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Summary report on the evaluation of the country strategic plan for El Salvador (2017–2021)

Executive summary

The evaluation of the country strategic plan for El Salvador was conducted between October 2020 and July 2021. It was aimed at assessing WFP's strategic positioning, its contribution to outcomes, efficiency in implementation and the factors explaining performance. It was conducted using a utilization-focused, consultative approach to serve the dual purpose of accountability and learning and to inform the preparation of a new country strategic plan for El Salvador.

El Salvador is a lower-middle-income country. Located in the Central American Dry Corridor, it is increasingly vulnerable to adverse climatic events. Multidimensional poverty affects households in both rural and urban areas, food insecurity and malnutrition represent a public health issue.

The country strategic plan envisaged a shift from emergency response to addressing recovery from disasters and root causes of vulnerability through national and local capacity strengthening. It thus focused on social protection, income generation, climate resilience and disaster risk reduction.

The evaluation found that the country strategic plan was relevant to national priorities and adequately addressed key development issues, including social, economic and environmental vulnerabilities. In a context of ongoing crises, WFP was an indispensable partner for the Government and positioned itself at the centre of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, although awareness of its enabling role is still limited among its partners.

In line with the Evaluation Policy (2016–2021) (WFP/EB.2/2015/4-A/Rev.1), 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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Overall, the country strategic plan created conditions for the sustainability of interventions through the institutionalization of activities and country capacity strengthening at the individual, organizational and enabling environment levels.

WFP was agile and quick to identify and assist households during the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic and in response to the Amanda and Cristobal tropical storms and the Eta and Iota hurricanes, with appropriate targeting and coverage. It was proactive in implementing cost-efficient strategies and seeking alternative cost-effective measures to reduce transaction costs in delivering assistance.

WFP's inputs for evidence-based policymaking and targeting of social protection programmes are valued and used by national government institutions, civil society organizations and United Nations entities; however, the lack of an established internal knowledge management strategy impaired the application of results-based management principles, and the country office did not make optimal use of the available evidence for its own strategic decision making during implementation.

The country strategic plan architecture was intended to provide more flexibility in programming and enhanced internal synergies among strategic outcomes. With few exceptions, however, these aspects were not fully explored, due to persistently siloed programmatic work.

The conclusion stemming from the evaluation was that the country strategic plan achieved positive results across all outcomes, with significant contributions to Sustainable Development Goals 2 and 17 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development overall. Partnerships and synergies with national and local government institutions, grassroots organizations and the United Nations system, coupled with the engagement of specialized WFP staff in high-level advocacy and policy dialogue, proved to be critical success factors.

Resource mobilization, however, was a challenge, due to initially optimistic budgeting and subsequent funding shortfalls. In that regard, some of the assumptions underpinning the logic of activities under the plan – like those on matters such as how much funding would be available and the continuation of projects by government counterparts – only partially held true, with implications for programming and sustainability of results.

The evaluation generated two strategic and four operational recommendations relevant to key issues for El Salvador's next country strategic plan. The strategic recommendations are aimed at harnessing the country office's reputational capital to position WFP as a key development partner by ensuring that the next country strategic plan has a strong focus on country capacity strengthening. The operational recommendations focus on strengthening the gender-transformative approach in programming and partnership; developing a strategy for enhancing the sustainability of interventions; strengthening results-based management; and developing a resource mobilization strategy.

Draft decision*

The Board takes note of the summary report on the evaluation of the country strategic plan for El Salvador (2017–2021) (WFP/EB.1/2022/6-C) and management response (WFP/EB.1/2022/6-C/Add.1) and encourages further action on the recommendations set out in the report, taking into account the considerations raised by the Board during its discussion.

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

Introduction

Evaluation features

1. Country strategic plan (CSP) evaluations are the main instrument for accountability and learning in accordance with the expectations of the WFP Executive Board and WFP management. They provide evidence of WFP's strategic positioning and results to inform the design of the next generation of CSPs and potentially to contribute to the design of United Nations sustainable development cooperation frameworks.
2. The evaluation of the El Salvador CSP for 2017–2021 covered WFP's interventions in the country between 2016 and 2020.¹ Its main users are the WFP country office and internal and external stakeholders, including beneficiaries.
3. The evaluation adopted a theory-based mixed-methods approach, drawing on monitoring data, a literature review, semi-structured interviews, focus groups with beneficiaries, online surveys and four case studies. A gender approach was applied throughout the process. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the evaluation was conducted remotely, with data collection between December 2020 and March 2021. Findings, conclusions and recommendations were discussed with stakeholders during two online workshops in June 2021.

Context

4. El Salvador is a very densely populated country, with an area of 21,040 km² and a population of 6.7 million.² Located within the Dry Corridor of Central America, it is regularly exposed and highly vulnerable to disasters such as droughts, torrential rains, floods and cyclonic storms, related both to climate change and to the El Niño and La Niña currents, which occur every two–seven years.
5. El Salvador is a lower-middle-income country, with 2.4 percent average annual growth in gross domestic product (GDP) over the last decade;³ it is highly dependent on remittances (see table 1). Multidimensional poverty affects both rural and urban households.⁴ Facing significant barriers to inclusion in the labour force and financial autonomy, women are more affected by poverty than men.⁵ Femicide and gender-based violence remain of significant concern.⁶
6. In 2015 El Salvador recorded the highest homicide rate in the world, largely due to violence and insecurity attributable to organized crime and street gangs (*maras*), which are also among the primary causes of school dropouts, migration and internal displacement.⁷

¹ The scope of the evaluation was established in agreement with the country office based on the assumption that the evaluation report would be presented together with the new CSP at the 2021 second regular session of the Executive Board. The evaluation report therefore includes financial and programme data as at December 2020. After the evaluation was assigned to an external evaluation team, the country office decided to extend the period of the current CSP to June 2022.

² Government of El Salvador, Directorate General for Statistics and Census (*Dirección General de Estadística y Censos*). 2020. *Multipurpose Household Survey (Encuesta de Hogares de Propósitos Múltiples)*. 2019.

³ Government of El Salvador, *Banco Central de Reserva* (Central Reserve Bank). 2021, GDP.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. 2020. *El Salvador gender equality country profile (Perfil de país según igualdad de género de El Salvador)*.

⁶ Economic Commission for Latin America. 2020. [Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean](#).

⁷ WFP. 2020. *El Salvador Annual Country Report*.

7. El Salvador ranked 50 of 117 countries in the 2020 Global Hunger Index,⁸ with 53 percent of all analysed households reporting some level of food insecurity.⁹ Malnutrition is also an important public health issue, with social costs equivalent to 10.3 percent of GDP.¹⁰
8. El Salvador's agriculture sector is dominated by smallholders (82 percent), predominantly subsistence-oriented.¹¹ In 2020, the agriculture, fishing and forestry sectors accounted for 5.11 percent of GDP.¹²
9. The COVID-19 pandemic threatens to reverse the country's positive trend in human development and poverty reduction, as unemployment, informality and territorial inequalities are expected to grow.¹³

TABLE 1: EL SALVADOR SOCIOECONOMIC INDICATORS			
	Indicator	Year	Value
	Total population (1)	2019	6 704 864
	GDP per capita (USD) (2)	2020	3 799
	Remittances as a percentage of GDP (3)	2020	20
	Human Development Index (4)	2020	0.673
	Gini coefficient (2)	2021	0.35
	Percentage of households living in multidimensional poverty (1)	2019	28.1
	Percentage of households living in extreme poverty (1)	2019	4.5

⁸ Von Grebmer, Klaus and Bernstein, Jill. 2020. *Global Hunger Index 2020: One Decade to Zero Hunger – Linking Health and Sustainable Food Systems*.

⁹ Integrated Food Security Phase Classification. 2020. El Salvador: IPC analysis of acute food insecurity November 2020–February 2021 (*El Salvador: Análisis de inseguridad alimentaria aguda de la CIF noviembre 2020 – febrero 2021*).

¹⁰ Economic Commission for Latin America and WFP. 2019. The cost of the double burden of malnutrition: social and economic impact, El Salvador (*El costo de la doble carga de la malnutrición: Impacto social y económico, El Salvador*).

¹¹ Government of El Salvador, Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock. 2009. Fourth census of agriculture and livestock 2007–2008 (*IV Censo Agropecuario 2007–2008*).

¹² World Bank. 2020. *Economic Indicators*.

¹³ United Nations El Salvador. 2021. *Análisis Común de País* (Common country analysis).

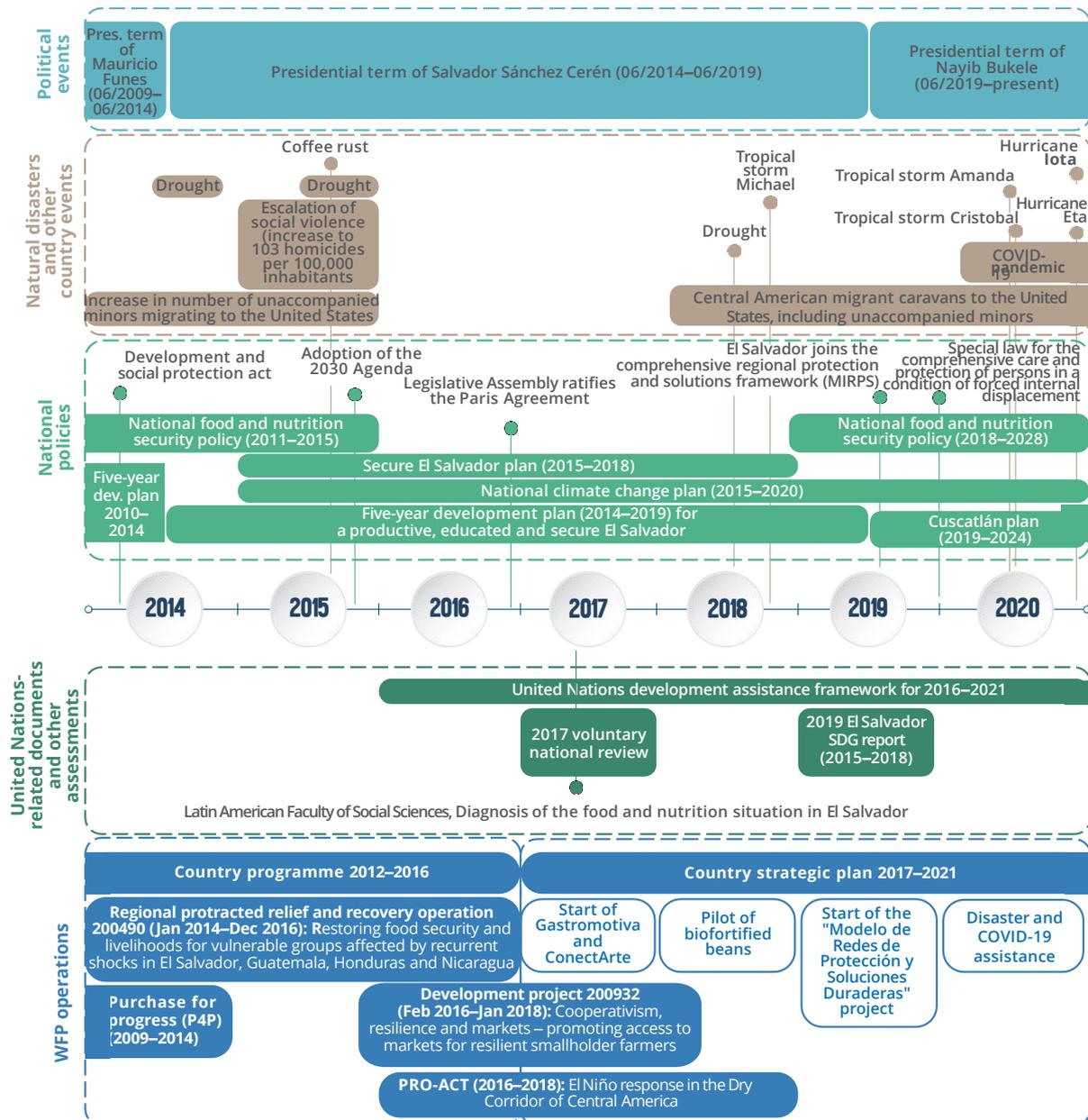
TABLE 1: EL SALVADOR SOCIOECONOMIC INDICATORS			
	Indicator	Year	Value
	Gender Inequality Index (4)	2020	0.383
	Internally displaced persons (5)	2020	71 500
	Global Hunger Index (6)	2020	10.5
	Height-for-age (stunting – moderate and severe) (children under 5) (7)	2020	11.2

Sources: Elaborated by the Office of Evaluation based on (1) Directorate General for Statistics and Census (*Dirección General de Estadística y Censos*), 2019; (2) World Bank, 2020 and 2021; (3) Central Reserve Bank (*Banco Central de la Reserva*), 2020; (4) United Nations Development Programme, 2020 Human Development Report; (5) Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2020; (6) 2020 Global Hunger Index; (7) United Nations Children's Fund, *State of the World's Children*, 2021.

WFP country strategic plan

- WFP has been present in El Salvador since 1969, gradually shifting from emergency, recovery and school feeding interventions to a recovery, development and capacity strengthening portfolio. The CSP was implemented during a challenging period marked by natural disasters, a change of government and the COVID-19 pandemic (figure 1).

Figure 1: El Salvador country context and country strategic plan overview

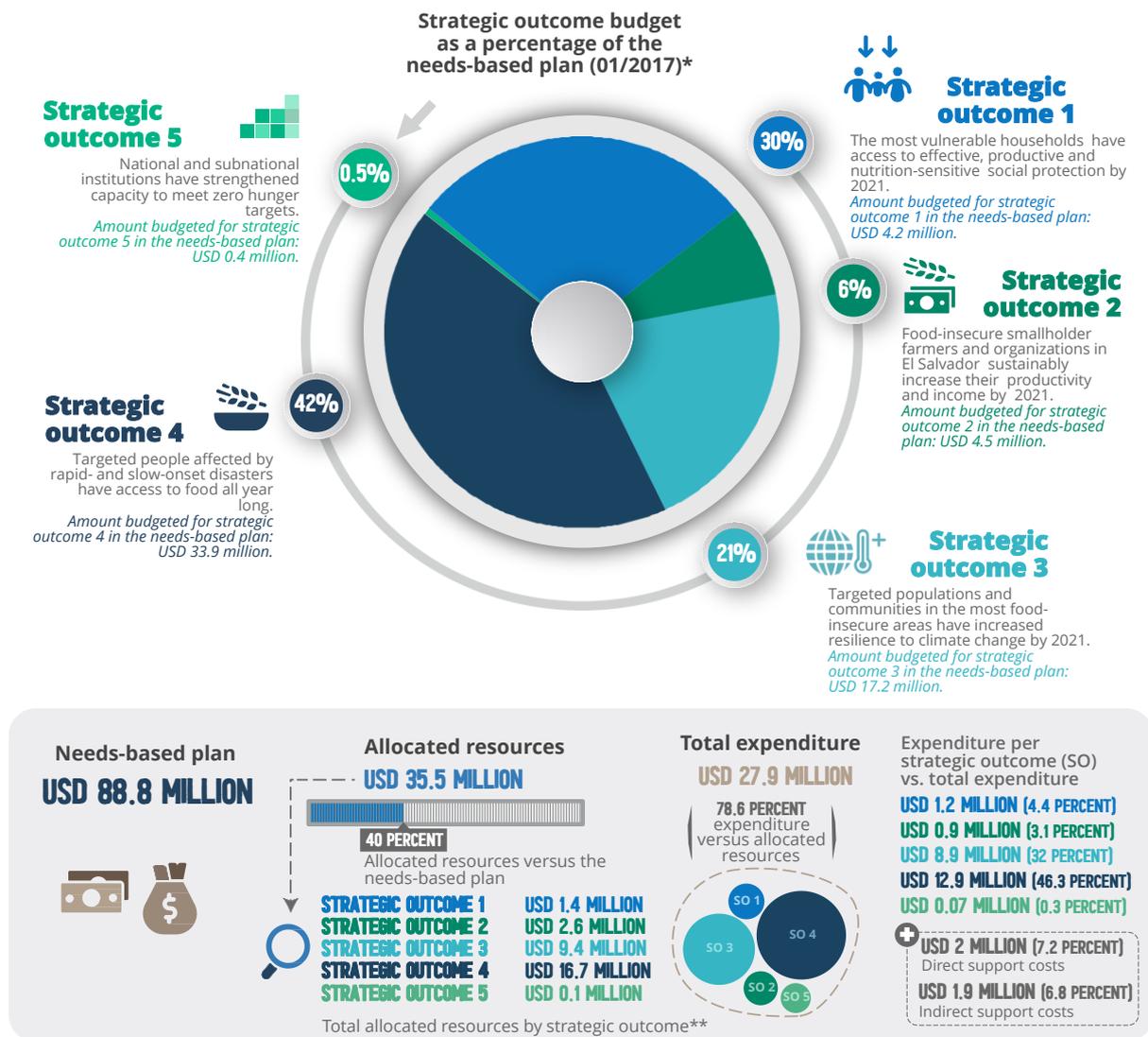


Source: Elaborated by the Office of Evaluation based on the full report on the evaluation of the El Salvador CSP for 2017–2021.

11. The CSP was structured around five strategic outcomes, 21 outputs and 11 activities. Cross-cutting priorities included accountability to affected populations, gender, protection and the environment.
12. The planned intervention modalities were cash-based transfers (CBTs), food transfers and capacity strengthening; at the Government's request, however, food transfers were not provided.

13. The planned country portfolio budget was USD 88.8 million (figure 2) and was intended reach 1,071,896 beneficiaries (figure 3).¹⁴ Only USD 35.5 million was in fact received (40 percent) (figure 2). The main sources of funds were flexible funding¹⁵ (41 percent), the Republic of Korea (11 percent), the United States of America (10 percent), El Salvador (8 percent) and the United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund (7 percent). The CSP revision approved in December 2020 set out a needs-based plan budgeted at USD 108.1 million.

Figure 2: El Salvador CSP (2017–2021) strategic outcomes, budget, funding and expenditures



* The percentage of the needs-based plan budget for each strategic outcome is calculated based on total transfer and implementation costs rather than the grand total needs-based plan budget of USD 88.8 million, which includes direct and indirect support costs.

** The percentages of allocated resources by strategic outcome do not add up to 100 percent because resources were also allocated to non-strategic outcome-specific purposes, as well as to direct and indirect support costs.

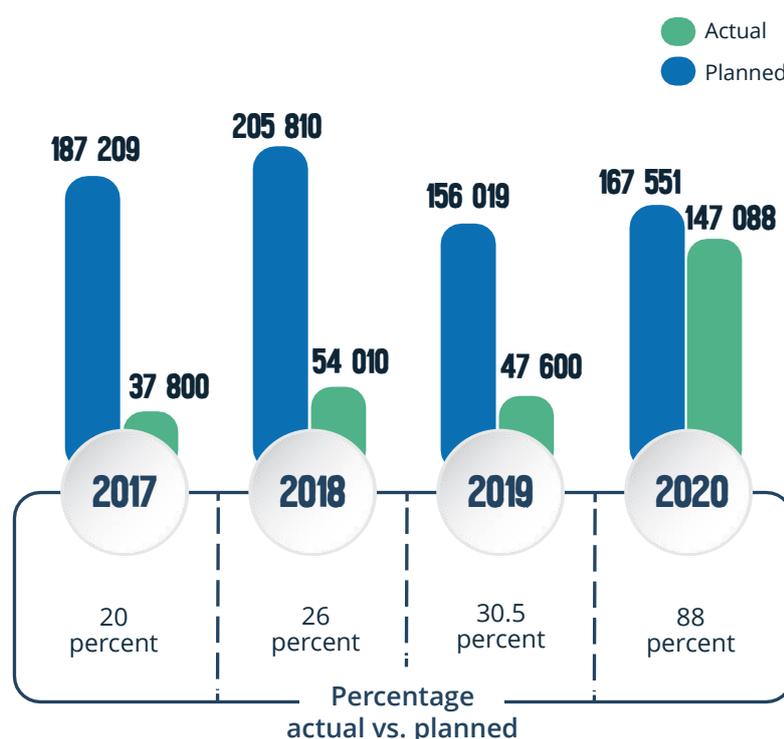
Source: El Salvador CSP (2017–2021) and Integrated Road Map Analytics, annual country report 1, 30 December 2020.

¹⁴ These figures refer to the CSP approved at the first regular session of the Executive Board in 2017. The CSP has undergone two budget revisions, on 31 December 2020 and in September 2021.

¹⁵ Flexible funding refers to contributions for which donors do not impose conditionalities, thus allowing WFP to determine their destination and use.

14. The CSP prioritized boys and girls 6–23 months of age; pregnant and lactating women; young women and men affected by violence; smallholder farmers and their associations in food-insecure areas affected by climate change; populations affected by natural and man-made disasters, internally displaced persons and people with disabilities. Capacity strengthening activities were addressed to national and local institutions and communities. The coverage of planned beneficiaries was low throughout the first years of the CSP due to low funding levels but increased significantly in 2020 in response to the climate and public health crises.

Figure 3: Actual versus planned beneficiaries (2017–2020)



Source: Annual country reports for 2017–2020.

Evaluation findings

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

Relevance and strategic positioning

15. The CSP was relevant to national priorities, adequately tackling key development issues such as poverty, food insecurity and social, economic and environmental vulnerabilities. It was aligned with the 2014–2019 national development plan and the 2019–2024 Cuscatlán education plan.
16. In a context of ongoing crises, WFP was an indispensable partner for the Government and positioned itself at the centre of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus; however, while the CSP focused on both crisis response and development issues, there is a low level of awareness in the country regarding WFP's role in capacity strengthening.

17. The country office was able to adjust the CSP to adapt to political and institutional changes, adverse climate events and the COVID-19 pandemic through the establishment of new partnerships. In doing so, WFP facilitated inter-agency coordination and political dialogue between the new Government and the United Nations system.

Addressing the needs of the most vulnerable

18. The CSP addressed the needs of the most vulnerable and allowed beneficiaries' voices to be incorporated into development processes due to WFP's widespread presence in the field and its proximity to communities.
19. The CSP prioritized groups with intersectional vulnerabilities and broadened the definition of "fragile context" to accommodate populations with differing needs who were affected by natural disasters and man-made emergencies. The CSP prioritized the most disadvantaged areas of the Dry Corridor, particularly Morazán, San Miguel, Usulután and La Unión.

Coherence and alignment

20. The CSP was coherent with United Nations strategies in El Salvador and its strategic objectives were aligned with the five areas of cooperation of the United Nations development assistance framework for the country. In addition, WFP actively sought to complement the work of other United Nations entities in the country (e.g. the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Children's Fund, the International Organization for Migration and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), playing a leading role in emergencies due to its technical and logistical comparative advantage.
21. WFP assisted the Government in its efforts to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2 (zero hunger) and 17 (partnerships for the goals). To address the challenges of hunger – which are multicausal and require multidimensional solutions – the CSP contributed to SDGs 1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 13, 15 and 16; however, the connections with those SDGs were neither explicitly established in the CSP nor systematically considered within the country office.

What is the extent and quality of WFP's contribution to country strategic plan outcomes in El Salvador?

Country strategic plan outcomes

22. This section provides a quantitative overview of the achievement of outcome indicator targets, followed by a qualitative discussion to enable interpretation and understanding of WFP contributions to expected outcomes, with an emphasis on country capacity strengthening as a key component of the CSP.
23. As shown in table 2, 65 percent of the outcome indicators had an achievement rate of over 90 percent, 25 percent had an achievement rate between 50 and 89 percent and 11 percent had an achievement rate of less than 50 percent. On average, outcome indicators for strategic outcome 4 attained the highest achievement rates, followed by those for strategic outcome 3. Outcome indicators for strategic outcome 2 present the lowest achievement rates. Indicators for strategic outcome 1 were measured only in the first two years of CSP implementation. The CSP did not include indicators for strategic outcome 5, with its achievement measured only through output indicators.

Table 2: Outcome indicator target achievement rate by strategic outcome and year (2017–2020)

Strategic outcome	2017	2018	2019	2020
1	9 indicators	6 indicators	n.d.	n.d.
		3 indicators		
2	5 indicators	4 indicators	3 indicators	1 indicator
		1 indicator	2 indicators	2 indicators
3	2 indicators	11 indicators	18 indicators	14 indicators
	15 indicators			
	3 indicators	1 indicator	2 indicators	6 indicators
4	12 indicators	12 indicators	10 indicators	12 indicators
	3 indicators	3 indicators	4 indicators	3 indicators
			1 indicator	
5	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

Legend

Achievement rate 90 percent or more	Achievement rate between 50 and 89 percent	Achievement rate less than 50 percent
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Abbreviations: n.a. = not applicable; n.d. = not available.

Source: El Salvador annual country reports for 2017–2020.

24. Through strategic outcome 1, the CSP was aimed at ensuring that vulnerable households had access to a more effective national social protection system, with an emphasis on nutrition. The outcome contributed to upholding national social protection and food and health assistance through capacity strengthening and CBTs, both during ordinary times and in emergencies. Through advocacy and political dialogue, the CSP led to raised awareness of development challenges related to food security and nutrition and contributed to the establishment of national plans and social protection policies. Initiatives such as the strengthening of the single registry of participants supported the establishment of a more

- universal, accessible and effective protection system, albeit with coverage-related limitations. CBTs and vouchers provided to vocational trainees through the *Gastromotiva* and *ConectArte* projects contributed significantly to beneficiary adoption of healthy food habits and nutrition patterns, as well as to improved beneficiary self-esteem thanks to enhanced labour market access. During the upsurge of the COVID-19 pandemic, the country office contributed to the inclusion of shock-responsive social protection in a foundational concept note on social protection developed by the Ministry of Local Development.
25. Strategic outcome 2 was aimed at sustainably increasing the productivity and income of food-insecure smallholder producers and strengthening their associations. The CSP enhanced extension institutions' management capacities and brought about technological advancements in the production plant for the fortified drink Biofortik, with significant improvements in productivity and child nutrition. Moreover, the CSP led to strengthened smallholder associations and networks, facilitation of financial inclusion of entrepreneurs with limited access to credit and introduction of insurance schemes for smallholders, which in turn contributed to micro-business growth. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the country office provided seed capital and biosecurity protective items to women entrepreneurs, enabling them to resume work and productivity.
 26. Through strategic outcome 3, the CSP was aimed at enhancing the climate resilience of populations and communities living in areas affected by high food insecurity. Participatory approaches were used to support the modernization of the national programme for the recovery of ecosystems and landscapes and the preparation of annual operational plans in selected departments, with positive effects on local governance and citizen engagement. Through technical assistance provided to the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources and the Directorate General for Civil Protection, the CSP contributed to preserving natural resources and building disaster reduction capacity in emergency settings. Moreover, it brought about innovations (i.e. macro-tunnels and greenhouses) that improved livelihoods of members of the most vulnerable groups in the Dry Corridor by diversifying and increasing their production and dietary intake. That also had a positive impact on family incomes and the local microeconomy.
 27. Strategic outcome 4 was aimed at ensuring that populations affected by rapid and slow onset disasters have access to food all year. At the national level, the CSP strengthened government preparedness and capacity to respond to emergencies by supporting the implementation of the law and national plan for civil protection and disaster prevention and mitigation. The modernization of assets such as the crisis room from which the Government coordinates disaster responses and the conduct of specialized training further strengthened government capacity to assess and respond to emergencies. At the subnational level, the CSP reactivated local commissions belonging to the national civil protection system in the risk-prone areas of San Miguel and Usulután, with a positive impact on the reduction of prolonged fires.
 28. Strategic outcome 5 was aimed at strengthening the capacity of national and local institutions to manage food security and nutrition policies and programmes. The CSP contributed to the definition of regulatory frameworks for food security through support for the design of the national food and nutrition security policy for 2018–2028. Multisectoral and multistakeholder platforms such as the departmental and municipal committees on food security and nutrition were supported beginning in 2018, leading to the establishment of food security plans in 6 of 14 departments, but funding shortfalls and the COVID-19 pandemic had serious implications for South-South cooperation activities, which were only implemented to a limited degree.

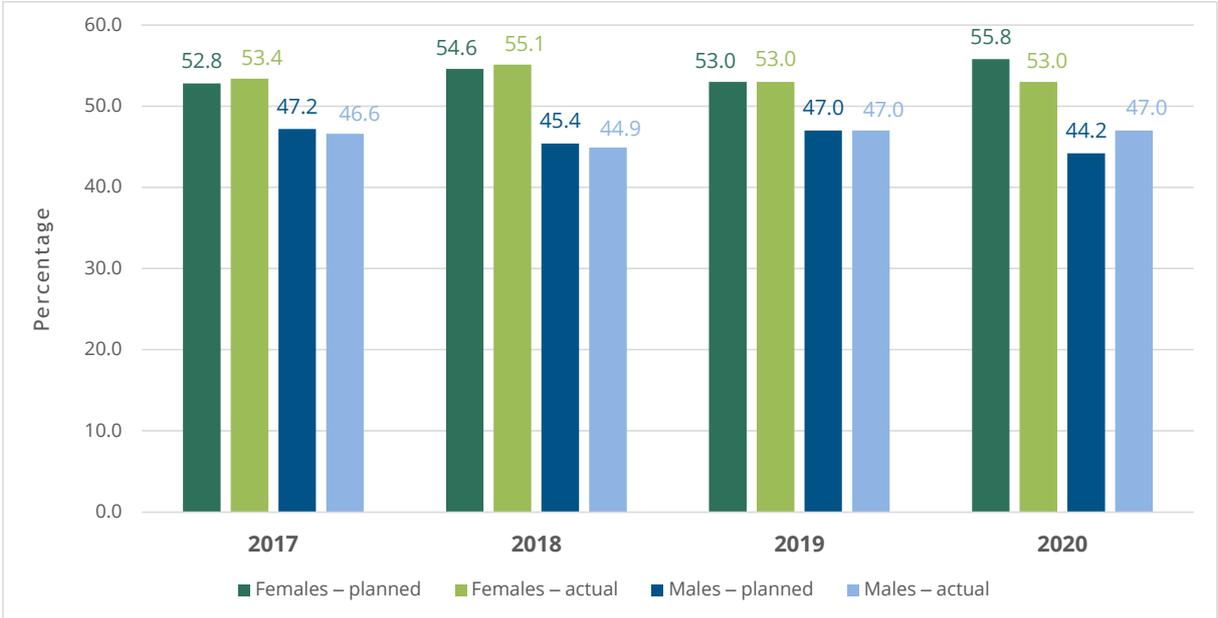
Humanitarian principles, accountability to affected populations, protection and the environment

- 29. Impartiality, respect for target populations, professionalism, neutrality and promotion of the autonomy of assisted populations are distinguishing features of the CSP. WFP led the humanitarian country team response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the inter-agency United Nations emergency technical team and contributed to providing solutions in hard-to-reach areas.
- 30. WFP involved communities in decision making on assistance and programming. Through the active use of community-based participatory planning and complaint and feedback mechanisms, voices of affected populations were heard, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the country office added a telephone number for receiving beneficiaries' concerns.
- 31. The CSP contributed to environmental protection by implementing, in the most vulnerable areas of the Dry Corridor, activities that promoted the preservation of natural resources. Environmental considerations and climate change adaptation were central in asset creation and resilience activities.

Gender and equity

- 32. The CSP considered the principles of gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE) through interventions that ensured the equal presence of women and men beneficiaries (figure 4) and contributed to an increase in decisions made by women on the use of assistance provided by WFP.

Figure 4: Annual planned versus actual beneficiaries by sex (2017–2020)



Source: COMET report CM-R001b, annual country beneficiaries (2017–2020).

- 33. The CSP did not, however, adopt a gender-transformative approach to capacity strengthening programming or partnerships. Despite the fact that violence against women and girls is known to increase markedly in emergency contexts, GEWE was not sufficiently taken into account in the work with the national civil protection system. The country office did not join the Spotlight Initiative, a project led by the United Nations and the European Union to eliminate gender-based violence. In addition, the CSP did not include a budget for

GEWE interventions and the corporate target of allocating 15 percent of resources to gender equality activities by 2020 was not achieved.

34. During the COVID-19 pandemic, humanitarian assistance was expanded to include people with limited access to social services, such as people living with HIV, indigenous people and groups highly affected by their informal economic activities, such as sex workers. The CSP also reached population groups with limited access to social protection schemes and forums, such as populations displaced by internal violence and people with disabilities.

Sustainability

35. The CSP generated favourable conditions for the sustainability of interventions through the institutionalization of activities and the strengthening of partnerships with national entities. In addition, the country office provided training for trainers for a significant number of government personnel and smallholder producers in emergency preparedness and response, a strategy allowing for the replication of achievements in the future. Nevertheless, the sustainability and scalability of achievements over time was hindered by the lack of adoption and expansion of activities by the Government and the lack of an explicit strategy in the CSP.

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

Timeliness

36. In emergency settings, assistance through CBTs was timely and met its distribution targets. The country office was agile and quick to identify and assist households during the COVID-19 pandemic and in response to the Amanda and Cristobal tropical storms and the Eta and Iota hurricanes. In contrast, institutional and capacity strengthening activities not linked to emergencies faced delays due to administrative procedures and external factors such as institutional adjustments resulting from the change of government.

Appropriateness of the coverage and targeting

37. Overall, targeting and coverage were appropriate. During CSP implementation, the number of direct beneficiaries increased in proportion to the availability of funding. In 2020, geographical coverage was expanded due to the emergency arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and natural disasters, reaching vulnerable population groups with limited access to social protection. Activities were more intense in areas with high levels of poverty and food insecurity such as Ahuachapán, Santa Ana, Cabañas, Usulután, Morazán, La Unión and San Miguel. This territorial expansion allowed for coverage of 219 out of 262 municipalities.
38. Targeting processes combined WFP technical criteria, community participation in decision making and insights from government authorities and community leaders.

Cost efficiency

39. The country office was proactive in implementing cost-efficient strategies. The political advocacy and dialogue with the Government for the strengthening of the single registry of participants and of the national food and nutrition security policy did not require additional funds other than the salary of WFP staff, resulting in significant budget savings for strategic outcomes 1 and 5. The active use of the “train the trainer” methodology further improved the overall cost-efficiency of the CSP.

40. It should be noted, however, that the macro-tunnel project – an innovative initiative for strengthening production within the Dry Corridor – was higher-cost than alternatives implemented in the country, partly due to the infrastructure it required. Nonetheless, in comparison with similar interventions, the project recovered a considerable area for production and families benefited from the investment made.

Alternative cost-effectiveness measures

41. The country office sought ways to reduce direct assistance transaction costs.¹⁶ The transformation of direct assistance from food transfers to CBTs improved cost-effectiveness. Throughout the term of the CSP, flexibility of delivery increased and additional channels for more agile CBTs were adopted, resulting in timely assistance to over 30,000 beneficiaries during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. There were 111,300 planned CBT beneficiaries in 2021.¹⁷
42. In terms of procedures, operating costs were decreased by 84 percent through remote beneficiary monitoring. The WFP-funded Active Monitoring of Social Programmes system also contributed to cost-effectiveness thanks to its innovative approach to real-time collection of anthropometric data.
43. Country office leadership of two initiatives for the common procurement of goods and services through the United Nations operations management team further improved the cost-effectiveness of the CSP.

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

Use of data and results-based management

44. The CSP design was informed by a diagnosis of the food and nutrition situation in El Salvador carried out by the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (*Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales*) and the national council on food and nutrition security (*Consejo Nacional de Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutricional*) in 2017, as well as by evaluations and lessons learned from previous interventions and sectoral, corporate and inter-agency information on food and nutrition security and human development, which served as the basis for consultations with the Government, other entities of the United Nations system, civil society, private actors and academia.
45. During the implementation of the CSP, the country office generated timely, high-quality evidence for public policy decision making and targeting for social protection programmes. The data and information generated are valued and used by several public institutions, civil society organizations and United Nations entities in the country that recognize the country office's technical knowledge and comparative advantage.
46. While internal learning loops exist within the country office, the CSP did not establish a knowledge management strategy. This impaired the application of results-based management principles, with the CSP lacking the benefit of optimal and systematic use of available evidence and analyses. Results-based management was further weakened by the gap between evidence generation and decision making.

¹⁶ In 2016, a study on cost-effective assistance options compared the impact of voucher, cash and multipurpose modalities on beneficiaries affected by drought in the Dry Corridor (WFP. 2017. *Addressing food insecurity: Does the choice of transfer modality matter? Study comparing voucher, cash and multipurpose cash in El Salvador*).

¹⁷ WFP. 2021. CSP Data Portal (data extracted on 24 November 2021).

Predictability, adequacy and flexibility of resources

47. Initially optimistic budgeting meant that resource mobilization was a challenge, and the country office faced funding shortfalls for most of the CSP term. The years 2017 and 2018 were severely under-funded (37.4 percent of planned funding for 2017 was received and 35.7 percent of 2018 funding). In 2019, funding increased to 56.7 percent. The CSP was only adequately funded in 2020, with funding arriving in response to natural disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic. Most of the resources made available were earmarked at the activity level rather than the strategic outcome or CSP level, however, and had limited flexibility.
48. The country office undertook several resource mobilization initiatives, including direct contact with donors, inter-agency collaboration (Central Emergency Response Fund, Peacebuilding Fund, Green Climate Fund) and, remarkably, the establishment of a dedicated team responsible for resource mobilization within the partnerships unit in 2018. To a large extent, however, resource mobilization depended on efforts under the strategic outcomes, meaning that opportunities for greater synergy and integration across the whole CSP were missed. Initiatives of the Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean were focused on resource mobilization with multilateral banks such as the Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank; however, international financial institutions have scant awareness of the work of the El Salvador country office.

Strategic partnerships

49. In implementing the CSP, the country office maintained its historical partnerships, incorporated new partnerships and positioned itself within multipurpose networks relevant to its mandate.
50. The humanitarian response mandate of WFP makes it a strategic partner for the Government and within the United Nations system. In emergency situations, the country office maintained a close relationship with the national civil protection system, which produced contingency plans with the participation and consensus of several government agencies. Furthermore, the country office kept abreast of El Salvador's decentralization process and cooperated with the Ministry of Local Development and municipal governments in implementing the CSP. Partnerships at the municipal level facilitated programmatic performance.
51. Cooperation with other United Nations entities made it possible to expand beneficiary coverage and mobilize funds; however, the extensive inter-agency work was neither explicitly acknowledged as an intervention modality in the CSP nor included in the CSP reporting system.
52. In line with the 2030 Agenda and SDG 17, the CSP established and nurtured partnerships with the private sector and academia.

Flexibility in dynamic operational contexts

53. The CSP proved to be flexible and allowed timely adjustment to changing circumstances. The widespread presence of field monitors and proximity to communities in particular provided information on the evolving needs of beneficiaries and subsequently allowed adjustments to the CSP to adapt to new problems and local dynamics. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this was made possible by cooperation with community leaders and the use of remote communication tools.

54. The flexibility of the CSP is evidenced by adaptive practices such as incorporation of new groups of beneficiaries (returned migrants and displaced persons, people with disabilities) and territories (rural and urban); adaptation of solutions to local specificities; activity adjustments to meet new government requirements; and innovation in assistance modalities for emergencies.
55. Compared to previous WFP portfolios in the country, the CSP was designed to provide more flexibility in programming and enhance synergies among strategic outcomes. With few exceptions, however, these aspects were not fully explored due to siloed programmatic work and limited application of results-based management.

Human resources and internal capacity

56. The country office's capacity to mobilize, in a timely manner, staff know-how, perseverance, dedication and readiness in respect of conflict resolution are additional factors explaining WFP's performance. The CSP in fact benefited from the reputational capital of the country office, which is attributable to the technical knowledge, willingness, strong commitment and attentive listening of its staff. Partners appreciated and acknowledged country office management leadership and technical staff capacity to think "outside the box" and innovate.

Conclusions

57. The El Salvador CSP for 2017–2021 successfully prioritized key issues related to national development challenges such as food security, resilience to shocks and capacity strengthening. It enabled WFP's strategic shift due to its combination of humanitarian emergency assistance and capacity strengthening to address root causes. Some of the underlying assumptions behind the CSP – regarding matters such as how much funding would be available and the continuation of projects by government counterparts – only partially held true, however, with implications for programming and the sustainability of results.
58. The country office successfully expanded and strengthened partnerships with national and local state actors, communities and other United Nations system entities to achieve the SDGs. The country office is recognized as a strategic partner for government counterparts, the United Nations country team, implementing partners, development cooperation entities and civil society organizations and as a key player in humanitarian response. It is less well known, however, for its contributions to development and capacity strengthening, which could be better exploited. There is scope to make the most of such contributions through development interventions that, without diminishing the focus on emergencies and food security, contribute to strengthening the capacity of state institutions and civil society organizations.
59. In the context of United Nations development system reform, WFP demonstrated its willingness to work with other agencies. The country office sought complementarities with other United Nations organizations and development and cooperation actors in the country. Inter-agency collaboration became a modality of intervention even though the initial CSP did not explicitly provide for it.
60. While the delivery of emergency response assistance was appropriate and timely, institutional capacity strengthening activities in ordinary times faced delays due to administrative procedures and external factors beyond WFP's control. The CSP contributed to capacity strengthening through the establishment of an enabling environment, the consolidation of institutional and community capacity and capacity development for individuals. It made significant contributions to SDGs 2 and 17 and the 2030 Agenda in general; however, a lack of gender analysis limited WFP's capacity to contribute to SDG 5.

61. The CSP fostered the sustainability of achievements by building capacity at the national and local level. Despite stakeholder expectations regarding WFP engagement in the post-COVID-19 scenario, some successful pilot projects were not scaled up for reasons beyond WFP's control. There is room for improvement in the identification of sustainability and scale-up conditions.
62. Even though the critical assumption on the availability of funding from the Government of El Salvador and other donors did not fully hold true, the CSP brought about positive results across all outcomes. This was possible thanks to country office adaptive capacity, the development of a high-level advocacy and policy dialogue by specialized staff and the search for alternative cost-effective strategies and complementarity with other United Nations organizations.
63. Given the quality and magnitude of the available data and studies conducted, the absence of a knowledge management strategy is a missed opportunity for WFP to position itself as a "knowledge" agency on crucial national development issues, including emergencies. The absence of a knowledge management strategy affected results-based management, which was already weakened by non-SMART¹⁸ mandatory corporate indicators on capacity strengthening.

Recommendations

64. The evaluation gave rise to two strategic and four operational recommendations relevant to key issues for El Salvador's next CSP. For most sub-recommendations, progress would be envisaged during the 2022–2026 implementation cycle, with a mid-term review in 2024.

¹⁸ SMART is an acronym for specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound.

Recommendations	Recommendation type	Priority	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Supporting entities	Deadline for completion
Recommendation 1: WFP should harness its strategic position and reputational capital to position itself as a key development partner in the post-COVID-19 reconstruction.	Strategic	High	Country office – management		
1.1 Develop a plan for expanding and consolidating partnerships with high-level political and institutional stakeholders in the country, international cooperation entities and international financial institutions and monitor the plan’s implementation with twice-yearly assessments of its continued relevance.	Strategic	High	Country office – management	Country office – programme, partnerships and communications units	December 2022 and twice-yearly assessments throughout CSP implementation
1.2 Develop a communication strategy focused on WFP’s ability to strengthen institutional capacity, aimed at conveying the results achieved for Sustainable Development Goals 2 and 17 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development overall targets under the country strategic plan for 2017–2021, and other WFP assets, such as its global recognition as the 2020 Nobel Peace Prize laureate.	Strategic	High	Country office – partnerships and communications units	Country office – research assessment and monitoring (RAM) unit	December 2022
1.3 Together with the regional bureau, establish a dialogue with international financial institutions to promote projects in the Central American subregion and South-South cooperation projects.	Strategic	High	Country office – management	Regional bureau – partnerships, South-South cooperation and programme units	December 2022

Recommendations	Recommendation type	Priority	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Supporting entities	Deadline for completion
Recommendation 2: Considering the Sustainable Development Goals in the post-COVID-19 reconstruction, the new country strategic plan should link its strategic outcomes, explicitly incorporate intervention modalities that are linked with the strengthening of national capacity and expressly capture the logic of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.	Strategic	High	Country office – management		
2.1 Design the new country strategic plan theory of change to consider and reflect: the connections between the strategic outcomes and the principles of the triple nexus, translating them into activities; the connections between the capacity strengthening domains (enabling environment, organizational and individual); and the various modes of engagement with stakeholders (advocacy and political dialogue, capacity development, knowledge management, direct assistance, inter-agency coordination and awareness-raising).	Strategic	High	Country office – management	Country office – programme unit	Incorporate into the new CSP (February/ March 2022)
2.2 Strengthen internal coordination within the country office as well as monitoring and evaluation processes to ensure connections among activities and to shape interventions that progress synergically.	Strategic	High	Country office – management	Country office – RAM and programme units	June 2022

Recommendations	Recommendation type	Priority	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Supporting entities	Deadline for completion
Recommendation 3: The new country strategic plan should continue adopting a gender-transformative approach, with relevant measures applied in the targeting of beneficiaries, in partnerships and in the implementation of inter-agency strategies.	Operational	High	Country office – management		
3.1 Map the gender gaps, considering intersectionalities (socioeconomic status, age, territory, ethnicity, disability and gender identity), and incorporate measures to reduce such gender gaps into the theory of change and the design of the new country strategic plan, combining parity criteria with affirmative action and gender-mainstreaming institutional interventions and using gender marker indicators.	Operational	High	Country office – gender focal point	Country office – programme unit Regional bureau – gender focal point	Incorporate into the new CSP (February/ March 2022)
3.2 Mainstream a gender approach in high-level advocacy by mapping key institutions and stakeholders with a gender equality mandate, establishing a dialogue and implementing gender-transformative actions with them.	Operational	High	Country office – management	Country office – gender focal point; partnerships and communications units Regional bureau – gender focal point	December 2022
3.3 Incorporate a gender-transformative approach in working agreements with partners and in partnerships with development cooperation actors.	Operational	High	Country office – programme unit	Country office – gender focal point; partnerships and communications units Regional bureau – gender focal point	December 2022
3.4 Ensure that the communication strategy of the country office gives greater visibility to the achievement of results for gender equality and women's empowerment.	Operational	Medium	Country office – communications unit	Country office – gender focal point; RAM unit	December 2022

Recommendations	Recommendation type	Priority	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Supporting entities	Deadline for completion
3.5 Develop a plan to ensure that the country office progresses on internal awareness-raising and capacity-building activities on gender equality and women's empowerment, making use of the recent addition of staff specialized in gender.	Operational	Medium	Country office – gender focal point	Regional bureau – gender focal point	December 2022
Recommendation 4: WFP should develop a strategy for enhancing the sustainability of its interventions under the country strategic plan.	Operational	Medium	Country office – programme unit		
4.1 Incorporate consideration of conditions for sustainability and the scaling up of strategic outcomes into the new country strategic plan. Such considerations should include the availability of funding for continued action and the sustainability of achievements; commitment by government counterparts; high-level advocacy and political dialogue with the Government of El Salvador and the private sector; and strengthened partnerships within the United Nations system to promote inter-agency projects.	Operational	Medium	Country office – programme unit	Country office – budget and programming and partnerships units	Incorporate into the new CSP (February/ March 2022)
4.2 Include contextual risks beyond WFP's control that could affect the sustainability of interventions in risk assessments conducted regularly by the country office and conduct twice-yearly risk assessments during the term of the country strategic plan, in line with the annual performance plan cycle.	Operational	Medium	Country office – programme unit	Country office – RAM and budget and programming units	June 2022 and twice-yearly risk assessments throughout CSP implementation
4.3 Develop a road map for scaling up pilot projects and strengthening partner commitments in terms of resources and timelines.	Operational	Medium	Country office – programme unit	Country office – RAM and partnerships units	December 2022

Recommendations	Recommendation type	Priority	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Supporting entities	Deadline for completion
Recommendation 5: Promote the results-based management approach in programme management, in the internal management of the country office and across the country office organizational culture.	Operational	Medium	Country office – management		
5.1 Ensure that the theory of change of the new country strategic plan clearly identifies the causal chain and its intermediate and final effects, setting out the rationale for the activities, taking into account the expected outputs.	Operational	Medium	Country office – RAM unit	Country office – programme unit	Incorporate into the new CSP (February/ March 2022)
5.2 Ensure that the new country strategic plan includes specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound indicators, in addition to the corporate indicators used to track the capacity strengthening strategy and advocacy and political dialogue.	Operational	Medium	Country office – RAM unit	Country office – programme unit	December 2022
5.3 Strengthen the link between evidence generation, design and decision making in implementation by involving monitoring and evaluation staff in decision making processes.	Operational	Medium	Country office – management	Country office – RAM and programme units	December 2022
5.4 Use the information generated by WFP field monitors to develop a country strategic plan with greater integration among strategic outcomes, facilitating feedback loops and corrective measures.	Operational	Medium	Country office – programme unit	Country office – RAM unit	December 2022
5.5 Establish agreements with implementing partners and with the Government of El Salvador to incorporate adaptive planning into interventions, generating results-based management capacity among partners.	Operational	Medium	Country office – programme unit	Country office – RAM and partnerships units	June 2023

Recommendations	Recommendation type	Priority	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Supporting entities	Deadline for completion
Recommendation 6: Develop a resource mobilization strategy with medium- and long-term horizons.	Operational	Medium	Country office – RAM unit		
6.1 Establish, through a participatory process, a phased resource mobilization strategy, monitor its progress (with measurable milestones or checkpoints) and determine intermediate and final outcomes.	Operational	Medium	Country office – RAM unit	Country office – budget and programming unit	December 2022 with periodic follow ups throughout CSP implementation
6.2 Set up a team, including senior management, responsible for monitoring the resource mobilization strategy and conducting regular analyses of cost-effectiveness scenarios.	Operational	Medium	Country office – management	Country office – RAM, budget and programming, supply chain and administration and finance units	January 2023

Acronyms

CBTs	cash-based transfers
CSP	country strategic plan
GDP	gross domestic product
GEWE	gender equality and women's empowerment
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal