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Summary report on the evaluation of the policy on WFP's role in peacebuilding in transition settings

Executive summary

The evaluation of the 2013 policy on WFP's role in peacebuilding in transition settings (hereafter referred to as the "peacebuilding policy") was initiated by the Office of Evaluation in 2021.

Overall, the evaluation found that the policy can be considered well-formulated with realistic and practical principles that can guide WFP in its approach to conflict sensitivity and contributions to peace. The peacebuilding policy scores well against WFP benchmarks of policy quality; its principles are still relevant in 2022, as evidenced by the similarity to more recent comparable policies from other humanitarian organizations, and it is highly rated by those employees who are aware of it.

The evaluation found examples of policy implementation ranging from the strengthening of support structures, particularly at headquarters, to capacity building activities, the establishment of a community of practice, the provision of practical operational support, the adaptation of processes, the broadening of the evidence base for WFP's contribution to peace and a more general mainstreaming of peacebuilding within the organization.

The policy's main limitation is not related to its contents but to shortfalls in the financial and human resources available to implement it, which limited systematic policy uptake until recent years. Certain critical measures were taken following the policy's adoption in 2013. For example, the corporate emergency programming framework (2013) identified peacebuilding and conflict sensitivity as a priority. Support missions to country operations and the drafting of guidance also

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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started in the early years of policy implementation. On the whole, however, policy implementation was initially cautious and situation-specific and became more systematic only several years later.

At the time of the evaluation, policy implementation measures included promising, but limited, investments in capacity building, increased support for country offices and efforts to strengthen conflict analysis, steps in broadening the evidence base for WFP's contribution to peace, and conflict-sensitive adaptations of key processes in certain situations. There is little evidence of synergies in the implementation of related policies such as those on gender, protection and accountability to affected people. Regarding results, the evaluation noted limited achievements in terms of improved conflict analysis, more conflict-sensitive programming and increased partnerships with peacebuilding organizations. Overall, efforts to strengthen the context and conflict analysis practices of WFP are visible but not systematic, and important blind spots remain.

The evaluation found limited examples of systematic, structured and inclusive processes for ensuring the consideration of conflict dynamics and conflict sensitivity. Even when conflict analyses are produced it is unclear whether and how they influence programming and country office planning documents and, with some exceptions, reports include relatively little discussion of conflict dynamics and conflict sensitivity. However, evaluation interview data showed that WFP employees and cooperating partners are highly aware of the importance of "doing no harm" and recognize the reduction of food insecurity as WFP's main contribution to peace.

Most factors that influence the current performance of WFP in conflict sensitivity and contributions to peace are internal and relate to management buy-in and incentives, staffing and the emergency focus and culture of WFP. Important external factors are the relationship with cooperating partners, the influence of donors and the relationship with host governments.

The evaluation concluded that the policy is well formulated and remains relevant and that WFP's main contribution to peace continues to be its work on food insecurity, resilience building and livelihoods. However, gaps remain in conflict-sensitive programming and in enhancing the practice and use of context and conflict analysis to inform programme and process adaptations.

Four recommendations are identified: strengthen analysis of how the presence and programmes of WFP and its partners influence conflict dynamics; adapt WFP's organizational culture to make conflict sensitivity more central; mainstream conflict sensitivity; and ensure that WFP focuses its contribution to peace on supporting existing peacebuilding processes and implementing activities jointly with other actors.

Draft decision*

The Board takes note of the summary report on the evaluation of the policy on WFP's role in peacebuilding in transition settings (WFP/EB.1/2023/5-B) and management response (WFP/EB.1/2023/5-B/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

1.1 Evaluation features

1. Approved in 2013, the evaluation of the policy on WFP's role in peacebuilding in transition settings (hereafter referred to as the "peacebuilding policy") asked three main evaluation questions:
 - How good is the policy?
 - What are the results of the policy?
 - What accounts for the results that have been observed and the results that were not achieved?
2. The primary intended audience of the evaluation is WFP senior management, together with Executive Board members, the Programme – Humanitarian and Development Division, which comprises the Emergencies and Transitions Unit as policy owner and various thematic units and divisions responsible for vulnerability analyses, procurement and partnerships, the regional bureaux and country offices.
3. The evaluation covered the period from 2012 to 2022. The overall approach and timeline were adjusted in light of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. Primary and secondary data collection and analysis activities took place between September 2021 and April 2022 at the global, regional and country levels, and included:
 - retrospective construction of the theory of change underlying the policy;
 - document and literature review;
 - in-depth analysis, drawing from field missions, including a survey of crisis-affected people in Burkina Faso, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Iraq covering 2,155 individuals (more than half of whom were women and girls);
 - desk reviews "plus", combining document reviews and selected interviews and carried out at country offices in Ethiopia, Libya, the Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic;
 - key informant interviews with WFP employees based in Rome, experts from academia, members of the evaluation internal reference group and the external advisory group and employees of other United Nations entities;
 - semi-automated document analysis of the more than 11,000 country planning and reporting documents issued from 2012 to 2021; and
 - a review of comparable organizations: the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and Oxfam International.

4. *Consideration of gender and diversity* was incorporated into the evaluation. First, data was collected to uncover the differences in how women and men, and the members of other population groups relevant to the local setting, perceived the effects of WFP interventions on local conflict and peace dynamics. Then the evaluation featured a disaggregated analysis of interview and survey data by sex, nationality and employee category and by other relevant categories. Thematically, the evaluation also assessed the consistency and complementarity of the peacebuilding policy in relation to the gender policy and explored the extent to which gender considerations relevant to local conflict and peace dynamics are reflected in WFP's work and whether programmes fostering social cohesion and peace include both women and men.
5. *Ethical considerations and safeguards* were designed to ensure informed consent, confidentiality and data protection; cultural sensitivity and the fair identification of participants, including women and socially excluded population groups; and adherence to the "do no harm" principle in relation to participants, their communities and WFP's work.
6. Some of the *evaluation limitations* were linked to COVID-19-related access issues and the exclusion of an initially foreseen ninth country of study (Afghanistan) following the events of August 2021. As mitigation, online interactions increased, including interviews with employees with experience in the Asia and the Pacific region. Some evaluability limitations were also encountered, including a limited institutional memory of the early phases of policy implementation, the absence of a theory of change to guide the analysis of the intended pathway towards the policy objectives, and a lack of existing evidence on the societal effects of WFP interventions. Expanded triangulation was thus required, and greater use was made of survey data from affected people in order to uncover issues relating to their direct experience of how WFP's presence and assistance affected conflict and peace dynamics.

1.2 Context

7. Food security and conflict intersect in several ways. Conflict has long been recognized as one of the main drivers of malnourishment, hunger and starvation. Food insecurity can also be, or be used as, an important driver of conflict. In addition, large-scale humanitarian or development interventions can have both positive and negative effects on local peace and conflict dynamics.¹ Delivering assistance in a conflict-sensitive way is therefore key to ensuring that WFP does no harm and works in a people-centred way. This is particularly important as WFP has been increasing its focus on changing lives as alongside saving lives, which entails more engagement with national and local authorities, requiring careful balancing between neutrality and impartiality.

¹ See for instance: Brück, T. and d'Errico, M. 2019. [Food security and violent conflict: Introduction to the special issue](#). *World Development*, 117: 167–171; Lander, B. and Richards, J. 2019. [Addressing Hunger and Starvation in Situations of Armed Conflict – Laying the Foundations for Peace](#). *Journal of International Criminal Justice*, 17(4): 675–698; Messer, E. and Cohen, M.J. 2015. [Breaking the Links between Conflict and Hunger Redux](#). *World Medical and Health Policy*, 7(3): 211–233; WFP. 2011. [Food Insecurity and Violent Conflict: Causes, Consequences, and Addressing the Challenges](#). Occasional Paper No. 24; "Annual performance report for 2019" (WFP/EB.A/2020/4-A).

- 8. WFP has long operated in environments characterized by conflict, fragility and violence. In 2020, 33 of the countries in which WFP operated had a Global Peace Index score of over 2.3, indicating a high level of conflict or conflict risk,² and there were 12 United Nations peacekeeping missions around the world.³ Several factors have recently resulted in greater attention being directed to understanding WFP’s contribution to peace. During the evaluation period the humanitarian assistance discourse increasingly emphasized the connections among humanitarian, development and peace work – the “triple nexus”. An evolving international agenda, including various United Nations-led initiatives, represents a strong call for development and humanitarian actors to seek a more active role in addressing the root causes of conflicts.
- 9. WFP’s receipt of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2020 was an acknowledgement of the organization’s efforts to combat hunger, contribute to improved conditions for peace and prevent the use of hunger as a weapon of war. Internally, the institutional set-up and capacity for WFP’s work on conflict and peace have changed, and aspects related to the peacebuilding policy are featured in the WFP strategic plan for 2022–2025. The current WFP Executive Director has also positioned WFP prominently through active involvement in peace advocacy in conflict settings such as those in Ethiopia, South Sudan and Yemen.
- 10. Overall, these factors have led WFP to increase its focus on and contribution to peace alongside its mandate of saving lives and changing lives.

1.3 Subject

- 11. Prior to the 2013 peacebuilding policy, WFP had developed an approach centred on the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and operational independence. The peacebuilding policy introduced eight general principles for working in conflict settings and three policy directions that guide WFP’s work in transition settings and set the parameters for the organization’s engagement in peacebuilding activities (table 1).

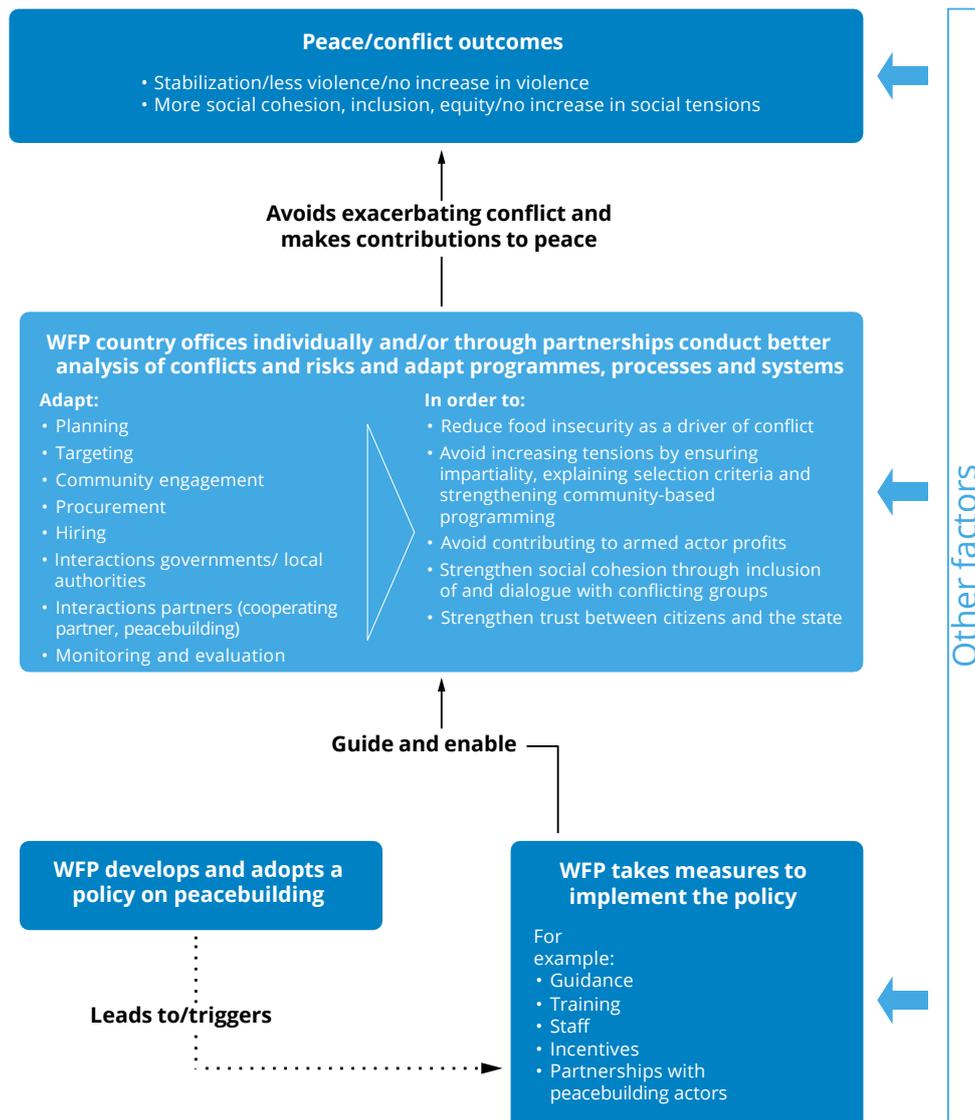
TABLE 1: OVERVIEW OF WFP’S PEACEBUILDING POLICY	
General principles	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Understand the context. 2. Maintain a hunger focus. 3. At a minimum avoid doing harm. 4. Support national priorities where possible, but follow humanitarian principles where conflict continues. 5. Support United Nations coherence. 6. Be responsive to a dynamic environment. 7. Ensure inclusivity and equity. 8. Be realistic.
Policy directions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducting conflict and risk analyses in transition settings as an inclusive process encompassing conflict and political economy analysis. • Using conflict-sensitive programming. • Working with peacebuilding partners, encompassing strong two-way communication with affected populations, partnerships with peace and reconciliation specialist organizations and cooperation with other United Nations entities.

² Institute for Economics and Peace 2020. *Global Peace Index 2020: Measuring Peace in a Complex World*.

³ United Nations Peacekeeping web portal: [Where we operate](#).

12. The policy is silent on implementation and resourcing requirements, and a policy implementation strategy was not developed. However, various steps were taken to implement the policy, focusing on:
 - *capacity building*, including training, guidance and a recently established community of practice for peace and conflict experts;
 - *support for country offices*, for instance, in conducting conflict analyses or conflict sensitivity assessments;
 - *a broadening of the evidence base* for a better understanding and improved measurement of WFP's contribution to peace, including through a partnership with the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute; and
 - *process adaptations* in the areas of staffing, partner management and supply chains.
13. An explicit theory of change is not featured in the policy. The evaluation team constructed one (figure 1), starting by narrowing the broad definitions of "peace" and "conflict" used in the policy by focusing on concrete ways for WFP to avoid exacerbating conflict or to make contributions to peace, mainly through efforts aimed at reducing food insecurity as a driver of conflict, but also, for example, by avoiding any increase in tension by ensuring impartiality and strengthening social cohesion.
14. The theory of change is intended to show that WFP can contribute to the desired outcomes if policy implementation measures enable country offices – individually or in partnership – to conduct better analysis of contexts, conflict dynamics and related risks and to use the results of that analysis to adapt programmes, processes and systems. In addition, the theory of change highlights the overlaps with those expected change pathways for other cross-cutting issues that emphasize the importance of context analysis in, for example, supporting access negotiations, enhancing the understanding of and response to protection concerns, increasing accountability to affected populations and strengthening the integration of gender perspectives.

Figure 1: Theory of change



Assumptions

- Resources and capacity for policy implementation exist
- Country offices have the capacity and flexibility to adapt programmes, processes and systems
- The policy and policy implementation measures address key factors that affect the ability of country offices to conduct analysis, establish partnerships and adapt programmes, processes and systems
- WFP interventions support and complement the peacebuilding efforts of others

Source: Evaluation team.

Evaluation findings

15. This section provides the key evaluation findings for the three evaluation questions asked.

2.1 How good is the policy?

Analysis of policy quality

16. Measured against established benchmarks, the peacebuilding policy is of relatively high quality, except for the aspects concerning policy implementation and uptake. Specifically, the evaluation noted:
- *significant evidence* of policy coherence with, and support for, strategic objectives, external coherence, reference to gap analysis, a well-defined scope and prioritized actions, and consistent use of terminology;
 - *partial evidence* of a policy vision, which is outlined but lacks a theory of change, and selective use of evidence to underpin the policy principles – the policy content is largely in line with other WFP policies but does not sufficiently take into account internal coherence or gender considerations; and
 - *policy quality shortcomings* that include the absence of adequate institutional frameworks, guidance, accountability arrangements and financial and human resources, and insufficient integration of monitoring, evaluation and reporting on policy implementation.
17. Overall, the policy remains relevant and valid in 2022. It is similar to more recent, comparable policies from other humanitarian organizations. Aspects where relatively minor changes could be made include broadening the scope for policy application, including an explicit theory of change, strengthening the links to gender, protection and other cross-cutting issues, and reflecting on recent changes in the external context.
18. The evaluation noted that more systematic policy implementation occurred only after WFP provided dedicated resources in late 2017. However, the policy remains little known throughout WFP, and implementation gaps remain. The main issues that affect policy uptake include:
- limited investment in training;
 - policy implementation guidance developed, but little known;
 - a promising, but only nascent, community of practice for conflict advisers;
 - efforts to strengthen conflict analysis being hampered by the existence of organizational silos;
 - efforts to broaden the evidence base that are too recent to allow the observation of results; and
 - only ad hoc processes for programme adaptation (in relation to human resources, cooperating partner management and supply chains).
19. Nonetheless, evaluation interview data uncovered positive aspects. Interviewees highlighted that the policy is clearly phrased and that it defines in realistic and balanced terms WFP's role and ambition when working in contexts in or at risk of conflict through the three policy directions of conducting conflict and risk analyses; using conflict-sensitive programming; and working with peacebuilding partners (see table 1). Interviewees also felt the policy's emphasis on partnerships and cooperation with other organizations remains a relevant guiding principle for WFP.

Support to policy implementation

20. The evaluation traced policy implementation measures up until April 2022. At headquarters, support for policy implementation has been unsteady, with few dedicated individuals supporting the policy agenda in the years following adoption. Starting in late 2017, WFP incrementally increased its workforce capacity in support of the peacebuilding policy. However, most positions are dependent on temporary external funding. In recent years, increased capacity facilitated the expansion of policy implementation throughout the organization and brought a notable increase in outputs from, or initiated by, the peace and conflict team in the Emergencies and Transitions Unit, among other WFP offices and units. In 2020, there was an acceleration of efforts, including the development of a COVID-19 and conflict-sensitive rapid operational conflict risk and prevention tool and the drafting of WFP minimum standards for conflict-sensitive programming.
21. The most recent restructuring of the Emergencies and Transitions Unit, in 2022, pursues a vision of policy implementation aimed at overcoming the silos that separate various cross-cutting issues and increasing synergies so as to offer more effective and holistic support to country operations. However, the restructuring has created some uncertainty and it is too early to tell whether it will succeed in its ambition.
22. At the regional and country levels, some dedicated capacity has been established and has played a key role in supporting policy implementation, including by providing analysis capacity for conducting conflict sensitivity assessments, advising on emergency preparedness, supporting applications to the Peacebuilding Fund, and providing surge capacity if needed. However, many positions are dependent on the availability of funding, which is limited.

Policy implementation steps

23. Policy implementation has included capacity building, the provision of practical operational support, a broadening of the evidence base for WFP's contribution to peace, and process adaptations within the organization. Overall, implementation has been hindered by the limited investments made in capacity building. For example, despite demand, training on conflict analysis, conflict sensitivity or nexus programming is not broadly available, although some modules are currently being finalized; guidance documents exist and address critical gaps but are little known; and the community of practice for conflict advisers is promising but only nascent.
24. The effectiveness of various efforts to strengthen conflict analysis depends on the buy-in of WFP country-level management and is limited by the existence of organizational silos and a focus on the risks to WFP and its activities. The role of the Research, Assessment and Monitoring Division in providing conflict analysis is limited. Other WFP divisions provide analyses of conflict dynamics, but focus mainly on the risk exposure of WFP.
25. The support provided to country offices for conflict analysis and conflict sensitivity has only recently increased.
26. In 2018, WFP entered into a knowledge partnership with the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute aimed at generating evidence on whether and how WFP programming can improve the prospects for peace and at understanding conflict-related risks. Investments have also been made in a process for strengthening the measurement of WFP's contribution to peace. However, most of the steps in broadening the evidence base for that contribution have been carried out too recently to allow the observation of results.

27. Promising conflict-sensitive adaptations to key processes have been developed through a bottom-up process in certain situations, but most potential adaptations have not been systematically considered. Examples of conflict-sensitive approaches to employee management have been noted, but there are challenges related to local hiring practices, especially in conflict settings.
28. Adaptations to procurement processes are also rare, and the evaluation found no systematic efforts to strengthen conflict sensitivity in WFP's interactions with its cooperating partners. However, the evaluation identified several good practice examples that can serve as a basis for the development of corporate solutions to those issues. The examples include:
 - training, workshops and structured interactions between WFP country offices and cooperating partners on conflict sensitivity and conflict resolution (Iraq and the Sudan);
 - the inclusion of conflict sensitivity in partner proposals and related discussions (Iraq and the Sudan);
 - the sharing of responsibilities for targeting and implementation among cooperating partners so as to avoid a perception of favouritism in project implementation (the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Libya); and
 - the discontinuation of partner contracts in cases of clearly expressed political allegiance (Colombia).

2.2 What are the results of the policy?

29. The results of the policy have been assessed at three levels: the practice of peace and conflict analysis, the use of analysis results to inform programme and process adaptations, and the broader effects of the policy on conflict and peace dynamics.

i) WFP conflict analysis practice at the country level

30. Despite investments, conflict analysis and conflict sensitivity at the country level are inconsistent and constrained. For example, two of the country offices covered by the evaluation have established systematic, structured and inclusive processes for the discussion of conflict dynamics and conflict sensitivity. In the other country case studies, however, most discussions of conflict sensitivity are carried out on an ad hoc basis and risk being siloed into small groups of specific employee profiles, and often take place without cooperating or peacebuilding partners and the input of communities or their representatives.
31. Some country offices have prepared conflict analyses, but these are only known to a few employees in each country and it is unclear how they influence programming. The role of partners in context analysis is also unclear, and country offices do not seem to benefit systematically from partners' contributions. Moreover, the possible role of inter-agency forums in conflict analysis has not emerged significantly.
32. WFP employees and partners at the country level are highly aware of the importance of "doing no harm" and tend to focus on the risks inherent to the allocation and targeting of assistance and the contribution to peace through reduced food insecurity. Reflections on other linkages between WFP's work and conflict or peace were largely missing. However, WFP employees working on resilience, conflict sensitivity, gender and protection shared more nuanced reflections on the practical implications for WFP's work.

33. WFP pays limited attention to how its presence and assistance may interact with conflict and peace dynamics. Three issues arose as blind spots in several countries, and were echoed in interviews with external partners:
- the influence of WFP assistance on power relations;
 - the interaction between WFP and host governments, especially when a government is a party in a conflict; and
 - the intersection of the affiliations and backgrounds of employees, contractors and cooperating partners with the conflict setting.
34. From a corporate perspective, the current WFP strategic plan for 2022–2025 emphasizes the conflict-sensitive and principled approach of WFP, refers to “taking steps to develop peace outcomes” and states that “WFP will engage in humanitarian diplomacy and peace advocacy”. The plan thus leaves room for interpretation and does not resolve the question of how to prioritize conflict sensitivity and the contribution to peace or define the level of WFP’s ambition for peace.
35. From a global perspective, the evaluation analysed all the WFP country planning and reporting documents issued from 2012 to 2022, showing that conflict awareness has increased only slightly since 2013 and important analytical blind spots remain. The reflection of conflict sensitivity in annual planning and reporting documents remains at a low level, but consideration of the “do no harm” principle has increased slightly over time.

ii) Programme adaptations

36. Most efforts to adapt programmes and processes in order to avoid contributing to tensions aim to strengthen impartiality and programme quality. The adaptations most frequently cited include *improved communication on beneficiary selection criteria, adjusted targeting, the establishment of complaints and feedback mechanisms, and enhanced community-based planning*.
37. Adaptation measures such as the *facilitation of local dialogue* and the *inclusion of conflict resolution mechanisms* in programme design are rare and applied selectively. Where implemented, most of these measures include both women and men:
- In Iraq, in the context of internal displacement, one programme included regular community meetings focusing on mutual acceptance, and a dedicated conflict resolution mechanism.
 - In Burkina Faso, WFP made school feeding conditional on the communities in conflict agreeing to protect the school feeding together.
38. In a few instances, WFP has also engaged in *high-level peace advocacy*. This has attracted controversy, but the extent of such engagement is limited in practice. WFP maintains contact with various parties to a conflict primarily for the purposes of negotiating humanitarian access. There is, however, an emerging consensus among the partners interviewed that future peace advocacy efforts should take place within the following parameters:
- To safeguard against any potential negative consequences, the activities of WFP headquarters and leadership should be clearly communicated to country offices in advance and be coordinated and in line with the strategy pursued by the WFP country office concerned.
 - WFP country office management should be involved in broader United Nations and political discussions relating to peace negotiations or processes so as to determine when or how WFP might support those processes and to ensure that WFP does not undermine other efforts by “going it alone”.

- Any form of engagement should ensure that WFP's neutrality and independence are safeguarded, for example, by focusing on only those negotiation elements that have an immediate bearing on humanitarian access.
39. Adaptation measures such as *WFP's coordination with peacebuilding actors* are rare but promising. Peacebuilding partners, and also donors, external observers and a range of internal stakeholders, underscored that WFP's potential to increase its contribution to peace lies mainly in contributing through its core mandate and sharing its expertise in addressing food insecurity and strengthening local food production by building local markets as part of broader stabilization or peacebuilding initiatives. Examples include:
- entering joint programming with organizations that can cover peace components, including with funding from the Peacebuilding Fund (the Democratic Republic of the Congo); and
 - rehabilitating, jointly with a non-partisan peace institution, infrastructure such as a market in a contested region as a way of potentially bridging community divisions (Libya).

iii) *Plausible (un-)intended effects on conflict and peace outcomes*

40. Although evidence is limited, the evaluation established several plausible effects of WFP's work on conflict and peace dynamics. At the whole-of-society level, there is little evidence of outcomes that can be traced to WFP. Nevertheless, evaluation survey data show that perceptions of changes in the level of social tension before and after WFP interventions diverge, partly by gender and between recipients and non-recipients of assistance. Among those who see a general change (positive or negative) in the level of tension, a majority believe that WFP contributed to that change, at least in part. This is significant given the many factors that affect conflict dynamics, and it confirms that conflict-affected people see a strong potential for WFP's actions to contribute to affecting conflict and peace dynamics. Generally, in all the countries included in the evaluation, a greater share of people who received assistance said that WFP contributed to decreasing tension than of those who did not receive assistance.
41. The evaluation explored several ways in which WFP can potentially contribute to reducing conflict and tensions. These are discussed in the remainder of the section and outlined in table 2.

TABLE 2: OVERVIEW OF EVIDENCE ON POSSIBLE WFP'S WAYS OF CONTRIBUTING TO DECREASING TENSIONS	
Ways of decreasing tensions	Evidence
Reduced tensions linked to improved individual well-being resulting from food assistance.	Perceived by affected people and WFP employees as being the most important WFP contribution.
Unintended effects on cooperation between members of different groups through meetings at distribution sites and the sharing of assistance.	Frequent examples given by affected people.
Intentional integration of social cohesion aspects into assistance programmes.	Several examples of anecdotal evidence of positive effects.
Programmes seeking to address other drivers of conflict besides food insecurity.	Little evidence of effects available.
Interventions that strengthen state capacities and citizen–state trust.	Evidence of effects of assistance on citizen–state trust is mixed.

Source: Evaluation team's analysis.

42. The main mechanisms through which WFP contributes to reduced conflict and tensions are by increasing food availability and bringing together conflicting groups through programming. The perception shared by conflict-affected people and WFP employees in all the countries included in the evaluation is that the direct benefits of food assistance to individual well-being and social cohesion is WFP's primary contribution to peace. Evidence of positive effects of programmes addressing the drivers of conflict other than food insecurity is rare.
43. The evaluation noted positive side-effects when WFP programmes provide a space where population groups who are in conflict can interact. The (perceived) exclusion from assistance, and quality issues in the delivery of assistance emerged as the main factors contributing to conflict and tension.
44. Evaluation findings further reinforce the evidence from studies by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute and previous WFP evaluations confirming the importance of targeting in strengthening conflict-sensitive assistance.
45. The extent to which targeting practices contribute to tensions depends to a large extent on people's perceptions of the fairness of the assistance. The perceived unfair exclusion of certain population groups from assistance is the primary driver of tensions, as confirmed by previous studies and WFP evaluations. Migrants and displaced people were the only groups defined in relation to conflict dynamics who were perceived as being unfairly included or excluded.
46. Little and mixed evidence exists on WFP's potential unintended contribution to the profits of armed actors, and thus to the war economy. WFP enjoys a strong reputation as a neutral actor, and a clear majority of the evaluation survey respondents saw WFP as neutral.
47. Evidence on strengthening citizens' trust in the state is mixed. Perceptions of involvement in WFP assistance can affect citizen–state trust, positively or negatively. In all the survey countries, when the authorities were seen to be involved in the planning or distribution of WFP assistance, the majority of respondents viewed that involvement as improving the

authorities' reputation. A significant minority, however, conveyed that it negatively affected the authorities' reputation, signalling a strong preference for the administration of humanitarian assistance by neutral bodies such as WFP and a perception of close government involvement in assistance as increasing the risk of diversion, favouritism or the use of assistance for political ends.

48. In the four survey countries, the evaluation did not find examples of WFP's choice of cash-based or in-kind assistance being made with the goal of improving social cohesion or a similar documented effect. However, secondary analysis of previous evaluation results showed that the choice of cash-based or in-kind modalities can have important positive or negative effects on local peace and conflict dynamics. Kenya is a noteworthy example where reductions in tensions in refugee camps and settlements were noted after a switch to cash-based transfers for nearly all assistance and the substitution of a cereal ration with cash. At the same time, however, the evaluation also found that cash recipients were discriminated against when redeeming their cash assistance, based on their ethnicity.⁴

2.3 What accounts for the results observed?

49. The evaluation identified and assessed factors that have plausibly contributed to or hindered the results derived from policy implementation.

i) Management buy-in and incentives

50. Management buy-in is a critical lever for anchoring both conflict sensitivity considerations and attention to peacebuilding within WFP, but it is constrained by mixed messages about the organization's position with regard to its contribution to peace. Global communications emphasize "contributing to peace" but do not provide clear guidance that defines WFP's ambition in that regard. Employees lack concrete expectations or action points for their work and see country-level management buy-in as the main enabler or hindering factor.
51. In addition, the recent focus on the contribution to peace is seen by a broad range of WFP employees and external stakeholders as having shifted attention away from efforts to avoid exacerbating tensions or conflict.
52. Evaluation interview data highlighted the hesitation of some WFP employees to raise "critical" issues that would impinge on conflict sensitivity. Implementation measures such as the inclusion of conflict sensitivity in training for senior managers are only starting to address this concern.

ii) Staffing

53. Dedicated positions at the country and regional levels are key to supporting conflict sensitivity, but the limited role of national employees limits progress in many settings. Dedicated employees play an important role in translating commitments to conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding to the programme level, enabling deeper conflict analysis by convening discussions and training on conflict sensitivity, internally or with cooperating partners, coordinating conflict sensitivity across objectives and programmatic areas, optimizing the contribution to peace of resilience projects and liaising with analytical and peacebuilding partners. However, most positions are temporary because they depend on the availability of specific funding. National employees are key to conflict awareness but are often not involved in strategic discussions.

⁴ WFP. 2018. *An evaluation of the effects and a cost benefit analysis of the GFD Cash Modality scale up (Cash Based Transfers for PRRO 200737) for refugees and host communities in Kenya, August 2015–November 2017*, p. 27.

54. WFP efforts to hire additional expert employees, strengthen training on conflict sensitivity and build a community of practice for employees involved in conflict sensitivity analysis are among the measures aimed at addressing this major factor.

iii) *Emergency focus and culture*

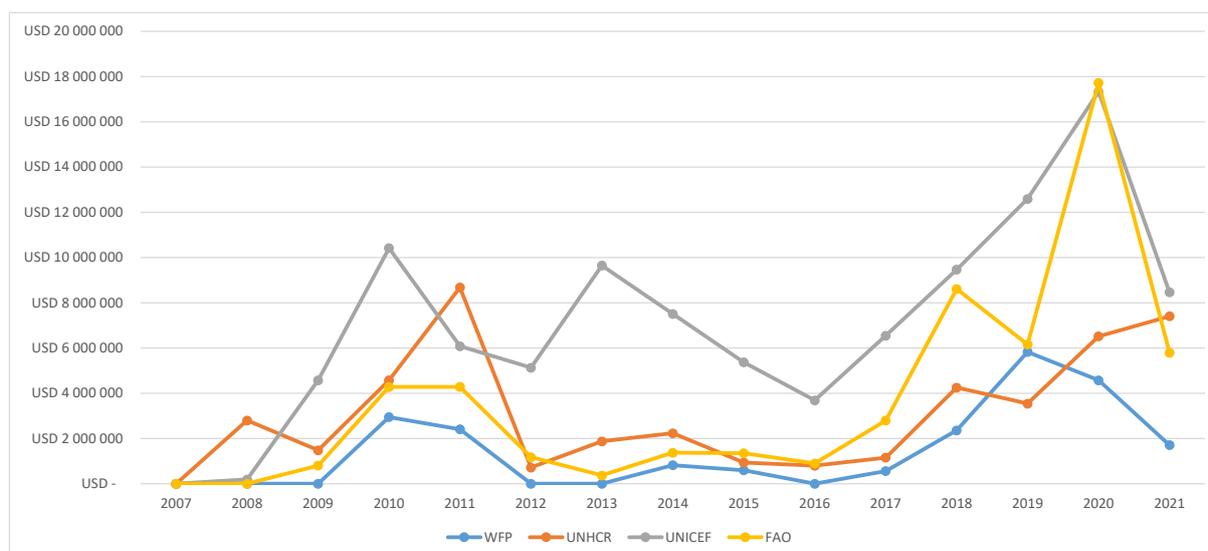
55. Strong awareness of humanitarian principles supports impartiality and neutrality, which are key to conflict sensitivity. Several WFP employees pointed to the humanitarian principles as the main element in guiding their approach to conflict sensitivity.
56. The large size of WFP's presence and emergency programmes has the potential to enable impartiality and the addressing of food insecurity as a driver of conflict, but also increases the risk of inadvertently contributing to tensions or conflict.
57. While WFP's focus on delivery contributes positively to its general reputation, its "emergency mindset" also influences three aspects of conflict sensitivity negatively.
58. First, the urgency culture and the speed at which WFP operates limit the focus on context analysis. Its emergency mindset and the size of its operations mean that WFP has a tendency to focus on its own programming modalities when implementing programmes (even though the role of WFP as a systems enabler for humanitarian response is strongly recognized).
59. Second, the evaluation found very few examples of WFP focusing on understanding and supporting existing peacebuilding efforts rather than working on its own intended contribution to peace as a standalone effort. Neither internal nor external interviewees mentioned overarching United Nations processes such as the United Nations common country analysis or the United Nations cooperation framework as relevant instruments for forging a more common approach in this respect.
60. Third, the short-term programming horizon noted in many WFP evaluations makes it difficult to find good partners for social cohesion work in some countries. Contributing to peace requires time to develop sufficient understanding of local dynamics and for relationships of trust to emerge. The shift to multi-year country strategic plans potentially supports WFP's ability to attract multi-year funding and conduct long-term planning. However, contracts with cooperating and peacebuilding partners are for short periods, some as brief as six months.

iv) *Relationships with cooperating partners*

61. The central role of cooperating partners is affected by competition and a focus on price. The critical role that cooperating partners play in conflict sensitivity is not acknowledged.
62. The competitive contracting environment makes some partners reluctant to share concerns about conflict sensitivity or negative experiences. Current implementation measures at the global level do not address this factor, but several country offices have taken important steps in addressing conflict sensitivity with their cooperating partners. Those steps include, for example, the systematic involvement of conflict advisers in reviewing proposals with partners, and the provision of training on conflict sensitivity, both of which create opportunities to discuss problems more openly.

v) *Donor and host government influence*

63. Donors play an important but at times ambivalent role in conflict sensitivity. Their funding can enable the establishment of dedicated positions that drive programming, but the earmarking of funding hinders WFP's flexibility to adapt programmes.
64. Resources from the Peacebuilding Fund have encouraged a greater focus on conflict analysis and the contribution to peace, but the overall volume received by WFP remains small compared with the amounts received by FAO and UNICEF. Figure 2 shows that after a peak in 2019, Peacebuilding Fund resources for WFP decreased in 2020 and 2021.

Figure 2: Volume of peacebuilding fund grants, 2007–2021

Source: Evaluation team, based on data from <https://mptf.undp.org/factsheet/fund/PB000>.

Abbreviation: UNHCR = Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

65. Host governments' positions regarding the involvement of external actors in issues related to conflict and peace can be another critical factor. In some countries, the stance of the government may constrain WFP's ability to contribute to peacebuilding efforts.

Conclusions

66. The evaluation concluded that the policy is well formulated and remains relevant. WFP's main contribution to peace continues to be its work on food insecurity, resilience building and livelihoods, but remaining gaps in conflict-sensitive programming require a renewed effort to use existing analytical insights into how WFP's presence and assistance may affect peace and conflict dynamics, and to adapt programmes and processes accordingly.

How good is the policy?

67. The peacebuilding policy aimed to clarify expectations regarding WFP's role in (post-)conflict and transition settings. It defined guiding principles for ensuring that WFP does not inadvertently contribute to conflict but leverages opportunities to contribute to peace, when appropriate. Nine years on, the evaluation concluded that the policy remains relevant and coherent, internally and externally, setting realistic directions in guiding the organization's approach to conflict sensitivity and contributions to peace, as reflected in the strategic plan for 2022–2025. There is therefore no need to update the policy, and limited interest in doing so. The evaluation underscored how the absence of a policy implementation and resourcing plan has hindered systematic policy uptake until recently. It is also unclear how the recent restructuring of the Emergencies and Transitions Unit will affect policy implementation in the future.

What are the results of the policy?

68. The evaluation noted that it is through reductions in food insecurity that WFP makes its main contribution to peace by minimizing the potential drivers of, or pretexts for, conflict within and between groups and avoiding inadvertently adding to tensions and conflicts.

69. That conclusion points primarily to a need to prioritize measures for strengthening the conflict sensitivity of WFP and its cooperating partners. As WFP gradually shifts to providing more long-term assistance aimed at strengthening livelihoods and resilience, it is already on a path to making its contribution to peace more sustainable.
70. Reducing food insecurity and malnutrition impartially and based on needs is the core mandate of WFP. The potential contribution to peace is not what drives decisions about food security interventions – nor should it. The evaluation concluded that WFP should not redirect its attention and resources towards efforts to reduce conflict drivers other than food insecurity, nor should WFP generate more evidence to substantiate what its contribution to peace is. Rather, there is additional potential to contribute to existing peacebuilding initiatives and partnerships to which WFP can bring its core strengths in reducing food insecurity and supporting local food production systems as part of broader coordinated efforts to prevent conflict and support peace.

What accounts for the results?

71. Since the award of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2020, more strategic attention has been directed towards WFP's potential and efforts to contribute to peace than towards addressing the foundational concern that WFP programming should avoid contributing to tensions and be conflict-sensitive. The evaluation indicated that some rebalancing is required, with greater emphasis on ensuring that existing expertise and analytical insights translate better into programme and process adaptations, with particular attention to targeting, feedback mechanisms and ensuring the quality of assistance, not only within WFP, but also in its work with cooperating partners.
72. The evaluation identified the following specific measures with a strong potential to improve existing efforts:
 - Enhance the engagement with cooperating partners in a way that is commensurate to the key roles that they play.
 - Strengthen the practice of context and, as appropriate, conflict analysis in order to address some of the analytical blind spots related to local power relations, relations with host governments that are party to a conflict and the ways in which the affiliations and backgrounds of employees, contractors and cooperating partners intersect with the conflict setting.
 - Take steps towards more robust, action-oriented processes of reflection on risks and opportunities at the country level, meeting minimum standards in various settings.
 - Reflect further on how to address the structural drivers, such as WFP's emergency culture, management buy-in and incentives and workforce issues, that can limit policy uptake and results both within WFP and with cooperating partners. A clear message from the top, incentives for country directors and the taking of steps to adapt organizational culture can be important in this regard.
73. If WFP can make progress on these priority issues, it can become a more conflict-sensitive organization because it already holds the other keys to making that shift work: first, the peacebuilding policy remains relevant and provides an adequate and sufficient framework for orienting WFP's role in (post-)conflict and transition settings; second, the country-based conflict advisers who have recently joined the organization have the necessary expertise, although sufficient capacity to effectively support the uptake of the peacebuilding policy is needed in the regional bureaux and at headquarters; and third, guidance documents, training and relevant partnership arrangements exist and need only to reach the right people within WFP and among cooperating partners.

Recommendations

Recommendation	Responsibility and deadline
<p>Recommendation 1: Strengthen the practice of actionable, country-level analysis of how the presence and programmes of WFP and its partners influence conflict dynamics.</p>	<p><u>Lead:</u> Programme – Humanitarian and Development Division (PRO) <u>Deadline:</u> December 2024</p>
<p>Sub-recommendation 1.1: WFP should set out how it plans to institutionalize regular, practically oriented and inclusive processes of reflection on the risks and opportunities related to conflict dynamics in all country operations facing conflict risks.</p> <p>As a minimum, the following elements should be considered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The reflection processes should take place annually and – as a minimum – inform the formulation and revision of second-generation country strategic plans so as to ensure that they are fully conflict-sensitive. • Country offices should prioritize the conduct of such reflection processes over the production of stand-alone, written context or conflict sensitivity analyses. Regional or global advisers should facilitate the process; cooperating partners should join the reflection. • The processes should include a discussion of relevant monitoring results (see sub-recommendation 2.2) and how to adapt WFP’s programmes and presence based on those results. • Risks relevant to WFP’s operation and programmes should be included in the risk registry. • Any regional implications of the analysis should be tabled for discussion at the periodic regional meetings of WFP country directors. The analysis should also inform WFP’s engagement in the United Nations common country analysis and discussions with development and peacebuilding partners (see sub-recommendation 3.1). 	<p><u>Lead:</u> Emergencies and Transitions Unit (PRO-P) <u>Support:</u> Country offices; regional bureaux; Programme Cycle Management Unit (PRO-M); Risk Management Division <u>Deadline:</u> February 2024</p>
<p>Sub-recommendation 1.2: Carry out workforce planning aimed at ensuring that sufficient capacity exists at the headquarters and regional levels for implementing the policy, supporting country offices and strengthening the accountability of country directors for improving conflict sensitivity and strengthening synergies with other cross-cutting functions such as protection, access, gender, disability and inclusion, and accountability to affected populations, and to other divisions and departments, including those of human resources, supply chain and emergency operations. This capacity can involve either dedicated peace and conflict capacity, at headquarters and in the regional bureaux, cooperating closely with other teams, or functional support teams integrating significant expertise on conflict and peace and reflecting that expertise in their terms of reference.</p>	<p><u>Lead:</u> PRO-P <u>Support:</u> Regional bureaux; country offices; Programme and Policy Development Department (PD); Human Resources Division (HRM); Supply Chain and Emergencies Department (SE). <u>Deadline:</u> December 2024</p>

Recommendation	Responsibility and deadline
<p>Sub-recommendation 1.3: Include guidance on the analysis processes and other conflict sensitivity issues in the revised Programme Guidance Manual and ensure that relevant guidance is available in key languages, such as Arabic, English, French and Spanish.</p> <p>This should ensure the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The available guiding questions for protection and conflict sensitivity assessments should serve as a starting point because they synthesize various elements of context analysis in relation to gender, protection, accountability to affected populations and conflict sensitivity. • The ongoing process of developing a conflict sensitivity mainstreaming strategy should include overarching and coherent guidance comprising all the context analysis requirements derived from policies, including those on gender, accountability to affected populations, protection and conflict sensitivity. • The resulting guidance should include the guiding questions mentioned above and be shared with employees as part of regular country-level reflection processes, along with online training. 	<p><u>Lead:</u> PRO-P <u>Support:</u> PD <u>Deadline:</u> February 2024</p>
<p>Recommendation 2: Create incentives for, and take steps in, adapting the organizational culture to make conflict sensitivity more central: communicate expectations clearly, integrate conflict sensitivity into standard monitoring tools and enhance incentives for country directors.</p>	<p><u>Lead:</u> PRO <u>Deadline:</u> December 2024</p>
<p>Sub-recommendation 2.1: Communicate the expectations in terms of the minimum standards for conflict sensitivity and the steps to be taken, as outlined in these recommendations, through an Executive Director's circular or similar corporate communication, rather than revising the peacebuilding policy, which remains adequate and sufficient. The communication should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clarify the mandatory steps for country offices, including, for example, the holding of an annual, inclusive process of reflection on context dynamics and conflict-sensitive issues and discussion of conflict sensitivity considerations with cooperating partners, for informing the design, review and evaluation of country strategic plans; and • include a general message about the level of priority given to conflict-sensitive programming, clarifying that conflict sensitivity and "doing no harm" can be more important than the speed and quantity of delivery. 	<p><u>Lead:</u> PRO-P <u>Support:</u> PD; PRO-M; regional bureaux. <u>Deadline:</u> December 2023</p>
<p>Sub-recommendation 2.2: Include in standard monitoring mechanisms basic indicators that track the interventions of WFP and cooperating partners and the effects of those interventions on the conflict setting. Building on existing good practice, the indicators should, at a minimum, include questions that explore whether affected people perceive increases or decreases in tensions; whether they think that current targeting practices create tensions and what other features of the assistance do; and who they perceive as being unfairly included in or excluded from assistance. Consideration of these questions should be mandatory for all country offices. Country offices that cannot use the questions because of protection or security concerns should explain why and propose alternative ways of gaining relevant insights.</p>	<p><u>Lead:</u> PRO-P <u>Support:</u> Research, Assessment and Monitoring Division; relevant policy/ programme areas within PD <u>Deadline:</u> December 2024</p>

Recommendation	Responsibility and deadline
<p>Sub-recommendation 2.3: Ensure that country directors make conflict sensitivity a priority by including it as a standard core competency used in their appraisals and in promotion and rotation decisions.</p> <p>Necessary steps should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensuring that conflict sensitivity is reflected in country director job profiles; • establishing that the performance of country directors in conflict sensitivity – including in ensuring that the reflection process outlined in recommendation 1 takes place – becomes a standard indicator in the appraisal supporting the annual Executive Director’s assurance statement; • giving central consideration to prior experience and performance in conflict sensitivity, particularly for placements in contexts with high levels or high risk of conflict; • including a module on conflict sensitivity in the induction programme for country directors and deputy country directors and in the training programme for heads of field offices; and • establishing, as a requirement for all country directors, an in-depth briefing from reputable institutions and academics with specialized knowledge of conflict analysis and local contexts prior to the directors’ assumption of their new positions. 	<p><u>Lead:</u> HRM</p> <p><u>Support:</u> PRO; PRO-P; Performance Strengthening Branch; Emergency Operations Division.</p> <p><u>Deadline:</u> February 2024</p>
<p>Recommendation 3: Strengthen the mainstreaming of conflict sensitivity in WFP programmes and processes with partners and contractors. Increase the focus on conflict sensitivity in work with cooperating partners, and check the backgrounds of employees, contractors and cooperating partners.</p>	<p><u>Lead:</u> PRO-P</p> <p><u>Deadline:</u> February 2024</p>
<p>Sub-recommendation 3.1: WFP should set out how it plans to enhance the conflict sensitivity of cooperating partners.</p> <p>Steps should include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage the open sharing of conflict-related issues through training, during the formulation of partnership agreements and in reports. • Amend partnership applications, field-level agreements and reporting templates to incorporate the request that cooperating partners include reflections on context dynamics and conflict sensitivity and to ensure sufficient resources to enable partners to deliver conflict-sensitive programmes. • Train and support country-level programme staff to ensure that they discuss context dynamics and conflict sensitivity when providing feedback to cooperating partners. • Request that processes for strengthening conflict sensitivity at the global level are included on the agenda of the annual partnership meeting until the mainstreaming of conflict sensitivity is complete. 	<p><u>Lead:</u> PRO-P</p> <p><u>Support:</u> Regional bureaux; country offices; NGO Partnerships Unit</p> <p><u>Deadline:</u> December 2023</p>

Recommendation	Responsibility and deadline
<p>Sub-recommendation 3.2: WFP should set out the steps it plans to take to ensure a thorough review of the political and identity-based issues that it needs to explore in order to understand how the backgrounds of employees, contractors and cooperating partners intersect with the conflict setting and may affect conflict dynamics and stakeholders' perceptions.</p> <p>The steps should include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review due diligence and selection processes to ensure that such affiliations are explored during the hiring, partnering and contracting of employees, contractors and cooperating partners. • Include a mechanism to ensure that any concerns regarding the political affiliations of contractors or employees are passed up to the country director or the appropriate management level above that. • Use proactive outreach to increase the pool of applicants from underrepresented groups. 	<p><u>Lead:</u> HRM <u>Support:</u> PRO-P, NGO Partnerships Unit, SE <u>Deadline:</u> February 2024</p>
<p>Recommendation 4: Alleviating food insecurity is and should remain the most important WFP contribution to peace. WFP should focus its contribution to peace on supporting existing peacebuilding processes by implementing activities jointly with other actors, drawing on its core mandate strengths and focusing on humanitarian access to alleviate food insecurity.</p>	<p><u>Lead:</u> PD; SE <u>Deadline:</u> February 2024</p>
<p>Sub-recommendation 4.1: WFP should confirm that it will design all of its specific peace-promoting activities jointly with other actors and not on its own. In doing so, WFP should focus on its core mandate strengths such as, for example, food security and livelihoods or resilience building interventions targeting areas at high risk of conflict or with ongoing peace agreements and reintegration efforts, local purchase and market-building activities, country capacity strengthening or access negotiations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WFP should engage with development and peacebuilding partners to identify how it can best contribute to efforts to address conflict drivers without undermining its own neutrality, impartiality and independence. • Such engagement should take place regularly – at a minimum when WFP develops, revises or evaluates a country strategic plan, or when there are important changes in the situation, or in light of the forthcoming conflict sensitivity strategy. • Headquarters and regional bureaux should provide guidance and support for country offices in this effort, enhancing the relevant frameworks of accountability and responsibilities (including of country directors) for holding discussions with other actors and further strengthening partnerships with actors relevant to peacebuilding at the global and regional levels. 	<p><u>Lead:</u> PRO-P <u>Support:</u> Country offices; regional bureaux; Partnerships and Advocacy Department <u>Deadline:</u> February 2024</p>
<p>Sub-recommendation 4.2: WFP should set out how it plans to leverage its global weight in humanitarian diplomacy to increase humanitarian access, in close coordination with other humanitarian, development and United Nations actors; for example, in system-wide negotiations with government actors or peace processes, WFP should ensure that country offices maintain the strategic lead in efforts involving various levels of the organization in order to safeguard against potential negative consequences.</p>	<p><u>Lead:</u> Deputy Executive Director, SE <u>Support:</u> SE; PRO-P; regional bureaux; country directors <u>Deadline:</u> February 2024</p>

Acronyms

COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
HRM	Human Resources Division
PD	Programme and Policy Development Department
PRO	Programme – Humanitarian and Development Division
PRO-M	Programme Cycle Management Unit
PRO-P	Emergencies and Transitions Unit
SE	Supply Chain and Emergencies Department
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund