nations strategic framework for nutrition.					June 2023

¹⁴ The purpose of working on assessments with the Ministry of Agriculture would be to promote increased local production, adequate storage and processing of diverse and nutritious food and access by, among others, horticultural farmers to local institutional markets such as school feeding.

Acronyms

CBT	cash-based transfer
CCS	country capacity strengthening
COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
CSP	country strategic plan
FFA	food assistance for assets
MAM	moderate acute malnutrition
SBCC	social and behaviour change communication
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
T-ICSP	transitional interim country strategic plan