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## Summary report on the evaluation of the country strategic plan for Eswatini for 2020–2025

### Executive summary

The evaluation of the country strategic plan for Eswatini for 2020–2025 served the dual purpose of accountability and learning. The plan continued the shift from WFP's direct provision of food and nutrition assistance to its engagement in the strengthening of government capacity, which started under the transitional interim country strategic plan for 2018–2019. A new strategic outcome, aimed at strengthening the capacity of smallholder farmers, particularly women, and connecting them to markets through school meal programmes, was added. While the emphasis on social protection was maintained, its scope was broadened to include shock responsiveness and nutrition considerations.

The evaluation found that WFP's continued engagement in Eswatini is justified given the high levels of food insecurity and malnutrition in the country. However the broad ambitions of the country strategic plan were poorly aligned with funding opportunities. In addition, while the strategic outcomes were logically linked to the aim of addressing the causes of food insecurity, they lacked detailed result pathways, particularly for resilience-building, climate change adaptation and social protection interventions.

To the extent that resources allowed, WFP performed well in helping to address short-term food insecurity in terms of both the coverage of activities and coordination with other responding agencies under the response plan of the National Disaster Management Agency. However, the overall contribution of the country strategic plan to improving food security and nutrition in Eswatini has been modest.

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

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WFP achieved positive results in creating and enabling a supportive environment for school meal operations and disaster management through its longstanding partnerships and the provision of relevant and high-quality technical support. However, newer activities, such as support for smallholder farmers, faced challenges caused by insufficient analysis of market systems, and coordination issues with partners. While WFP developed strong partnerships in social protection, it did not adequately engage with some key players, which impeded its strategic positioning in this area.

Good initial efforts to mainstream the consideration of gender, inclusion and nutrition issues were to some extent compromised by a lack of dedicated expertise in WFP's country office.

The evaluation makes three recommendations: two strategic and one operational. The strategic recommendations focus on assessing potential resources and calibrating the design of future country strategic plans against probable resource availability; and defining a value proposition, including for the areas of climate adaptation and social protection, in partnership with the Government. The operational recommendation calls for continued support for capacity strengthening for national authorities, enabling them to own and sustain school and preschool meal operations.

### **Draft decision\***

The Board takes note of the summary report on the evaluation of the country strategic plan for Eswatini for 2020–2025 (WFP/EB.2/2025/6-C/4) and the management response (WFP/EB.2/2025/6-C/4/Add.1).

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

## Introduction

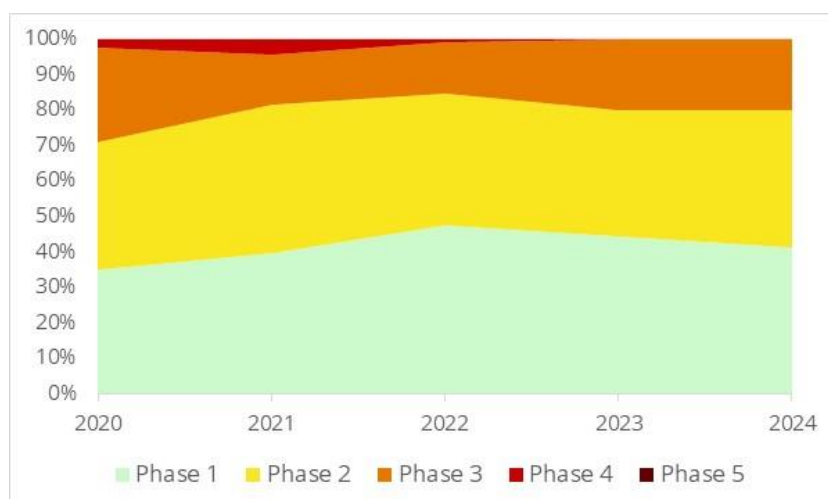
### Evaluation features

1. The evaluation of the Eswatini country strategic plan (CSP) for 2020–2025 was conducted between March and September 2024. It serves the dual purpose of accountability and learning and was designed to contribute to discussions on WFP's future engagement in Eswatini. The evaluation focused on assessing the results of the CSP for the period from 2020 to mid-2024 and also provided a strategic overview of work and results under the preceding transitional interim CSP (T-ICSP) for 2018–2019, paying particular attention to activities under the T-ICSP that were continued under the CSP.
2. The evaluation adopted a theory-based, mixed-methods approach, drawing on multiple sources of evidence, including documentary evidence, data on performance, budget data, direct observation, and key informant interviews and focus group discussions with people assisted. The consideration of gender and disability issues was included in the evaluation design and in the collection and analysis of data.
3. The main intended users of the evaluation are WFP's country office, the regional office for Eastern and Southern Africa,<sup>1</sup> senior management and relevant technical units at headquarters in Rome, the Executive Board, donors, the Government of Eswatini, the people assisted, members of the United Nations country team, and cooperating partners.

### Context

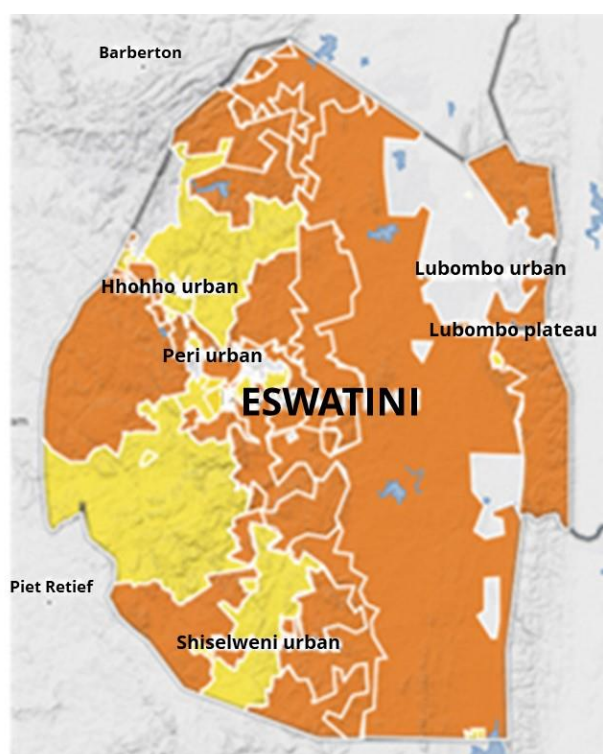
4. Eswatini has a population of 1.2 million people. It is a lower-middle-income country with an estimated per capita gross domestic product of USD 3,936.<sup>2</sup> Food insecurity and malnutrition are widespread, with a significant proportion of the population consistently assessed as food insecure and malnourished (see figure 1). The 2024 Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) report indicated that between June and September 2024 an estimated 20 percent of the population – 243,000 people – was at “crisis” levels of food insecurity, or IPC phase 3, mainly in the lowlands of the country's east (see map 1).

**Figure 1: Acute food insecurity situation: 2020–2024**



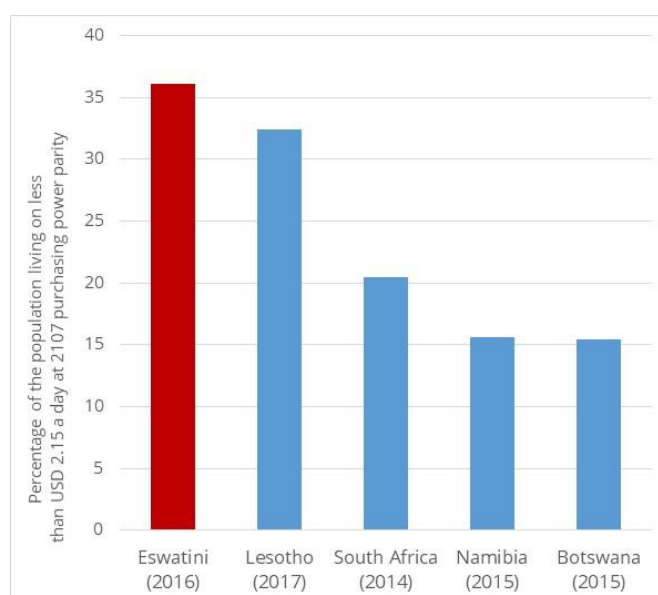
<sup>1</sup> In 2025, the Regional Bureau for Southern Africa, based in Johannesburg, was incorporated into the Regional Bureau for Eastern Africa to create the Eastern and Southern Africa regional office based in Nairobi.

<sup>2</sup> World Bank. 2024. [GDP per capita \(current US\\$\) – Eswatini](#).

**Map 1: Acute food insecurity classification, by geographic area**

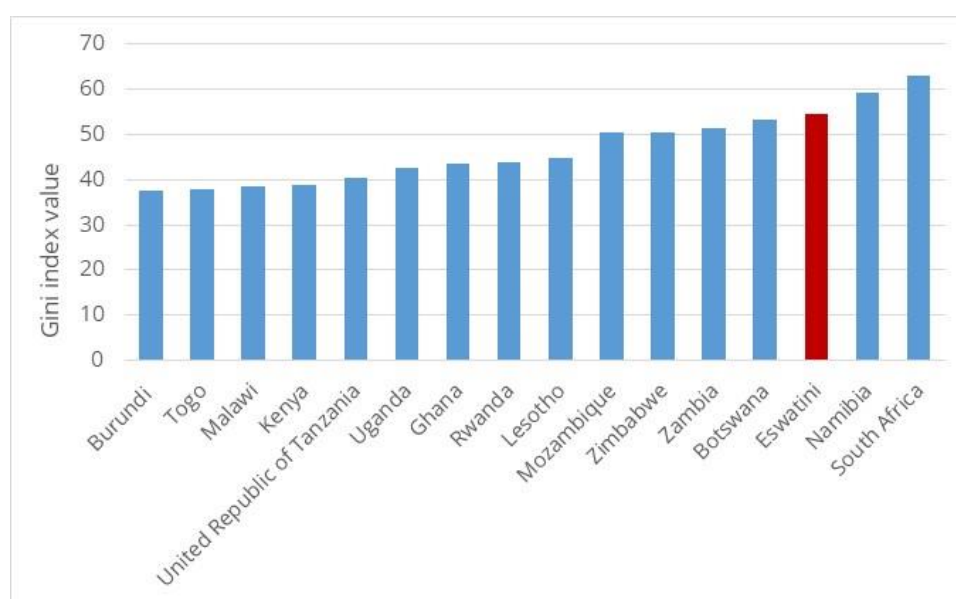
Source: IPC Eswatini acute food insecurity reports (accessed in September 2024).

5. Food insecurity and malnutrition in Eswatini are rooted in chronic poverty and inequality. Most of the population – 58.9 percent – lives below the national poverty line of USD 3.65 per day,<sup>3</sup> and Eswatini has the tenth highest income inequality in the world, with a Gini coefficient of 54.6.<sup>4</sup> Poverty and inequality rates are also high compared with other countries in the region.

**Figure 2: Poverty rates, Southern African countries**

<sup>3</sup> World Bank. 2025. [The World Bank in Eswatini – Overview](#).

<sup>4</sup> World Bank. 2016. [Gini index – Eswatini](#).

**Figure 3: Income inequality, sub-Saharan countries**

Source: World Bank data.

6. Chronic food insecurity has been compounded by external shocks, including climate-related events such as El Niño, economic challenges such as increasing unemployment caused by the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, social unrest, and spikes in food prices.<sup>5</sup>
7. Net official development assistance for Eswatini is modest and has fluctuated between a low of USD 70.5 million in 2019 to a high of USD 125.0 million in 2021, declining to USD 96.6 million in 2022.<sup>6</sup>

### WFP interventions in Eswatini

8. The Eswatini CSP was approved for a period of five years from 2020 to 2024 and subsequently extended by one year to bring it into line with the United Nations sustainable development cooperation framework (UNSDCF) for 2021–2025. It continued WFP's shift from the direct provision of food and nutrition assistance to the strengthening of government capacity, which was started under the T-ICSP for 2018–2019. The CSP includes three strategic outcomes aimed at responding to crises and building resilience, with strategic outcome 3 – on technical support to assist the Government in providing access to integrated and shock-responsive social protection systems – identified as the core of the CSP. Gender equality is included as a fundamental cross-cutting pillar.

<sup>5</sup> Government of Eswatini. Vulnerability Assessment Committee: Annual vulnerability assessment and analysis reports, 2018–2023.

<sup>6</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. 2023. [Official development assistance at a glance](#).

TABLE 1: STRATEGIC OUTCOMES AND ACTIVITIES UNDER THE ESWATINI CSP FOR 2020–2025		
Focus area	Strategic outcome	Activity
Crisis response	Vulnerable populations in shock-affected areas are able to meet their basic food and nutrition needs during times of crisis.	Provision of food and/or cash-based transfers.
Resilience building	Smallholder farmers, particularly women, have enhanced capacities to supply structured markets with nutritious foods by 2024.	Training in marketing and business management skills. Introduction of climate-smart practices for smallholder farmer groups.
Resilience building	Vulnerable populations, particularly women, children, adolescent girls and people living with HIV, have access to integrated and shock-responsive social protection systems by 2030.	Technical assistance in vulnerability analysis and early warning and disaster preparedness and response. Direct assistance – food transfers – through a home-grown school feeding (HGSF) pilot to feed schoolchildren and orphans and other vulnerable children at neighbourhood care points.* Provision of technical expertise in the development of productive safety nets.

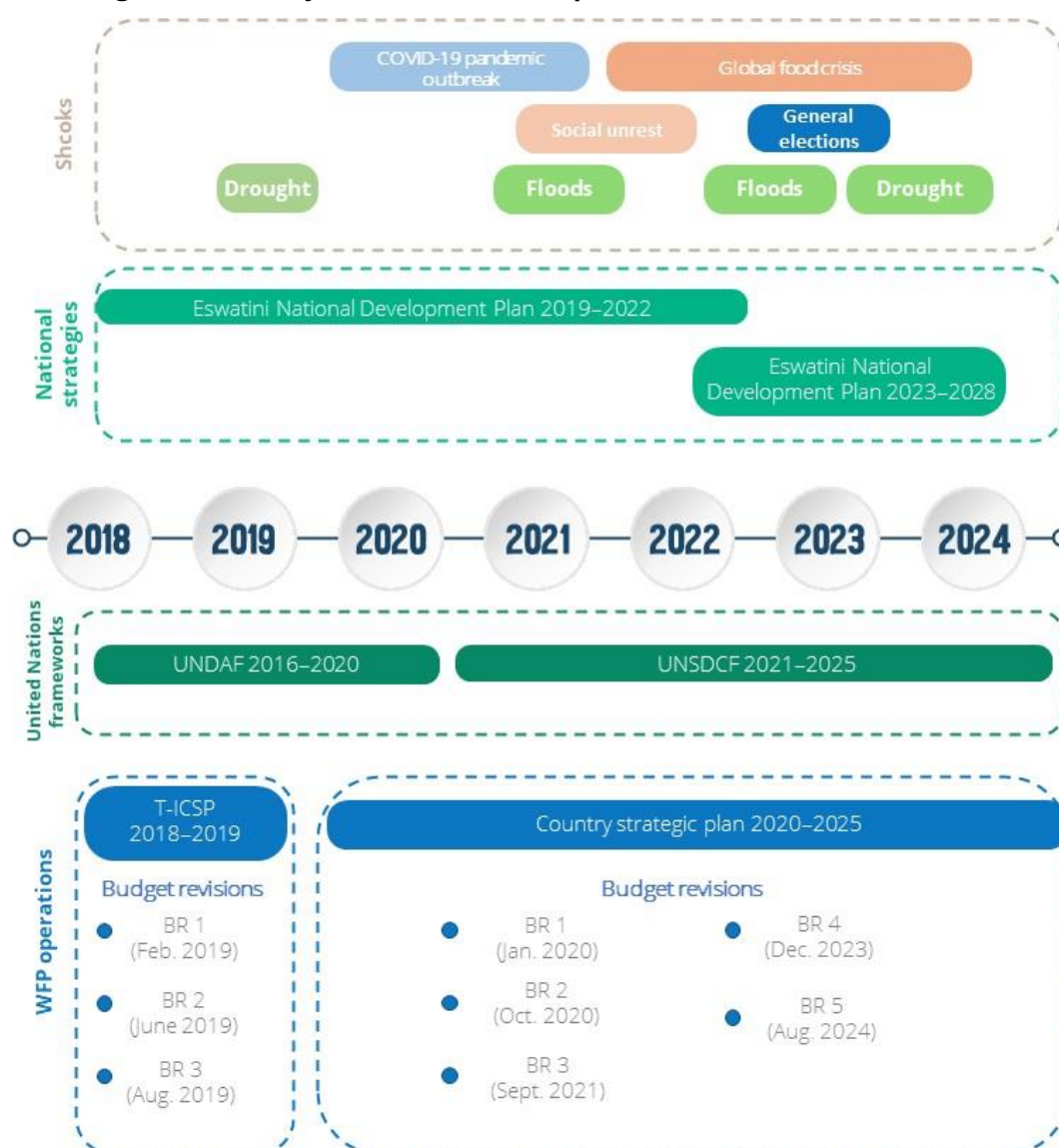
\* Neighbourhood care points were established in Eswatini in 2002 as a community-based response to the needs of orphans and other vulnerable children of ages 6 months to 6 years.

Source: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). 2024. *Mapping of Social Protection Development in the Kingdom of Eswatini*.

9. The CSP had an original budget of USD 26,284,469 and aimed to reach 199,593 beneficiaries;<sup>7</sup> however, it was revised five times during implementation, increasing the budget to USD 76,838,626 for an increased number of planned beneficiaries, reaching 331,852 in August 2024.<sup>8</sup> Key changes included the introduction of lean season support under revision 1; a response to the COVID-19 response under revision 2; a one-year extension of the CSP in line with the UNSDCF for 2021–2025 under revision 3; expansion of the coverage of strategic outcome 1 under revision 4; and the introduction of value vouchers under revision 5 (see figure 4). Strategic outcome 1 originally accounted for approximately two-thirds of the total CSP budget, but this decreased to 53 percent in the most recent revision.

<sup>7</sup> "Eswatini country strategic plan (2020–2024)" (WFP/EB.2/2019/7-A/2).

<sup>8</sup> WFP. 2024. *Eswatini country strategic plan, revision 5*.

**Figure 4: Country context and WFP operational overview, 2018–2024**

*Abbreviations:* BR = budget revision; UNDAF = United Nations development assistance plan.

*Sources:* Evaluation team's elaboration based on revisions and programmatic documents related to the T-ICSP and the CSP.

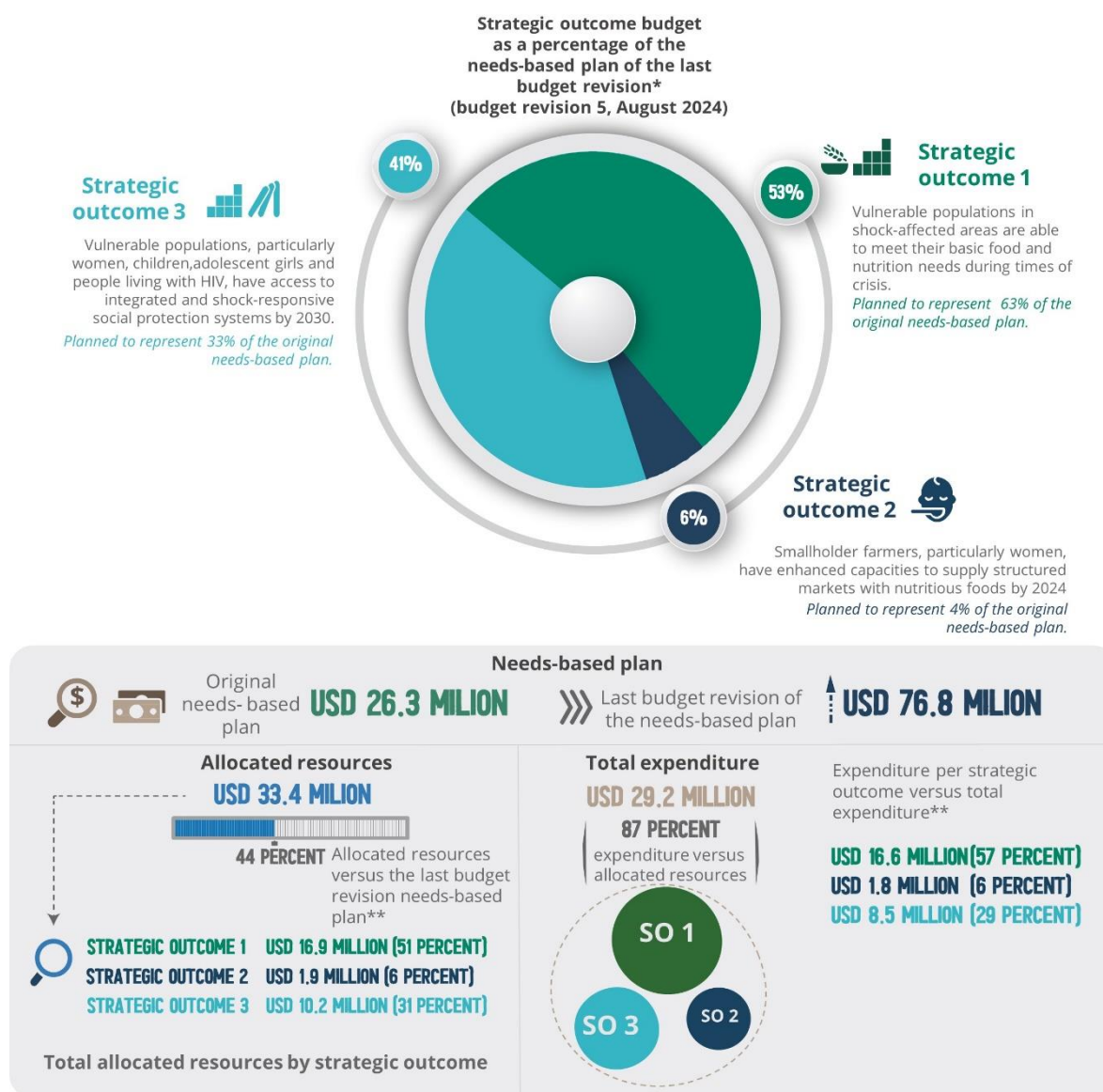
10. As of August 2024, the CSP was funded at 45.5 percent. The major funding sources were WFP's flexible funding mechanisms, which accounted for 32.9 percent of total contributions, and the Government of Japan, accounting for 30.9 percent.<sup>9</sup> Other donors were the European Commission, with 11 percent of total contributions, Germany, with 12.8 percent, and United Nations funds and agencies, with 4 percent. Most funding was earmarked at the Sustainable Development Goal level, accounting for 40 percent of total contributions, and the strategic outcome level, with 18 percent, which allowed for a degree of flexibility in allocating the funding received.
11. The proportion of planned beneficiaries reached each year has fluctuated, with the lowest proportions of people reached being 53 percent in 2019, under the T-ICSP, and 73 percent in 2021, under the CSP (see figure 6). In 2020, due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis, the actual number of beneficiaries reached was significantly higher than originally planned,

<sup>9</sup> WFP. FACTory. *Resource Situation Report*, 21 August 2024 (internal).



representing 130 percent people of the planned number. However, in the subsequent years, from 2021 to 2024, the planned annual targets for the numbers of beneficiaries assisted have not been reached.

**Figure 51: Eswatini country strategic plan for 2020–2025, strategic outcomes, budget, funding and expenditures**

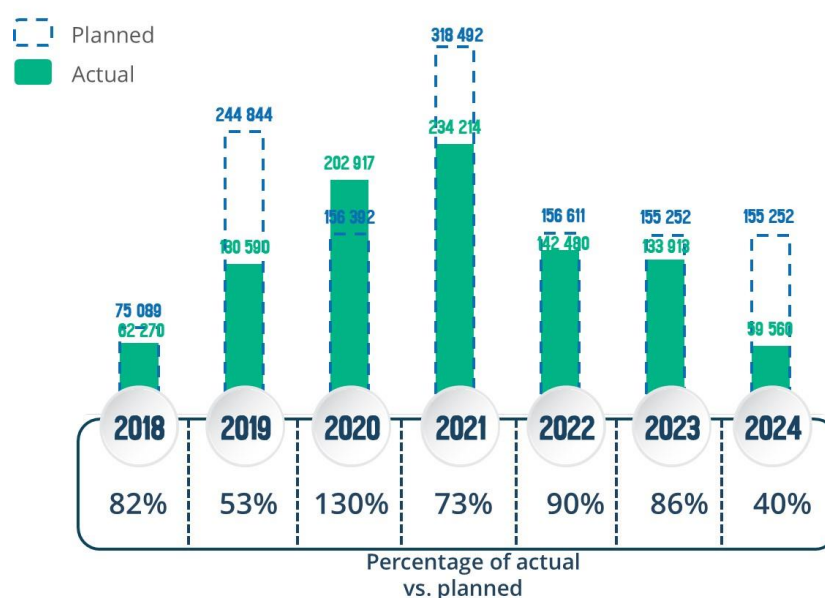


\* Excluding direct and indirect support costs.

\*\* Allocated resources do not add up to 100 percent of the needs-based plan because 12 percent of resources were allocated for direct and indirect support costs.

Abbreviation: SO = strategic outcome.



**Figure 6: Planned and actual beneficiaries by year, 2018–2024**

Note: Data for 2018 and 2019 apply to the T-ICSP.

Sources: WFP. *Eswatini annual country reports 2018–2023*. For 2024, CMP013 and MoDa as of August 2024 (internal reporting).

## Summary key findings and conclusions

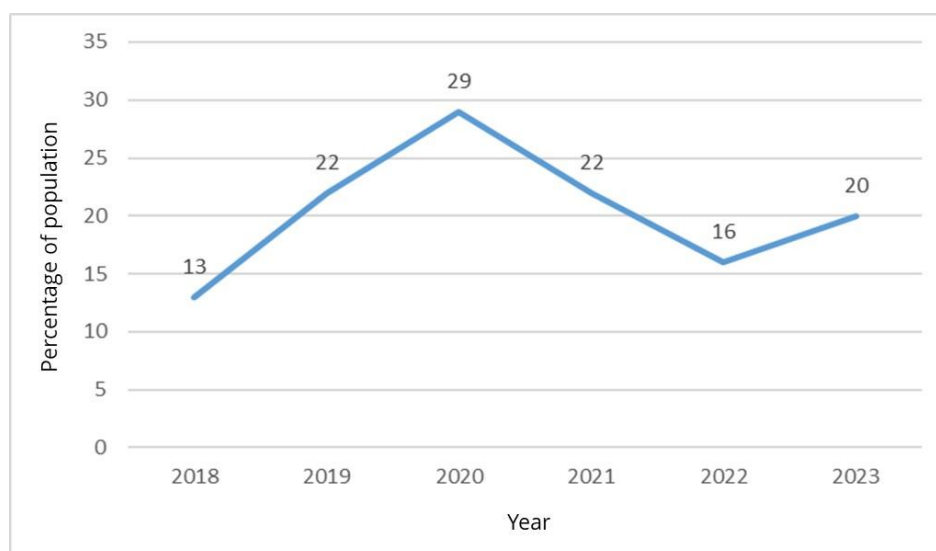
### *Relevance, use of evidence and strategic positioning*

At the time that the CSP was being formulated, there were clear and logical links between the findings of food insecurity analysis in Eswatini and the proposed CSP strategic outcomes. However, gaps were evident in the detailed articulation of result pathways for achieving certain outcomes. As a result, the CSP document offered few concrete details on WFP's planned approach to resilience building, climate change adaptation and social protection.

12. Annual needs assessments carried out by the vulnerability assessment committee found large numbers of people consistently in need of food assistance throughout the T-ICSP and CSP periods (see figure 7). In addition, the El Niño event of 2015–2016 led to a 40 percent drop in agricultural production<sup>10</sup> and the inclusion of a crisis-response component in the T-ICSP. The intersection of high levels of chronic vulnerability with increasing exposure to risks called for a response that was compatible with WFP's mandate and therefore justified the organization's continued engagement in the country.

<sup>10</sup> Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery. 2020. *ACP-EU Natural Disaster Risk Reduction Program – Eswatini Drought Preparedness*.

**Figure 7: Percentage of the population facing acute food insecurity and requiring humanitarian assistance between June and September, 2018–2023**



13. According to Eswatini's zero hunger strategic review, the majority of the population was reliant on agricultural livelihoods, which justified the inclusion of strategic outcome 2 – on strengthening smallholders' capacity to supply structured markets with nutritious food – in the CSP. However, the CSP document offered few concrete details on the planned approach to resilience building and climate adaptation. Under strategic outcome 2, the document made reference to the linking of farmers to downscaled weather forecasts<sup>11</sup> as a contribution to mitigating the effects of climate shocks, but no associated activities were described. The extent to which livelihood activities were designed to mitigate the localized effects of climate change was also unclear.
14. There was little readily available evidence to inform the design of activities in other newer areas of work. The approach to HGSF lacked an evidence base for ensuring that it was sufficiently adapted to conditions in Eswatini, including an in-depth analysis of market systems in the country. A proper value chain analysis and review of market system actors was not carried out, nor did the CSP document provide details on how the core objective of helping to develop social protection policies and programmes would be achieved.
15. The CSP identified potential synergies between social protection, crisis response and support for smallholder farmers. However, in practice, funding challenges meant that many activities were relatively small-scale, fragmented projects, reflecting a preference for spreading the available resources across as many beneficiaries and geographic areas as possible.

**While the CSP's focus on strengthening social protection systems was appropriate, certain assumptions about the Government's appetite for increasing the coverage of these systems turned out to be only partially valid. In addition, WFP's partnerships in this area of work were too narrowly focused, leading to missed opportunities for WFP to position itself strategically.**

<sup>11</sup> Downscaled weather forecasts use various techniques to translate weather predictions from large-scale models into more detailed, local-scale forecasts. This process improves the accuracy of predictions for specific regions by incorporating local conditions and microclimates. [Meteomatics. Weather Data 90-meter Downscaling](#) (accessed on 11 June 2025).

16. The CSP's focus on enhanced social protection was found relevant in helping to provide assistance for chronically food-insecure people through forms of social assistance that were more predictable and appropriate than lean-season emergency response. In addition, conditions in Eswatini made the focus on developing shock-responsive social protection mechanisms an appropriate way of exploring the most effective and efficient means of meeting the needs of crisis-affected people. While the CSP identified and sought to address gaps in national social protection policies and programmes, some important gaps and opportunities – such as the introduction of poverty-oriented cash transfers, and the strengthening of administrative capacity – were not explicitly considered in the scope of the CSP's country capacity strengthening activities.
17. Assumptions regarding the Government's appetite for increasing the coverage of social protection programmes proved to be only partially valid given the limited fiscal space. A political-economic analysis, which could have helped to clarify some of the challenges to strengthening national social protection systems, was not conducted. For example, a deeper analysis of the pathways and partnerships that were needed could have helped WFP to advocate change more effectively. While WFP partnered with Eswatini's social welfare department and UNICEF, its partnership with the World Bank was underdeveloped. This resulted in duplicated capacity assessments and a lack of alignment in developing a unified social registry, which represented a significant missed opportunity, as the agenda and substantial financial support of the World Bank had gained considerable traction with the Government.

### **Effectiveness**

**WFP used evidence to inform its targeting of the most food-insecure groups of people and took measures to improve household-level targeting. However, the Government has not adapted its own approach to targeting, and civil society organizations continue to use agency-specific targeting criteria; a common targeting approach has therefore not yet been introduced.**

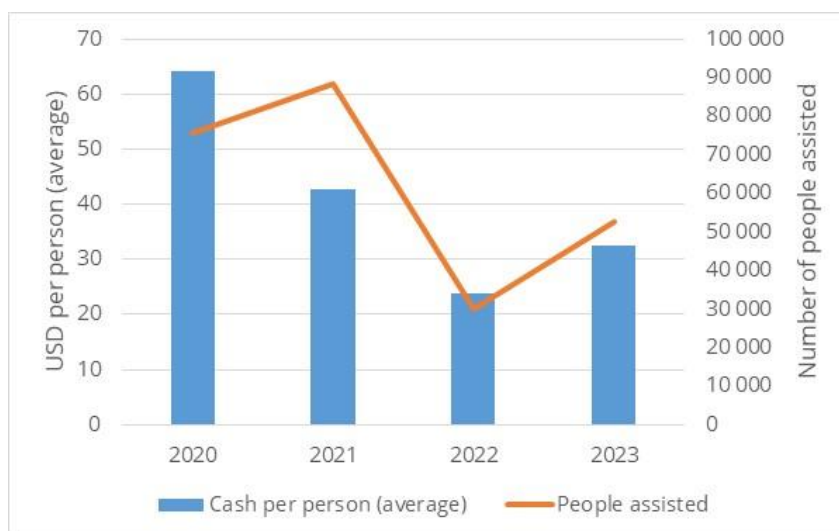
18. Targeting was appropriately guided by evidence on the incidence of food insecurity – such as vulnerability assessments – for crisis response activities and the feeding of orphans and other vulnerable children through neighbourhood care points. WFP revised its targeting approach for the household level in order to address the challenges identified in the Government-led system by moving away from reliance on local leaders and key informants to the use of community meetings and the application of specific criteria to identify vulnerable groups in need of assistance, such as older people, unemployed people, households headed by children or women, widows, and persons with disabilities or chronic illness. This approach helped to minimize errors, but the resulting community lists were more inclusive and required prioritization in line with the available resources. A common targeting approach for the Government and civil society has yet to be introduced.

**WFP partially pivoted back to crisis response, which was appropriate given the scale of needs. Unconditional food and cash assistance provided by WFP was found to have improved the food security of crisis-affected people at scale, but this result was compromised by resource limitations later in the CSP period.**

19. *Strategic outcome 1:* Eswatini was affected by a succession of exceptional, unanticipated food security shocks over the period of the CSP. WFP adapted well to respond to the needs arising from drought, the COVID-19 pandemic and food price hikes, and performed well in helping to address short-term food insecurity under strategic outcome 1, to the extent that resources allowed. Specifically, WFP's assistance covered between 19 and 46 percent of the

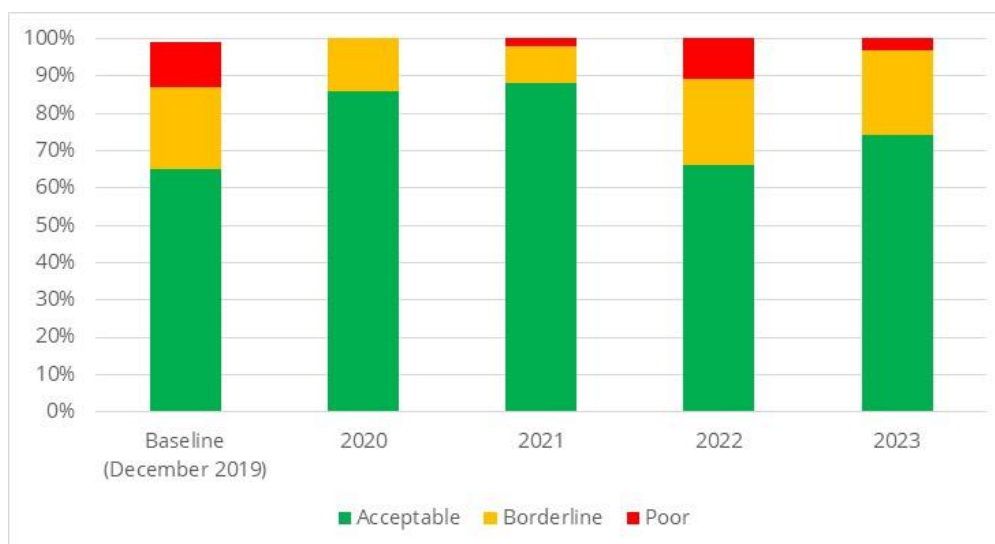
population in need of food assistance and was well coordinated with the work of other responding agencies under the response plan of the National Disaster Management Agency. However, resource limitations meant that WFP had to significantly scale back its distributions from the 2021 cycle onwards, in terms of both the number of people assisted and the average amounts of assistance provided (see figure 8). This may have contributed to the subsequent decreases in acceptable food consumption scores between 2021 and 2022, with the proportion of people receiving cash assistance and reporting an acceptable score falling from 88 to 66 percent (figure 9).

**Figure 8: Average amounts of cash transferred and numbers of people assisted**



Sources: CM-R007 annual distributions 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023 (internal reporting).

**Figure 9: Food consumption scores of people assisted under strategic outcome 1 2020–2023\***



\* The baseline value is from December 2019. In response to the impact of COVID-19 and erratic drought conditions, WFP implemented a crisis response through unconditional resource transfers, with food and cash transfers reaching 125,375 affected people. This explains the significant increase in acceptable food consumption scores in 2020 compared with the baseline.

Sources: WFP. [Eswatini annual country reports 2010–2023](#). Post distribution monitoring December 2020.

20. WFP also provided neighbourhood care points<sup>12</sup> with food for preschool-age orphans and other vulnerable children. There is a strong justification for WFP's provision of food to the care centres given that these institutions are not funded from the national budget, with the Government's involvement being only in a coordinating capacity. However, WFP has reduced the number of care points it supports from 1,700 between 2020 and 2023 to 700 in 2024 owing to funding constraints, and the long-term future of neighbourhood care points is uncertain given the slow progress in building national ownership of their management and funding.

**Despite some positive results, the overall approach to livelihood and resilience-building interventions – predominantly under strategic outcome 2 – was fragmented and lacked a vision of how activities could be brought to scale.**

21. *Strategic outcome 2 (predominantly):* WFP helped to strengthen the Government's capacity to design and deliver livelihood activities. The "three-pronged approach" (3PA), which consists of a consultative process aimed at strengthening the design, planning and implementation of resilience-building programmes, was successfully piloted and improved communities' engagement in the design of programmes, but partnerships for the implementation of those programmes were incomplete, and the prospects for their sustainability are low. For example, when implementing the 3PA, WFP did not engage with some key government agencies, United Nations entities and non-governmental organizations that could have assisted in supporting the implementation of the multisectoral plan that was developed, such as the Water Development Board, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), UNICEF, Save the Children and the Eswatini Red Cross Society. In addition, there was no clear strategy for integrating the 3PA into community planning processes that would support resilience programming under the Ministry of Tinkhundla.<sup>13</sup> However, WFP successfully supported the development of the agricultural integrated information system and the Government has taken important steps to operationalize the system.
22. Overall, livelihood and resilience-building interventions were fragmented across the three strategic outcomes and followed inconsistent approaches. There is some evidence of WFP supporting generalized "climate-smart" interventions for smallholder farmers, including the use of shade nets, drip irrigation and drought-resistant seed varieties, but the evaluation found that WFP did not prioritize and identify locally appropriate, climate-smart agricultural technologies. Experiences elsewhere in the region have not been fully capitalized on. For example, while the initial CSP document proposed linking farmers to downscaled local weather forecasts – an idea that had been pursued elsewhere in the Southern Africa region – this was not translated into actionable plans.
23. The three-to-four-month duration of some livelihood activities, and the amounts provided to smallholder farmers – approximately USD 94 – were too small to meaningfully affect livelihoods over the long term. While the cash transfers had positive welfare outcomes, they fell short of the stated objective of enhancing resilience as part of early recovery initiatives, and the activities did not target the most food-insecure areas distant from the major roads.

<sup>12</sup> The Ministry of Tinkhundla Administration oversees the coordination of neighbourhood care points, with support from the Deputy Prime Minister's Office. The neighbourhood care point programme is fully funded through international aid. In partnership with UNICEF, WFP supports social safety nets by providing daily warm meals for the children attending the care points (UNICEF, 2024. [Mapping of Social Protection Development in the Kingdom of Eswatini](#)).

<sup>13</sup> The Ministry of Tinkhundla Administration and Development is responsible for the administration of Tinkhundla as an administrative unit equivalent to a local council.

24. Critically, for most livelihood interventions there was no clear pathway for bringing them to scale, and no specific plan for shifting responsibility for their implementation to the Government. Projects remained small in scale and fragmented. There was insufficient monitoring of individual interventions to identify what works and why, and to demonstrate which activities are worthy of replication. Support for the groups working on climate and resilience matters has remained at the community level, and it is unclear which government partner is responsible for these interventions and their upscaling.

**WFP has been able to demonstrate strong results in supporting country capacity strengthening – primarily under strategic outcome 3 – where it has established longstanding partnerships and been able to offer relevant technical expertise.**

25. *Strategic outcome 3:* Achievements in country capacity strengthening were witnessed under the CSP – most notably in the areas of school meal operations and disaster management. WFP’s capacity-strengthening activities in these areas were highly relevant and delivered tangible positive effects for individuals and organizations, and at the policy and institutional levels. Specifically the evaluation found the following:
- *The training of school staff helped to improve their capacity in food safety and hygiene measures for the preparation of school meals.* For example, utensils are now properly cleaned before and after use.
  - *Advocacy led to the Government joining the School Meals Coalition<sup>14</sup> and subsequently drafting the country’s commitments* relating to school meal policy, financing, evidence and data, programme design and coverage. Although these commitments were awaiting Cabinet approval at the time the evaluation was conducted, this represented an important step forward.
  - *Support for improved data collection, analysis and report writing for the annual assessment of the vulnerability assessment committee led to improvements in the quality and timeliness of the report and were subsequently used to guide emergency responses.* WFP provided capacity strengthening activities with FAO on various food security analysis tools, including the household economy approach and the IPC, and also supported the analysis of cross-cutting areas. The latter led to improved disaggregation of data on gender-based violence, but there is still a need for deeper analysis of gender-related issues and climate change.
  - *Support for the development of the national operational framework for disaster management and the national operational guidelines for emergency response led to the delineation of responsibilities and multi-agency frameworks for the national and local levels.* These documents and guidelines were considered particularly helpful in establishing the operational parameters for the National Disaster Management Agency.

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<sup>14</sup> The School Meals Coalition is an effort that is led by United Nations Member States and aimed at ensuring that every child has the opportunity to receive a healthy, nutritious daily meal in school by 2030. It is rooted in country-level action and multisectoral partnerships focused on restoring access to the school meal programmes lost during the COVID-19 pandemic; helping low-income countries to reach the most vulnerable children; and promoting safe, nutritious and sustainably produced foods, and diverse and balanced diets.



26. In addition, as a result of WFP's training and advocacy on the school meal plan PLUS tool, the Ministry of Education and Training *created a series of costed nutritious menus for schools operating school meal or HGSF programmes, which led to commitments to increasing the budget for school meal activities by 30 percent in 2023.*<sup>15</sup> However this budget line was not protected and has been used for other education-related expenditures.
27. WFP's longstanding partnerships with key national partners such as the Deputy Prime Minister's Office, the National Disaster Management Agency and the Ministry of Education and Training significantly facilitated progress in school meal operations and disaster management. This multi-year collaboration fostered a deep understanding of capacity-strengthening needs, enabling WFP to effectively leverage its technical skills in food security analysis in its work with various agencies. Collaboration over several years has given WFP an intimate understanding of the needs and opportunities for capacity strengthening, despite the absence of a formal capacity assessment. For example, collaboration with the Eswatini vulnerability committee under the Deputy Prime Minister's Office dates back to 2013 and has enabled WFP to leverage its strong technical skills in food security analysis to efficiently develop capacity in multiple agencies, including the University of Eswatini, the Surveyor General's Office, and civil society and non-governmental organizations.
28. Progress has also been made in country capacity strengthening in other areas. Specifically, WFP has supported the development of a social protection policy, action plan and road map for 2023–2028. However, it is still too early to judge the utility and effectiveness of these documents, and no national funding has been committed to their implementation. The evaluation also found that the challenges faced by the Government in financing an expansion of shock-responsive social protection in Eswatini were underappreciated by WFP in its planning.

### **Cross-cutting issues**

**Despite initial investments in gender analysis, attention to gender-related matters and the other cross-cutting issues of inclusion and nutrition was compromised by a lack of dedicated expertise in the country office.**

29. To its credit, WFP followed up on this gap through its early attempts to mainstream gender across its activities at the start of the implementation phase. However, these efforts tailed off considerably during the later stages. There was little attention to the inclusion of marginalized groups other than women and girls. For example, while the needs of people with disabilities have steadily risen in prominence in WFP's corporate strategic agenda, this focus was not incorporated into the preparation or implementation of the CSP.
30. In terms of equitable participation, enrolment numbers were positive for the HGSF pilot, with 67 percent of the farmers supported in 2022 being women; however, in other training courses women accounted for fewer than a third of total participants, and informants were unable to recall any training events that were specifically designed to enhance women's leadership skills and self-confidence. Evidence that women's leadership in smallholder farmer and livelihood groups had been enhanced was also limited, and under strategic outcome 1 women became the default recipients of cash transfers only after complaints were made by beneficiaries.

<sup>15</sup> Data provided by a key informant. Government of Eswatini. 2024. *Eswatini National Budget 2024/25 at a Glance*. The budget confirms the allocation of SZL 15 million as additional funding for the school meal programme.

31. The limited attention to gender and inclusion issues was closely related to resource constraints that affected the staffing of the country office. From 2023 onwards, the country office did not have a dedicated gender officer but instead relied on a gender focal point who had other significant responsibilities across the CSP, including leading an activity area. This undermined mainstreaming efforts as there is a limit to what could be expected from overburdened gender focal points. Although partnerships were established to help address this gap – for example with the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa's Federation of Women in Business, which supports women farmers in supplying the school meal programme – they could not fully substitute for the lack of capacity in the country office.
32. Nutrition was taken into consideration to some degree in the CSP, as reflected in the targeting of malnourished population groups, the messaging for social and behaviour change, and the mainstreaming of nutrition in the design of livelihood interventions. However, efforts to mainstream nutrition in food systems through the promotion of fortified foods did not make meaningful progress and also suffered from a lack of dedicated expertise in the country office.

### ***Key factors affecting performance***

**Limited funding, including from government co-financing and new sources, hampered the achievement of the CSP's broad ambitions. The measurement of capacity strengthening outcomes and the capture of evidence from pilot projects to inform upstream policy work have been challenging.**

33. With minimal contributions directed to supporting capacity-strengthening activities, WFP has relied heavily on internal, flexible, multilateral financing to implement these activities. This source of financing does not provide the predictable multi-year financing that is required in order to make sustained progress, and its future availability is particularly uncertain given the corporate budgetary pressures facing WFP.
34. Other sources of financing that may be better suited to supporting capacity-strengthening efforts have not been sufficiently explored, such as opportunities for trilateral dialogue with the Government and international financial institutions on the potential for contributing to WFP in accordance with their respective mandates. This will require WFP to change the way in which it views its partnership with the Government.
35. WFP has not fared well in competitive bids and, depending on the circumstances and its specific comparative advantages, may need to accept more of a supporting than a central role in developing joint bids with other United Nation entities. WFP's positioning in competitive bids would also benefit from stronger evidence of results, drawing on WFP's work in-country and, potentially, elsewhere in the region. WFP failed to collect sufficient, good-quality data to demonstrate the results of the HGSE pilot. As a consequence, it has not captured sufficient learning and evidence to demonstrate the viability of this approach in informing national policymaking.

***Sustainability and transition strategies***

**While progress towards sustainable change was achieved for disaster management, the main exit strategy for the CSP was seen to lie in gradually shifting responsibility for emergency response to a shock-responsive national social protection system. Overall, progress towards this goal has been slow.**

36. There has been positive progress in creating sustainable change in the area of disaster management. The necessary legislation, policies and guidelines to support the operations of the National Disaster Management Agency have been drafted and are close to being formally adopted. The Government's capacity has been strengthened in the areas of assessment, cash distributions and logistics. After exceptional budget allocations related to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020/21, budget allocations from the Government have continued at a predictable level. The National Disaster Management Agency has a strong record in leading crisis response, complemented by the auxiliary capacity of the Baphalali Eswatini Red Cross Society, but capacity gaps remain. For example, a disaster financing mechanism that enables large-scale response has not yet been established, and WFP was not involved in other relevant initiatives on drought preparedness and disaster risk financing.
37. The main exit strategy for the CSP focused on ensuring that transfers and services were sustainably delivered through national social protection systems. Progress towards this goal depended on changes in national policy and legislation, strengthened financing, and increased government staff capacity. WFP aimed to start filling the policy gap by promoting a comprehensive social assistance policy that recognizes the role of social protection in responding to shocks and promoting household resilience.

## Recommendations

Recommendations and sub-recommendations	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
<p><b>Recommendation 1: WFP should conduct a thorough assessment of potential resources and calibrate the design of the next CSP against a pragmatic assessment of probable resource availability.</b></p> <p>1.1 Explore new opportunities for leveraging domestic resources in areas relevant to food security and nutrition, and in partnership with international financial institutions, as relevant and applicable.</p> <p>1.2 Intensify engagement and advocacy with established donors at the country and – especially – the regional levels to mobilize CSP funding.</p>	Strategic	Country office	Regional office	High	Prior to the new CSP – 2026 onwards
<p><b>Recommendation 2: WFP should continue to support capacity strengthening for national authorities aimed at enabling them to own and sustain school and preschool meal operations.</b></p> <p>2.1 Continue to pilot local procurement for school meal operations with the Ministry of Education and Training, in conjunction with the relevant marketing boards providing extension and procurement services.</p> <p>2.2 Continue to advocate the Government's leadership of, and responsibility for, the coordination of all partners' support for neighbourhood care points.</p> <p>2.3 Continue to implement a time-limited pilot project on the development of gardens that sustainably supply food for orphans and other vulnerable children attending neighbourhood care points.</p>	Operational	Country office		High	Prior to the new CSP – 2026 onwards

Recommendations and sub-recommendations	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
<p><b>Recommendation 3: In partnership with the Government, WFP should define a value proposition that includes the areas of climate change adaptation and social protection.</b></p> <p>3.1 Work in close partnership with the Government and other actors to identify opportunities for contributing to national policy debates and best practices in food and nutrition security programming, drawing on an analysis of best practices and demonstrated comparative advantages in similar settings in the region.</p> <p>3.2 Detail an approach that considers combining technical advisory support at the institutional level, dialogue and advocacy on policy with the national government and key international actors, including international financial institutions, and the identification, design and implementation of pilot projects with strong investments in systematization, evidence generation and knowledge management.</p> <p>3.3 Explore the potential for sharing experts in social protection, climate change adaptation, nutrition and gender issues with other country offices through a multi-country support arrangement.</p> <p>3.4 Develop a theory of change that clarifies the anticipated outcomes and articulates the key assumptions on which those outcomes depend; and ensure that adequate resources are ring-fenced to support monitoring, evaluation and learning in relation to this theory of change.</p>	Strategic	Country office	Regional office	High	Prior to new CSP – 2026 onwards

**Acronyms**

3PA	three-pronged approach
COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
CSP	country strategic plan
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
HGSF	home-grown school feeding
IPC	Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
T-ICSP	transitional interim country strategic plan
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNSDCF	United Nations sustainable development cooperation framework