



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

Executive Board

First regular session

Rome, 27 February–2 March 2023

Distribution: General

Agenda item 5

Date: 13 January 2023

WFP/EB.1/2023/5-D/6*

Original: English

Evaluation reports

* Reissued for technical reasons on
23 February 2023

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 the State of Palestine (2018–2022)

Executive summary

The evaluation of the country strategic plan for the State of Palestine for 2018–2022 covered WFP's strategy, interventions and systems under the plan. Taking a utilization-focused, consultative approach, the evaluation served the dual purpose of accountability and learning and informed the preparation of a new country strategic plan.

The State of Palestine is a lower-middle-income economy with low rates of severe multidimensional poverty. The coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic and a sharp reduction in the Government's financial resources in 2020 led to a sharp increase in the severity of humanitarian needs.

The country strategic plan envisaged a strategic change, targeting only severely food-insecure, non-refugee people and households and giving priority to food-insecure households headed by women. It also reflected WFP's commitment to moving from in-kind food assistance to cash-based transfers.

The plan was appropriately aligned with national policies and strategies and with government commitments in relation to Sustainable Development Goals 1, 2 and 17. Targeting was informed by food security and nutrition analysis supported by WFP, and WFP undertook regular robust post-distribution monitoring.

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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Under strategic outcome 1, WFP made a strong contribution towards the dietary diversity of poor and severely food-insecure people, and assistance had positive effects, particularly on people living under the poverty line. Funding constraints forced WFP to reduce the number of beneficiaries, and woman-headed households and other of the most vulnerable population groups were prioritized. Under strategic outcome 2, WFP successfully helped to enhance the capacities of national institutions and systems to identify, target and assist food-insecure vulnerable households. As part of its work under strategic outcome 3, WFP's service delivery platform was effective, and the platform's expansion indicated that it was highly valued by United Nations and non-governmental organization partners.

WFP was able to ensure the protection of people during the delivery of its assistance. Gender considerations were integrated into the design of the country strategic plan, and implementation was underpinned by WFP's gender policy, plans and strategies. WFP was also actively focused on addressing sexual and gender-based violence, exploitation and abuse, with awareness sessions for its staff and cooperating partners. Although the country strategic plan was largely silent on how WFP would address environmental and climate issues, in 2021, the organization worked with the national environmental authority and the Ministry of Agriculture to frame its new climate resilience activities, and applied environmental and social safeguards in its programmes.

However, in light of the increasing needs resulting from deteriorating conditions, few of WFP's achievements to date will be sustained without continued engagement and investments. Some of WFP's support for government institutions was leading to sustained improvements but, owing primarily to the Government's fiscal crisis, those advances were fragile.

In general, outputs were delivered within the intended timeframes and activities were carried out in a cost-efficient manner. WFP's move to the use of electronic vouchers and an enhanced single delivery platform for cash-based transfers delivered efficiencies.

Overall, WFP achieved strong results in a complex and challenging setting. WFP made strong progress towards the achievement of the plan's strategic outcomes, in terms of both outputs and outcomes. However, funding shortages limited the extent to which WFP could provide benefits to the most vulnerable people. WFP operated effectively within a range of collaborative partnerships with other United Nations entities and civil society. Its service delivery platform helped United Nations entities to "deliver as one". WFP plays a role in stabilizing and supporting the conditions for peace, particularly in Gaza. WFP's support contributes to social stability and to local markets and economic stability.

Although the cessation of funding from WFP's largest donor had a dramatic impact, WFP – to its credit – responded rapidly and was able to mitigate the effect on beneficiaries, and monitoring and analysis helped the country office to make the strategic shifts set out in the country strategic plan and to adapt to the changing circumstances.

The evaluation makes five recommendations of which two are strategic and three operational: ensure that the new plan and all its country strategic plan outcomes are appropriate to the various possible scenarios facing the State of Palestine, which range from the status quo to a sharp deterioration in conditions; in designing the new country strategic plan, set out a range of issues, at the strategic and operational levels, some of which were not comprehensively addressed in the current country strategic plan (such as WFP's core mandate, sustainability, climate change, the humanitarian-development-peace nexus and feedback mechanisms); enhance the effectiveness and targeting of unconditional assistance in line with, but not limited to, the commitments made in the management response to the 2020 decentralized evaluation of the country strategic plan; enhance the social protection system by strengthening coordination and supporting the development of the Government's referral system; and enhance WFP's approach to supporting resilience and livelihoods.

Draft decision*

The Board takes note of the summary report on the evaluation of the country strategic plan for the State of Palestine (2018–2022) (WFP/EB.1/2023/5-D/6) and management response (WFP/EB.1/2023/5-D/6/Add.1) and encourages further action on the recommendations set out in the report, taking into account the considerations raised by the Board during its discussion.

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

Introduction

Evaluation features

1. The country strategic plan (CSP) evaluation was timed to provide evidence and lessons for informing the development of the next CSP for the State of Palestine.
2. The evaluation covered all the activities implemented under the CSP from January 2018 to February 2022. It assessed WFP's strategic positioning and the extent to which WFP made the shifts expected under the CSP, WFP's effectiveness in contributing to strategic outcomes, the efficiency with which the CSP was implemented, the appropriateness of the operational modalities used to respond to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, and factors explaining WFP's performance.
3. The evaluation followed a mixed-methods approach using qualitative data from key informants, which was supplemented with quantitative secondary data. Data collection was conducted between early January and mid-February 2022, when COVID-19 restrictions continued to reduce movement and face-to-face interactions. Fieldwork therefore consisted of a combination of remote and face-to-face interviews with 44 beneficiaries and 64 other stakeholders, including WFP staff from headquarters, the Regional Bureau for the Middle East, Northern Africa and Eastern Europe and the country office, the Government, donors, other United Nations entities and non-governmental organization cooperating partners. The team leader was based outside the region with two team members based in Gaza and three in the West Bank.
4. Gender and social inclusion were fully integrated into the evaluation's methodological approach. Ethical standards were applied to ensure the dignity and confidentiality of those involved in the evaluation.

Context

5. The State of Palestine comprises the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and the non-contiguous Gaza Strip. In 2020, the State of Palestine's population was estimated at 5.1 million people.¹ The State of Palestine is a lower-middle-income economy with an estimated per capita gross national income of USD 3,883 in 2019.² Estimates show that only 0.01 percent of the population lived in severe multidimensional poverty in 2019–2020.³
6. Socioeconomic conditions have been deteriorating, with persisting high rates of poverty and unemployment and declining gross domestic product per capita. The economy of Gaza has been affected by protracted restrictions and more than 80 percent of the population depends on international assistance. Assistance has been insufficient to prevent deep crises of poverty, food insecurity, hygiene and health. The State of Palestine society is predominantly patriarchal, and traditional gender roles cause multiple layers of discrimination and limit overall gender equality.

¹ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. 2019. *World Population Prospects 2019*.

² *Ibid.*

³ United Nations Development Programme and Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative. 2021. *2021 Global Multidimensional Poverty Index Report: Unmasking disparities by ethnicity, caste and gender*.

7. The CSP for 2018–2022 was implemented during a challenging period. In 2020, the State of Palestine witnessed a sharp increase in the severity of humanitarian needs across its territory due to the COVID-19 outbreak and a sharp reduction in the Government's financial resources for providing social assistance to the poorest Palestinians. Food insecurity remains high and is caused by limited economic access to food resulting from high poverty and unemployment rates and an overstretched government safety net. In 2020, 31.2 percent of the population was categorized as moderately (13.6 percent) or severely (17.6 percent) food-insecure.⁴

TABLE 1: SOCIOECONOMIC INDICATORS		
Indicator	Value	Year
Population total (millions) (1)	5.1	2020
Urban population (% of total population) (2)	79.6	2020
Life expectancy at birth (years) (2)	74.5	2020
Human development index (score and rank) (2)	0.71 115 of 189	2020
Population living in severe multidimensional poverty (% of total population) (2)	0.01	2021
Total number of refugees (millions) (3)	2.2	2021
Prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity in the total population (%) (4)	31.2	2021
Prevalence of stunting (height for age) – moderate and severe – in children under 5 years of age (% of total children under 5) (5)	8.7	2020
Prevalence of wasting (weight for height) – moderate and severe – in children under 5 years of age (% of total children under 5) (5)	1.3	2020
Prevalence of overweight in children under 5 years of age (% of total children under 5) (5)	8.6	2020

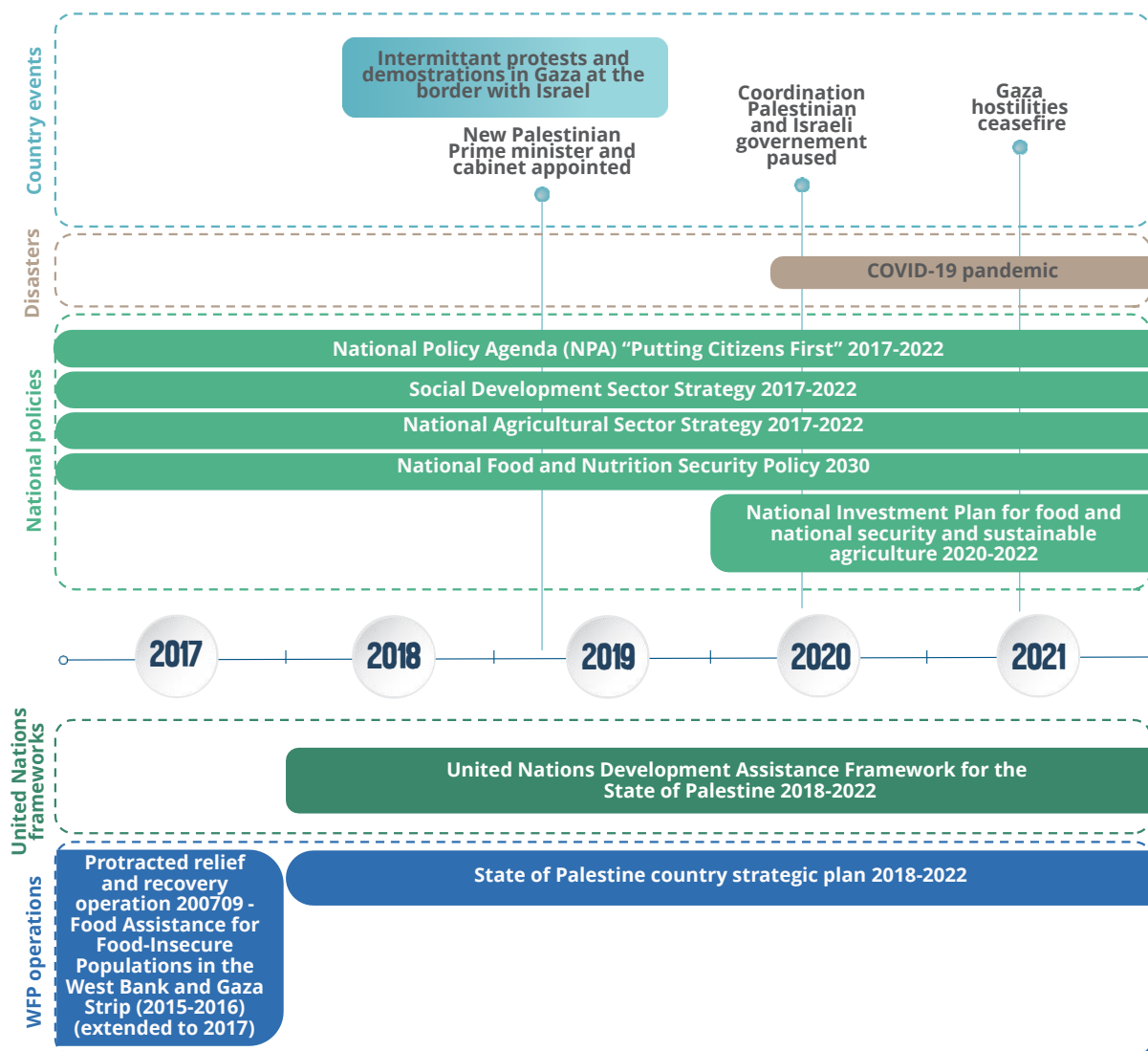
Sources: (1) United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. 2019. *World Population Prospects 2019 – Volume I: Comprehensive Tables*; (2) United Nations Development Programme. 2020. *Human Development Report 2020. The next frontier: Human development and the Anthropocene*; (3) United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. 2021. *Where we work*; (4) Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, International Fund for Agricultural Development, United Nations Children's Fund, WFP and World Health Organization. 2022. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2022. Repurposing food and agricultural policies to make healthy diets more affordable*; (5) Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2021. *Palestinian Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019–2020, Survey Findings Report*.

WFP country strategic plan

8. WFP has provided support in the State of Palestine since 1991. The main strategic change WFP made under the CSP was to target only severely food-insecure, non-refugee people and households, giving priority to food-insecure households headed by women. It also committed to moving from in-kind food assistance to cash-based transfers (CBTs), using existing market infrastructure. Figure 1 illustrates the major events in the country context, the United Nations development assistance framework and WFP interventions over the period of CSP implementation.

⁴ Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute. 2021. *Socio-Economic & Food Security Survey 2020: State of Palestine*.

Figure 1: Country context and WFP operational overview, 2018–2022

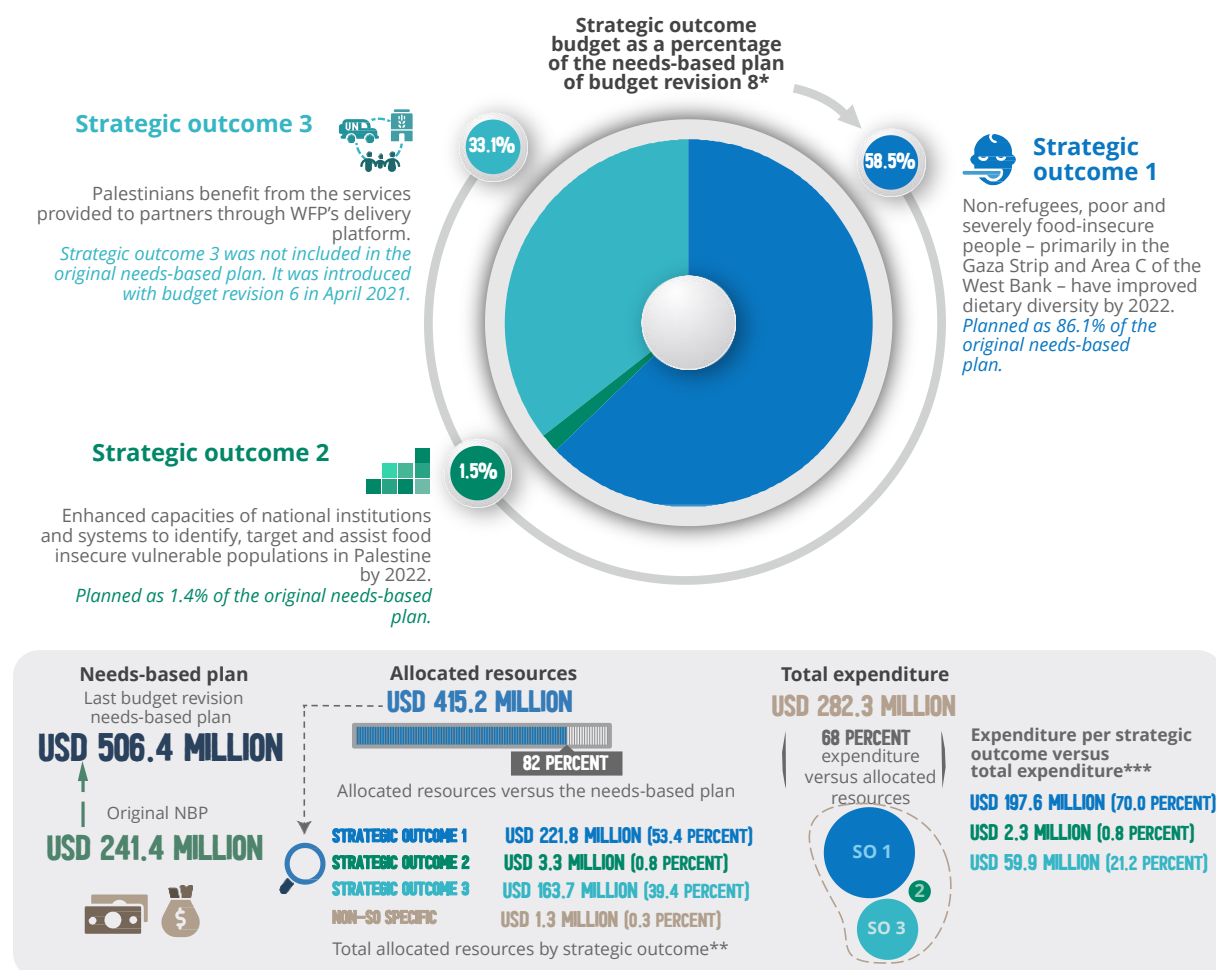


Source: Prepared by the Office of Evaluation based on the full report on the evaluation of the CSP for the State of Palestine for 2018–2022.

9. The original CSP needs-based plan was USD 241.4 million (figure 2). As of January 2022, that figure had risen to USD 506.4 million, reflecting six CSP revisions.⁵ The percentage of expenditure allocated to resources as of February 2022 was 68 percent, with variations across activities and strategic outcomes. Donor contributions were predominantly earmarked at the activity level (67 percent), followed by the strategic outcome level (14 percent of confirmed contributions).

⁵ These amounts include indirect support costs, which are not included in figure 2. Two additional CSP revisions were solely technical in nature: revisions 1 (2017) and 2 (2018) amended the indirect support costs and introduced changes in accordance with a WFP corporate budget simplification exercise.

Figure 2: State of Palestine CSP (2018–2022) strategic outcomes, budget, funding and expenditures



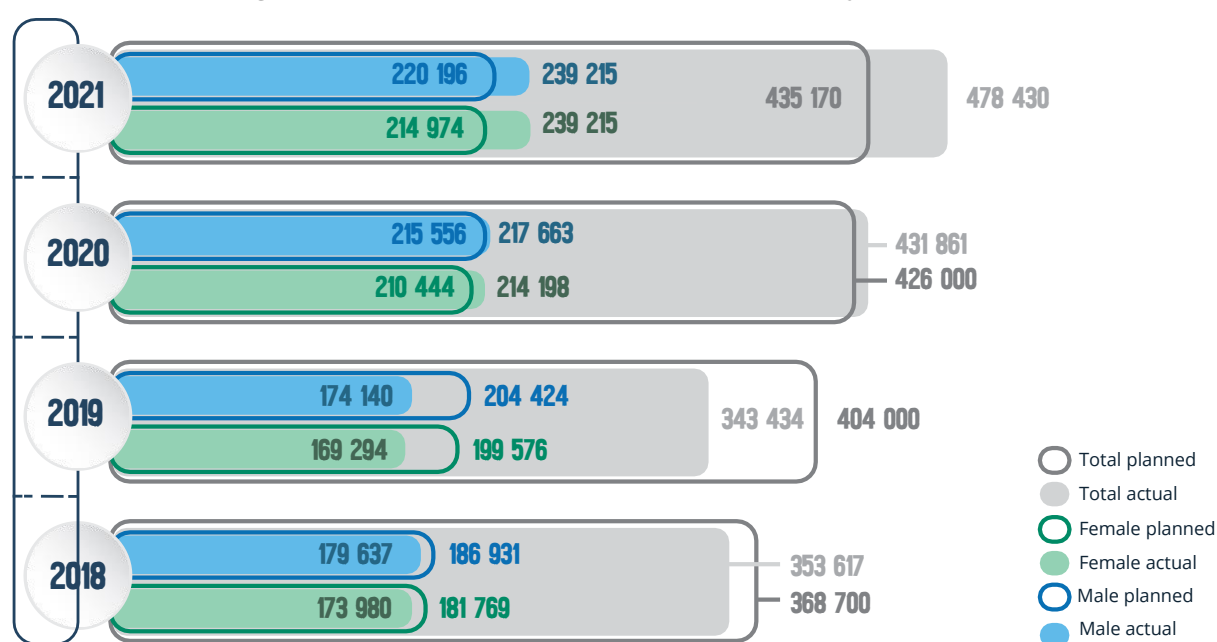
* The needs-based plan budget percentages by strategic outcome have been calculated at the grand total level (USD 506.4 million), including direct support costs (USD 14.4 million) and indirect support costs (USD 20.5 million). This data refers to budget revision 8, approved in January 2022.

** The allocated resources by strategic outcome do not add up to USD 415.2 million as resources were also allocated to direct support costs (USD 11.1 million or 2.7 percent of total allocated resources) and indirect support costs (USD 13.98 million or 3.4 percent of total allocated resources). The allocated resources percentages by strategic outcome have been calculated at the grand total cost level (USD 415.2 million). Allocated resources data is as of February 2022.

*** The expenditures by strategic outcome do not add up to USD 282.3 million as resources were also allocated to direct support costs (USD 8.5 million or 3.02 percent of total expenditures) and indirect support costs (USD 13.98 million or 4.95 percent of total expenditures). The expenditures percentages by strategic outcome have been calculated at the grand total cost level (USD 282.3 million). Expenditures data is as of February 2022.

10. CSP revisions 3, 4 and 5 significantly increased the number of beneficiaries WFP aimed to support, from 314,000 in 2018 to 435,170 by January 2022. After two years (2018 and 2019) of WFP not reaching the planned beneficiary numbers, in 2020 and 2021, a higher proportion of actual beneficiaries were supported than planned, with 2021 showing a large difference. In general, the number of male beneficiaries was slightly higher than that of female beneficiaries, in both planned and actual figures.

Figure 3: Planned versus actual beneficiaries by sex, 2018–2021



Source: Compiled by the Office of Evaluation based on annual country reports for 2018, 2019, 2020 and 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 to national policies, plans and strategies

11. The CSP was relevant to the State of Palestine's national priorities. It was developed in consultation with central ministries and was appropriately aligned with national policies and strategies. The CSP was also in line with subnational strategies and plans and with government commitments in relation to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1, 2 and 17. Through the use of cash- and non-cash-based support for the poor, the core interventions of the CSP were aligned with, and contributed to, the Government's targets for food security and poverty alleviation. The CSP document set out, at a relatively general level, how the CSP would support the Government's technical capability and capacity. The absence of a commonly agreed comprehensive capacity needs assessment created challenges for assessment of the extent to which the CSP was aligned with the Government's technical and capacity gaps. However, given that the national food security monitoring systems needed, and continue to need, development, WFP's intention to increase the focus on improving the national social safety net was appropriate.

Addressing the needs of the most vulnerable people and communities

12. The CSP was designed to address the needs of the most vulnerable people and communities. Targeting was informed by socioeconomic and food security surveys and other food security and nutrition analysis supported by WFP. The effectiveness of WFP's targeting was evaluated by a decentralized evaluation in 2020, which found that WFP was effective in targeting the most vulnerable. The Government's targeting list, which WFP used in both the West Bank and Gaza, was being revised, but a lack of resources meant that beneficiary lists risked being outdated. In addition, the selection criteria for the beneficiaries of livelihood activities were not sufficiently aligned with the various needs and capabilities of beneficiaries. However, WFP undertook regular robust post-distribution monitoring. The resulting rolling assessment of the poverty status of beneficiaries gave confidence that support was going to beneficiaries who meet WFP's criteria.

Adaptation

13. WFP adapted its strategic positioning effectively throughout implementation of the CSP so that it remained relevant to the setting, government policies and changing needs. WFP's response to the escalation of hostilities in Gaza in May 2021 was swift and perceived as highly effective. WFP mobilized rapidly to address emergency needs and, mainly using its electronic voucher system, provided temporary support to about 100,000 new beneficiaries during the hostilities, with an additional 20,000 receiving longer-term support. It also adapted effectively to the operational challenges and increased needs resulting from COVID-19 by scaling up its assistance to distribute CBT payments to additional severely affected households. Thus, in 2020, it assisted more than 84,000 new beneficiaries in governorates where it had not previously provided support. Furthermore, WFP offered its platform for other agencies to use to provide assistance.

United Nations partnerships

14. The CSP was coherent and aligned with the programmes of the wider United Nations system and included appropriate strategic partnerships. There was a high degree of coherence between the CSP and the 2018–2022 United Nations development assistance framework for the State of Palestine. WFP was seen as a leading agency in the United Nations country team. It was an influential partner in efforts to enhance coordination and joint United Nations planning. However, while WFP operated in accordance with its comparative advantages, the CSP did not explicitly define what those advantages were, except in relation to emergency response.

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

Delivery of outputs and contribution to outcomes

15. **Strategic outcome 1: Unconditional resource transfers for the severely food-insecure and poorest people.** WFP made a strong contribution towards the dietary diversity of poor and severely food-insecure people. CBTs and in-kind food assistance had positive effects, particularly on people living under the poverty line. Funding constraints forced WFP to reduce the number of beneficiaries, but woman-headed households and others of the most vulnerable groups were prioritized. Moving from predominately in-kind to cash-based support yielded benefits. The single platform for CBTs and electronic vouchers proved to be an effective mechanism and was extremely valuable during the COVID-19 pandemic and other emergency responses. WFP's multi-purpose cash pilot was well received by beneficiaries, but some targeting and implementation issues needed to be addressed, including by ensuring the harmonization of the support provided to beneficiaries by multiple providers. Nutrition interventions had been adapted since the original CSP was designed. The interventions being implemented at the time of the evaluation had been recently launched and there was not yet sufficient strong evidence from which to assess their effectiveness. Output targets regarding nutrition and social and behaviour change communication beneficiaries were reached.
16. **Strategic outcome 2: Capacity strengthening and livelihoods and resilience-building activities.** WFP helped to enhance the capacities of national institutions and systems to identify, target and assist food-insecure vulnerable households. Government counterparts appreciated the quality of the support given and their access to internationally proven approaches. WFP was in the third phase of piloting agriculture-based approaches to resilience building at the time of the evaluation. Analysis showed that phase one livelihoods activities in Gaza had a positive effect on participants' food consumption scores. There was potential for some of the livelihoods projects to contribute to the well-being and livelihoods of beneficiaries, but there were also challenges, particularly in sustainability.

17. **Strategic outcome 3: Service provision to partners through WFP's delivery platform.** WFP's service delivery platform was effective, and its increasing expansion (to nine United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations) indicated that it was highly valued by partners. The platform offered a streamlined way of delivering services using proven systems that were subject to strong oversight, fraud control and accountability mechanisms. WFP calculated that in 2021, cross-sectoral assistance amounting to USD 44 million was delivered to 743,700 people using the organization's platform.

Humanitarian principles, protection and accountability to affected populations

18. WFP raised awareness of humanitarian principles and put in place systems for upholding them that worked effectively. WFP engaged with beneficiaries and stakeholders through multiple channels and in real time, thereby ensuring that it was quickly made aware of changing conditions and had the information needed to respond effectively and rapidly. WFP operated a free hotline and provided complaint boxes in shops, although the latter were used less frequently than the hotline. WFP was able to ensure the protection of people during the delivery of its assistance and activities. To its credit, in several instances WFP attempted to refer to the Government and other partners vulnerable households whose needs were beyond its own mandate. However, there is limited evidence that this was done in a systematic way and in coordination with cooperating partners.

Gender

19. Gender considerations were integrated into the CSP design and implementation and beneficiary analysis was gender- and age-disaggregated. WFP achieved gender parity in its delivery of services, with a good gender balance among beneficiaries targeted and reached. WFP started to emphasize gender-transformative interventions and was testing approaches in its livelihoods and resilience work. WFP also actively focused on the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence, exploitation and abuse by conducting awareness sessions for its staff and cooperating partners and ensuring that its hotline operators re-routed calls related to sexual exploitation and abuse to a dedicated hotline equipped to handle those and other sensitive issues.

Environment

20. The CSP was largely silent on how environmental and climate issues would be addressed. However, in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, WFP piloted resilience-building projects aimed at reducing the impact of severe weather events on poor and food-insecure people and enhancing their capacity to improve their lives. This work included providing families and institutions with solar panels and wastewater treatment units. WFP formed a Green Climate Fund committee with the national environmental authority and the Ministry of Agriculture aimed at helping to frame its new climate resilience activities. Environmental and social safeguard tools and procedures for identifying and managing the risks associated with WFP programmes were applied from 2021 onwards.

Sustainability

21. Few of WFP's achievements to date will be sustained without continued engagement and investment. This is the logical result of the nature of WFP's primary support (CBTs for contributing to dietary diversity) and the deteriorating situation marked by increasing needs. Some of WFP's support for government institutions was leading to sustained improvements but, owing primarily to the Government's fiscal crisis, those advances were fragile. While WFP experimented with sustainable climate-resilient, agriculture-based livelihoods support, those interventions had not run long enough to allow assessment of their sustainability. In addition, interventions of that kind are difficult to make viable in the long term, especially in Gaza, where it can be costly and difficult to obtain replacement inputs.

Linkages between humanitarian and development work

22. While the CSP did not identify how WFP would facilitate strategic linkages at the humanitarian–development–peace nexus, WFP set out its approach to working at the nexus in a separate consolidated document. WFP’s contribution was defined in terms of the contribution that CBTs and in-kind food assistance made to stability, the contribution that WFP assistance made to local markets and economic stability and the role of WFP’s recent resilience interventions. WFP played a role in stabilizing and providing the conditions for peace, particularly in Gaza. Its service delivery operation, distributing support to vulnerable households in Gaza on behalf of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, was an example of this.

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

23. Overall, outputs were delivered within the intended timeframes. The evaluation did not identify any systemic weaknesses in WFP’s capability to deliver on time. WFP monitoring reports and interviews demonstrated that CBT payments were made without delay. WFP also adapted its response effectively to address the challenges caused by COVID-19 and was able to provide timely support.

Coverage

24. WFP’s coverage and targeting of interventions were largely appropriate. Actual beneficiaries reached with in-kind and cash-based support were consistently close to planned numbers. The proxy means testing formula that informed the Ministry of Social Development’s targeting did not capture the poverty changes caused by shocks, so the “new poor” would have been excluded from the surveys that used that formula. Thus, WFP was at times unable to reach all severely food-insecure, non-refugee people and households. When faced with funding shortages, WFP chose first to reduce the amount of assistance provided to beneficiaries, and then to reduce the number of people it assisted. However, women-headed households and other of the most vulnerable groups were prioritized.

Cost-efficiency

25. WFP’s activities showed clear signs of cost-efficient delivery. There is evidence of measures that drove cost efficiency and value for money and delivered services at less than planned costs. The move to electronic vouchers and the use of a single platform for the delivery of CBT services, which occurred before implementation of the CSP started, delivered efficiencies. WFP’s engagement with the commercial platform provider improved the efficiency, reliability and cost-effectiveness of the CBT programme, with the development of an electronic transaction system and online monitoring platform. Those technological advances enabled WFP to reduce implementation costs, provide real-time payments to shopkeepers and carry out timely monitoring of shop sales and beneficiaries’ voucher redemption rates and purchasing patterns. An analysis of procurement data showed that WFP procured in-kind food inputs using mainly the most cost-efficient options.

Alternative cost-efficient measures

26. WFP made the strategic decision to move from in-kind food to voucher-based CBTs under the CSP. In response to local conditions, it provided in-kind food in Area C, even though doing so required additional resources; the provision of in-kind food in Gaza ensured that WFP could continue to keep emergency stocks and food delivery systems active. The costs of providing in-kind food or CBTs did not change markedly during the period from 2018 to 2021, so WFP did not need to make adaptations. However, WFP did not conduct value-for-money analysis.

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

Use of existing evidence

27. The CSP design and implementation were based on robust evidence and findings and recommendations from multiple studies, including evaluations. Throughout the implementation of the CSP, WFP supported and produced in-depth studies with partners. For example, it provided technical guidance and financial support to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics for the production of the socioeconomic and food security survey. WFP also commissioned a decentralized evaluation to examine its unconditional assistance under the national social safety net programme: this produced important recommendations that informed WFP's future approach. WFP also produced a participatory gender analysis study in 2020, which informed and guided its gender equality and women's empowerment work.

Resource mobilization

28. Funding was unpredictable during the CSP period: the single most important challenge was the unexpected loss of funding from its largest donor between 2018 and 2020. Compared with 2017, WFP's resources dropped by 35 percent in the first trimester of 2018, forcing it to suspend, delay or reduce assistance in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. A high level of earmarking by donors also undermined the efficiency of WFP's operations. However, WFP mobilized additional multilateral donor funding from existing and new donors, accounting for almost a third of total resources received in 2018. WFP also managed the shortfall by using corporate loan allocations. WFP's ability to mobilize additional resources was notable, particularly as there is a general downwards trend in the funding provided for humanitarian and development activities in the State of Palestine.

Partnerships

29. WFP worked in close collaboration with a broad range of stakeholders and developed strong partnerships with the Government, donors, other United Nations entities, international financial institutions, civil society and the private sector. WFP also led and engaged in key coordination groups, including the food security sector, which it co-led with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, and the logistics cluster. WFP's sharing of its platform with other organizations helped United Nations agencies to "deliver as one", facilitated complementarity and cost-effectiveness and magnified the platform's effects. Interviews indicated that WFP was valued and respected as a reliable, trusted partner. However, there is room for strengthening information-sharing with a broader range of providers.

Flexibility of the country strategic plan

30. WFP's ability to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances was underpinned by clear leadership and decision-making, the adaptability provided by the CSP portfolio, and the strategic choices made in the plan that gave it flexibility in delivery. The CSP structure allowed the country office to respond to emergencies by increasing the number of beneficiaries, covering new geographic areas and channelling funding in a streamlined way. For instance, the decision to move from a mainly in-kind food assistance modality to a voucher system enabled WFP to adapt to changing demands. Furthermore, WFP's commitment to deepening and developing the use of the CBT platform helped it to respond to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the May 2021 escalation of hostilities in Gaza. In addition, WFP expanded its operation to respond to malnutrition in pregnant and lactating women and girls, and children under 5 years of age, in line with recommendations from the joint analysis carried out by WFP and the United Nations Children's Fund.

Other factors that explain WFP's performance and strategic shift

31. WFP established a robust accountability system to monitor the implementation of the CSP and the delivery of its strategic outcomes. WFP's monitoring and the analysis that it produced helped the country office to make the strategic shifts that the CSP mandated and to be responsive in adjusting its support to changing conditions. They enabled the country office to track delivery during complex and difficult periods and to capture regular feedback from beneficiaries. External stakeholders, other United Nations entities, donors and non-governmental organizations used the data and reports generated by WFP.

Conclusions

32. WFP achieved strong results in complex and challenging circumstances, including the protracted crisis, ongoing restrictions on the movement of people and trade, complex governance challenges, the May 2021 escalation of hostilities in Gaza and the COVID-19 pandemic. The key role played by WFP in the State of Palestine, its solid capacity, expertise and deep in-country experience positioned it as a leading humanitarian agency meeting the needs of non-refugees.
33. The CSP and strategic outcomes were appropriate for the operating context and aligned with the direction of the Government and the United Nations development assistance framework. The CSP enabled WFP to develop an integrated and coherent approach to programming, which allowed greater flexibility than previous WFP operations.
34. WFP made strong progress towards the achievement of CSP strategic outcomes: it was effective in terms of output and outcome delivery. Under strategic outcome 1, WFP cash-based and in-kind food assistance had positive effects, particularly on the most vulnerable people, and contributed to improving dietary diversity. While the targeting system was reviewed during CSP implementation, there were shortcomings in the proxy means testing, especially from the beneficiaries' point of view. Under strategic outcome 2, WFP helped to enhance the capacities of national institutions and systems in identifying, targeting and assisting food-insecure vulnerable households. Phase one of the piloting of agriculture-based approaches in Gaza had a positive effect on participants' food consumption scores. Under strategic outcome 3, WFP's service delivery platform was effective and the increased usage of the platform indicated that it was highly valued by partners. WFP's monitoring and analysis have consistently provided insight into the situation on the ground, and feedback on the results of WFP support.
35. Funding shortfalls limited the extent to which the CSP was able to benefit the most vulnerable people. The potential trade-off between focusing WFP resources on the most vulnerable people versus maximizing the number of beneficiaries assisted will be an important topic for discussion during the development of the new CSP.
36. Initially, the CSP did not focus on resilience, but WFP experimented with various approaches. Its interventions delivered positive results, but it is too early to comment on the sustained effectiveness of those results. If WFP intends to broaden its livelihoods programme, it will need to consider how and when beneficiaries move from CBT programmes.
37. WFP helped to enhance the capacities of national institutions and systems in identifying, targeting and assisting food-insecure vulnerable people and households in the State of Palestine. However, while partnerships with national institutions were strategic, the strengthening of capacity faced challenges.
38. WFP operated effectively within a range of collaborative partnerships with other United Nations entities and civil society organizations. Its service delivery platform helped United Nations agencies to "deliver as one", facilitating complementarity, cost-effectiveness and impact.

39. Through its service delivery for the United Nations system, WFP demonstrated to an important regional non-traditional donor that there are benefits to using WFP systems to deliver bilateral assistance. From its monitoring systems, it generated evidence of the value-added that its support provides, which could encourage the donor to use WFP systems in other contexts. WFP's service delivery in Gaza could also have a broader effect through demonstration, encouraging other non-traditional donors to use United Nations systems in other contexts.
40. WFP played a role in stabilizing and supporting the conditions for peace, particularly in Gaza. WFP's support for addressing basic needs contribute to social stability, and its CBT assistance helped to support local markets and economic stability. Its recent service delivery for the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process is an impressive example of WFP stepping in to alleviate a source of tension and the potential for an escalation of hostilities.
41. Gender and protection were integrated into the CSP and were treated as cross-cutting issues that were effectively mainstreamed into operations. There was systematic collection and analysis of gender- and age-disaggregated data, recently including data on disability. WFP is beginning to push gender-transformative approaches and will need to place more emphasis on those approaches in the next CSP.
42. While WFP established robust accountability mechanisms, there are indications that beneficiaries' voices were not sufficiently heard in relation to intervention design. In terms of its treatment of the environment, WFP piloted some innovative approaches to supporting households in the development of climate-resilient livelihoods.
43. Although the cessation of funding from WFP's biggest donor had a dramatic impact, WFP – to its credit – responded rapidly and was able to mitigate the impact on beneficiaries. Donors earmarked contributions to a relatively high degree but WFP was able to balance donors' conditions so as to continue to deliver – although it faces real difficulty in raising funds to support country capacity strengthening.
44. Few of WFP's achievements to date will be sustained without continued engagement and investment. This situation is simply the result of the nature of WFP's primary support (CBTs for contributing to dietary diversity) and the deteriorating situation in which needs are increasing rather than decreasing. Donor fatigue regarding the Palestine crisis is increasing, and the economic downturn due to the COVID-19 pandemic in donor countries and new humanitarian crises such as the Ukraine conflict will also affect resource availability.
45. WFP used its resources efficiently during the CSP period. Outputs were delivered mostly within the intended timeframe, coverage and targeting were largely appropriate. WFP's decision to move most of its support to electronic vouchers resulted in a more efficient delivery modality. WFP payment processes were cost-effective, accessible and well-received by beneficiaries, making them the most appropriate channel for delivery.

Recommendations

#	Recommendation (specific steps for implementing the recommendations are outlined in the sub-recommendations following each recommendation)	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Supporting entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
1	<p>Ensure that the new country strategic plan and all of its outcomes are appropriate to the various possible scenarios facing the State of Palestine, which range from the status quo to a sharp deterioration in conditions.</p> <p>1.1 Use political economy analysis and scenario planning to inform the design of the country strategic plan.</p> <p>1.2 Plan for the retention of WFP capacity to scale up crisis response support for food-insecure households in the event of an interruption in the State's capability, or renewed hostilities.</p> <p>1.3 Factor in the implications of reduced funding on social protection:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Ensure that plans for providing cash-based transfers to people on the Ministry of Social Development's lists take into account the possibility that cash-based transfers will not be distributed for extended periods. ➤ Consider the implications for WFP of a reduction in social protection support for refugees. <p>1.4 When defining the new country strategic plan's institutional capacity strengthening objectives, factor in the likelihood that the fiscal crisis will be extended, and focus on strengthening functions that the Government can realistically deploy with its constrained resources.</p>	Strategic	Country office	Regional bureau	High	December 2022
2	<p>In designing the new country strategic plan, set out the following range of issues, at the strategic and operational levels, some of which were not comprehensively addressed in the current country strategic plan.</p> <p>2.1 Define WFP's core mandate and comparative advantage in the State of Palestine.</p> <p>2.2 Analyse the sustainability issues related to future activities and outcomes, and identify actions that will help to make the impact of investments sustainable.</p>	Strategic	Country office	Regional bureau, headquarters Programme – Humanitarian and Development Division and Research, Assessment and Monitoring Division	Medium	December 2022

#	Recommendation (specific steps for implementing the recommendations are outlined in the sub-recommendations following each recommendation)	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Supporting entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
	<p>2.3 Set out a strategic approach to addressing environmental issues and climate change.</p> <p>2.4 Advocate the joint development of a coherent framework for the humanitarian–development–peace nexus with other humanitarian and development actors in the State of Palestine, and within that framework identify how WFP will facilitate strategic linkages at the nexus.</p> <p>2.5 Ensure that the future results framework is comprehensive and reflects all of WFP’s activities, including service delivery.</p> <p>2.6 Strengthen the integration of beneficiary feedback into programme design and revision.</p>					
3	<p>Enhance the effectiveness and targeting of unconditional resource transfers in line with, but not limited to, commitments made in the management response to the 2020 decentralized evaluation.</p> <p>3.1 The present evaluation highlights two of the decentralized evaluation’s recommendations that would enhance food security for the most vulnerable people:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ recommendation 2 “Explore tiered and targeted assistance using varied voucher values based on need”; and ➤ recommendation 3 “Consider increasing the voucher value for households composed of below-average members”. <p>WFP agreed to both of these recommendations and to the action deadline of September 2022, and will need to reflect any change in approach in its future programming. Other agreed recommendations are also important.</p> <p>3.2 Based on the findings of the ongoing evaluation of WFP’s multi-purpose cash assistance pilot, define WFP’s future approach to the use of multi-purpose cash in the new country strategic plan, in consultation with key partners.</p> <p>3.3 Based on a careful study of the feasibility and potential impact (especially on gender relations), consider offering households a choice of modality for the support that they receive (multi-purpose cash, food vouchers or in-kind food) and advocate with donors for greater flexibility in funding.</p>	Operational	Country office	Regional bureau	Medium	December 2023

#	Recommendation (specific steps for implementing the recommendations are outlined in the sub-recommendations following each recommendation)	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Supporting entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
4	<p>Enhance the social protection system with stronger coordination, and support the development of the Government's referral system.</p> <p>4.1 To reduce duplication and promote equity, continue to promote coordination with other agencies providing social protection services; explore opportunities for improving data sharing.</p> <p>4.2 To address the non-food social protection needs of WFP beneficiaries, support the development of the Government's referral system, with other partners.</p>	Operational	Country office	Regional bureau, headquarters Programme – Humanitarian and Development Division	Medium	December 2023
5	<p>Enhance WFP's approach to supporting resilience and livelihoods.</p> <p>5.1 Develop a strategy and theory of change for WFP's resilience and livelihoods programming.</p> <p>5.2 Adopt an adaptive and iterative approach to resilience and livelihoods programming, and commission periodic external reviews of WFP's interventions for informing significant next steps.</p> <p>5.3 Seek to enhance the degree of choice that beneficiaries have in the resilience and livelihoods support that they receive, and enhance WFP's monitoring systems so they assess the extent to which programming is responsive to beneficiaries' preferences.</p> <p>5.4 Continue to experiment with gender-transformative interventions for resilience and livelihoods, ensuring that they are based on strong gender analysis.</p> <p>5.5 Consider piloting a way of linking other providers of resilience and livelihood interventions to WFP beneficiaries who could benefit from support for resilience and livelihoods development.</p> <p>5.6 Consider enhancing WFP's capacity with specialist livelihoods and resilience expertise.</p>	Operational	Country office	Regional bureau, headquarters Programme – Humanitarian and Development Division and Gender Office	Medium	December 2023

Acronyms

CBT	cash-based transfer
COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
CSP	country strategic plan
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal