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Summary report on the evaluation of the country strategic plan for Mauritania (2019–2023)

Executive summary

The evaluation of the country strategic plan for Mauritania for 2019–2023 was conducted between April 2021 and April 2022. Taking a utilization-focused, consultative, approach, the evaluation serves the dual purpose of accountability and learning and informs the preparation of the next country strategic plan for Mauritania. The evaluation assessed WFP's strategic positioning, contribution to outcomes and efficiency in implementing the plan and the factors explaining WFP's performance.

The country strategic plan for 2019–2023 marked a change from operations and programme-based planning at the regional and country levels to multi-year, country-level strategic planning with a strong, renewed focus on adaptive social protection. The main thrust is three-fold: the provision of food assistance to refugees at the Mbera refugee camp; the implementation of an adaptive social protection system; and the deployment of an integrated resilience package.

The evaluation found the country strategic plan to be aligned with the relevant national policies and with the strategic goal of achieving zero hunger by addressing both the immediate and chronic needs of the most vulnerable populations. WFP reached a cumulative total of more than 1.2 million beneficiaries over the period 2018–2021, with the need for food assistance having peaked during the Sahel region drought in 2018 and the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic in 2020.

WFP's provision of food assistance in refugee camps was found to have helped to stabilize the food security and nutrition indicators, although actual food consumption was sometimes affected by food price spikes and ration cuts due to funding shortfalls. Overall, the agroecological and socioeconomic contexts were not conducive to progress in developing durable solutions for refugees. WFP successfully expanded its United Nations Humanitarian Air Service operations over

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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the period concerned, ensuring that the humanitarian community had rapid access to affected populations, including in the Malian refugee hosting area.

WFP's resilience building approach focused on livelihood strengthening combined with nutrition and school feeding interventions, but synergies between the various activities, and ownership of the approach at the national level could be further strengthened. While food assistance for assets is likely to have helped to increase production, reduce migration and strengthen social cohesion, the upscaling of the activity was hindered by the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic; and while the school feeding programme promoted a return to school after the easing of coronavirus disease 2019-related restrictions, and moderate acute malnutrition treatment activities proved very effective, with recovery rates of close to 100 percent, beneficiary numbers in both those areas fluctuated strongly in line with the availability of funding.

WFP showed strong leadership in capacity strengthening, with institutional support for the Government focusing mainly on adaptive social protection. Capacity building support provided to the *Commissariat à la Sécurité Alimentaire* (food security commission) and the *Observatoire de la Sécurité Alimentaire* (food security monitoring agency) has assisted in the creation of a national shock prevention and response system and the setting up of sentinel sites.

While consideration of the cross-cutting issues of gender, accountability, protection and environment has improved over the duration of the country strategic plan, there is still room for improvement in those areas.

Through its implementation of the plan, WFP has demonstrated a strong capacity for adaptation, flexibility and responsiveness in the face of changing circumstances, including in the use of the national social register during the coronavirus disease 2019 crisis. Progress was observed in the use of the humanitarian–development–peace nexus approach, particularly in providing assistance to refugees.

While WFP managed to increase its funding levels and mobilize substantial additional funds for emergency responses over the course of the country strategic plan period, including in the context of the coronavirus disease 2019, it continued to face difficulties in securing flexible, multi-year funding.

The evaluation concluded that while WFP remained a key humanitarian actor in the country, it also managed to position itself in the fields of adaptive social protection and resilience building. Opportunities exist for improving the coordination and alignment of WFP's policy directions with government counterparts, reviewing the approach to malnutrition treatment in coordination with partners, mobilizing more development-oriented resources and enhancing the monitoring of activities.

The evaluation made two strategic recommendations covering social protection, resilience building and cross-cutting issues. It also made three operational recommendations covering refugee assistance, the integrated resilience package, school feeding and malnutrition treatment.

Draft decision*

The Board takes note of the summary report on the evaluation of the country strategic plan for Mauritania (2019–2023) (WFP/EB.1/2023/5-D/4) and the management response (WFP/EB.1/2023/5-D/4/Add.1) and encourages further action on the recommendations set out in the report, taking into account the considerations raised by the Board during its discussion.

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

Introduction








Evaluation features

1. The evaluation of the country strategic plan (CSP) for Mauritania for the period 2019–2023 was conducted between April 2021 and April 2022 with a view to providing evidence for accountability and learning to inform the development of the next CSP.
2. The evaluation covered the implementation of the CSP from 2019 to mid-2021 as well as the preceding transitional interim CSP implemented in 2018. It assessed WFP's strategic positioning, its effectiveness in contributing to the strategic outcomes, its efficiency in implementing the CSP and the factors explaining its performance.
3. An independent external team conducted the evaluation using a theory-based, mixed-methods approach that drew on monitoring data, document reviews, direct field observations, interviews of key informants and focus group discussions with over 700 stakeholders. Data from both primary and secondary sources were carefully triangulated to ensure the validity of findings.
4. Gender, protection, accountability to affected populations and environment-related considerations were fully integrated into the evaluation and ethical standards were applied to protect the dignity of the people involved and the confidentiality of the information shared. The findings, conclusions and recommendations were discussed with internal and external stakeholders during two online workshops in March 2022.
5. Despite the restrictions imposed during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, the evaluation team did not encounter any major constraints that compromised the overall credibility of the evaluation, although they did encounter some limitations related to staff turnover, access to the most remote sites and the closure of schools at the time of data collection.
6. The main stakeholders and users of the evaluation include the WFP country office, the Regional Bureau for Western Africa in Dakar, technical divisions at headquarters, WFP's Office of Evaluation, the beneficiaries of interventions, the Government of Mauritania, non-governmental organizations, donor agencies and partner United Nations entities operating in Mauritania.

Context

7. Mauritania is a Sahel-Saharan country with a population of 4.6 million people concentrated in the south. It has experienced a consistent decline in poverty since 2000 and was ranked 157th of 189 countries on the human development index in 2020. The low population density and size of the territory pose major challenges in terms of access to social services for the population. In terms of education, the primary school net enrolment rate in 2019 was 78 percent for girls and 74 percent for boys.
8. There is a structural trend of food and nutrition insecurity in the country, with the global hunger index ranking it 85th of 107 countries in 2020. Agricultural production is deficient and, in the face of land degradation, falling agricultural yields and successive droughts, covers only about 30 percent of the country's annual food needs. The prevalence of global acute and chronic malnutrition is estimated at 11.6 percent and 23.3 percent respectively and the causes of malnutrition, which are multidimensional in nature, include food insecurity, inadequate feeding practices and a lack of access to drinking water.
9. Despite national efforts to promote the status of women, most of the country's economic and social indicators are marked by gender disparities, with the gender inequality index ranking Mauritania 151st of 162 countries in 2020.

10. Increasing armed conflict, deteriorating security, widespread poverty and the effects of climate change are major drivers of migration in the Sahel, and Mauritania, which has been spared the insecurity, hosts more than 67,000 refugees fleeing the conflict in neighbouring Mali.
11. Mauritania's national strategy for accelerated growth and shared prosperity for 2016–2030, which aims to eradicate severe food insecurity and reduce food insecurity and malnutrition, promotes the scaling up of social protection programmes, such as shock-responsive social safety nets, to achieve Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2 (zero hunger). Meanwhile, its United Nations sustainable development partnership framework (CPDD) for the period 2018–2022 has provided a strategic and legal framework for the interventions of United Nations entities in the country.

TABLE 1: SOCIOECONOMIC INDICATORS			
	Indicator	Value	Year
	Total population (million) (1)	4.6	2020
	Human development index (rank) (2)	157 of 189	2020
	Poverty headcount ratio at national poverty lines (% of population) (1)	31	2014
	Global hunger index (score and rank) (3)	24 85 of 107	2020
	Prevalence of moderate and severe stunting (% of under 5s) (4)	23.3	2019
	Prevalence of global acute malnutrition (% of under 5s) (4)	11.6	2019
	Gender inequality index (rank) (2)	151 of 162	2020

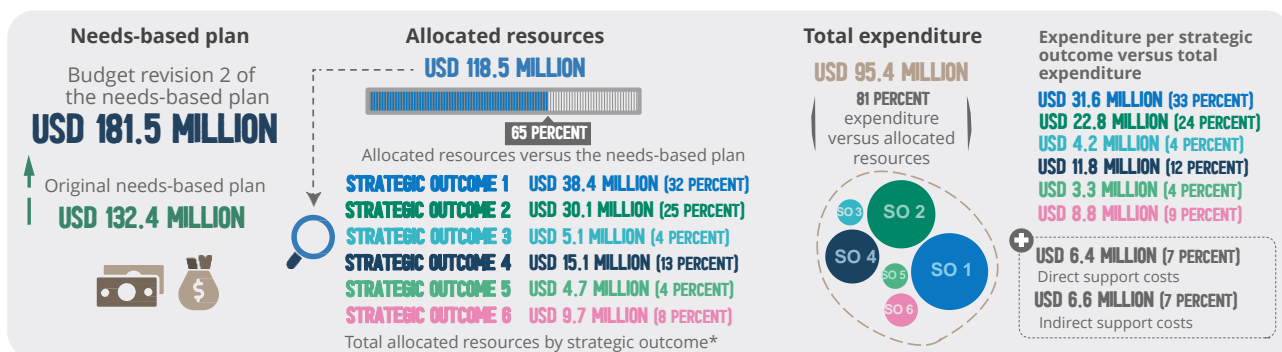
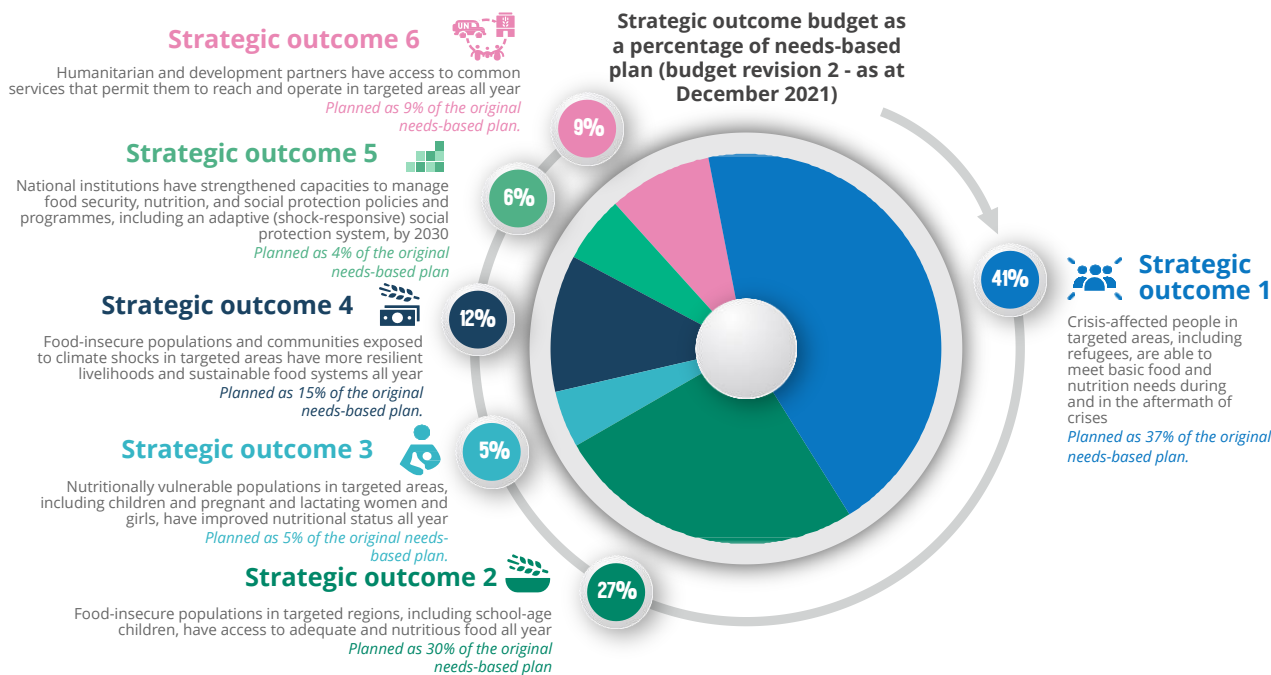
Sources: (1) World Bank. 2020. [Data: Mauritania](#); (2) United Nations Development Programme. 2020. [Human Development Report 2020. The next frontier: Human development and the Anthropocene](#); (3) Global Hunger Index. 2020; (4) Standardized Monitoring and Assessment of Relief and Transitions, 2018 national nutrition survey.

WFP country strategic plan

12. Approved by the WFP Executive Board in November 2018, the CSP marked a change from operations and programme-based planning at the regional and country levels to multi-year, country-level strategic planning, which allowed for longer-term holistic planning across all activities, geographical areas and sectors of intervention with a view to facilitating integration among the various sectors, focus areas and objectives. Its initial duration of four years (2019–2022) was extended in mid-2021 by two months (until February 2023) to ensure alignment with the United Nations sustainable development cooperation framework (UNSDCF) planning process. The CSP included six strategic outcomes (figure 1) covering nine activities.

13. The CSP has undergone three revisions, with the needs-based plan increasing from USD 132.4 million for 444,456 planned beneficiaries to USD 181.5 million for 484,150 planned beneficiaries under the second budget revision in December 2021.¹ As of September 2021, the CSP's overall funding level was 61.7 percent. Germany was the largest bilateral donor, followed by the United States of America, the European Commission, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, France and Japan.

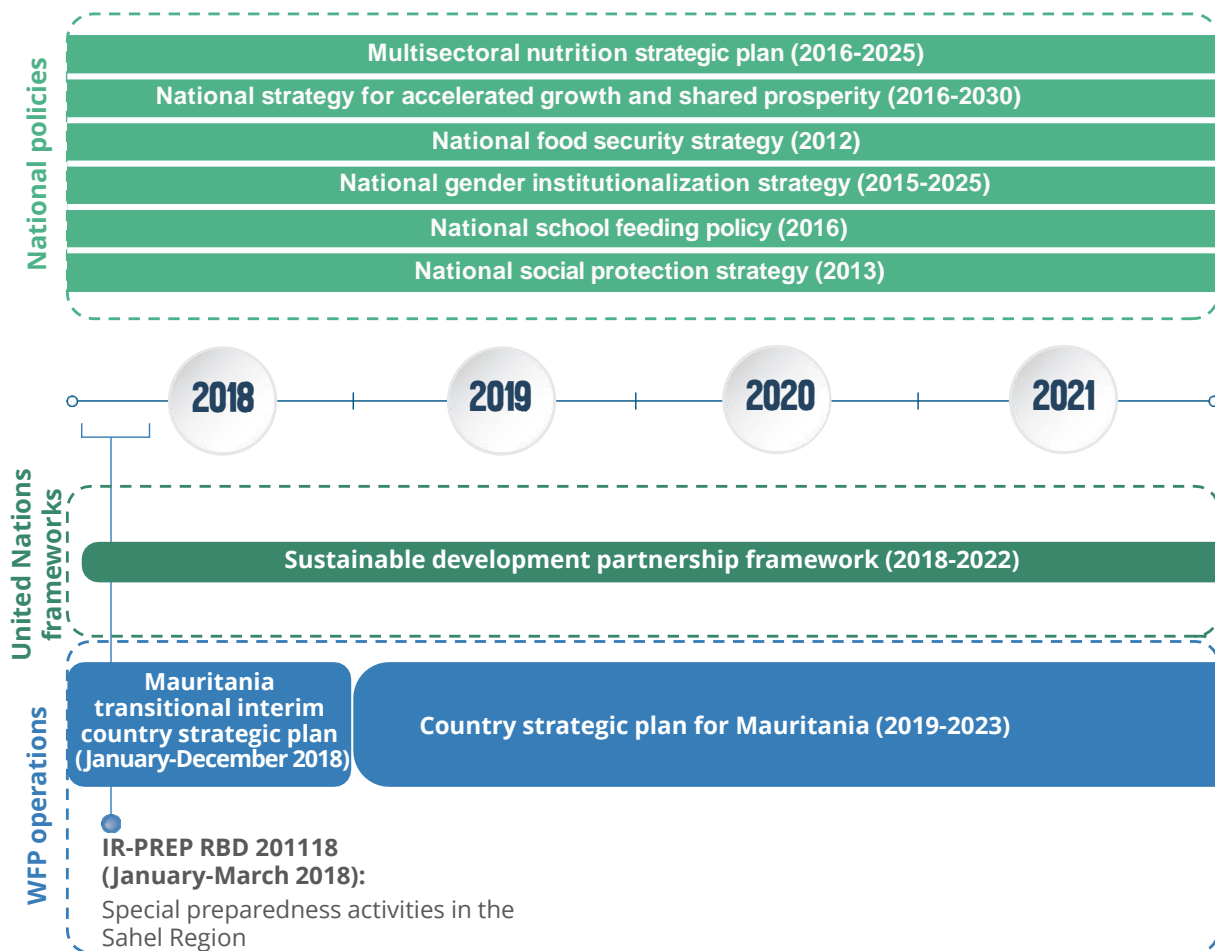
Figure 1: Mauritania country strategic plan (2019–2023) strategic outcomes, budget, funding and expenditures, December 2021



* The percentages of allocated resources by strategic outcome do not add up to USD 118.5 million as resources were also allocated to non-activity specific purposes (USD 0.2 million), as well as to direct support costs (USD 8.6 million) and indirect support costs (USD 6.6 million).

Sources: Country portfolio budget, CSP budget revision 2, integrated road map analytics and annual country reports.

¹ Under the third revision, approved in July 2022, the needs-based plan increased to USD 211.4 million for the same number of planned beneficiaries (484,150). That revision was beyond the scope of this evaluation.

Figure 2: Country context and WFP operational overview of Mauritania, 2018–2021

Source: Elaborated by the Office of Evaluation (based on the full CSP evaluation report).

Abbreviations: IR-PREP = Immediate Response Account for Preparedness; RBD = Regional Bureau for Western Africa.

Evaluation findings

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

Relevance to national priorities

14. The multi-year, strategic nature of the CSP allowed WFP to contribute directly to the implementation of national strategies and the achievement of their strategic objectives. National strategies often cover a longer period and are broader in scope, not regularly updated and lacking in terms of prioritization, which made the full integration of WFP actions into national approaches more challenging. Stronger alignment is observed with the national multisectoral nutrition strategic plan (2016–2025).

Alignment with WFP corporate frameworks and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

15. The CSP aimed to address the challenges identified by the zero hunger strategic review (2018) and its strategic outcomes were in line with the formulation and targets of SDG 2 (zero hunger) and SDG 17 (partnerships). It was also aligned with the WFP corporate results framework for 2017–2021, although the latter did not allow for the monitoring of synergies between the activities of the integrated resilience package or the implementation of sustainable solutions for refugees. The CSP had not yet been able to fully integrate the most recent policy advances in the areas of gender, diversity, accountability and protection.

Relevance to the needs of the most vulnerable people

16. Geared to meeting immediate needs and reducing vulnerability to food and nutrition insecurity, the CSP was found to have been relevant to the needs of the most vulnerable people in Mauritania. The integration of climate issues into the design of interventions was deemed of particular relevance. Concomitant activities to support the adaptive social protection system and the strengthening of community resilience were relevant and mutually complementary. Refugees' needs were duly considered and the assistance provided was adapted to their levels of vulnerability. In the Mbera refugee camp, specific measures were put in place to ensure that people with reduced mobility or special needs were served.
17. While the geographical targeting for food assistance took into consideration the prevalence of moderate acute malnutrition (MAM), challenges were observed in aligning the timing of MAM prevention and treatment interventions with geographical and seasonal variations in the incidence of MAM. To allow for integration with resilience building activities, the school feeding activity prioritized the most food-insecure areas rather than those with the lowest enrolment rates. The food assistance for assets (FFA) activity focused on the convergence zones defined in the CPDD and the integrated context analysis and was based on the trends in regard to vulnerability.² Activities were adapted to the pastoralist context, although some social dynamics, such as transhumance and intergroup tensions, were not fully taken into consideration. Stakeholders also reported challenges with respect to the timing of the implementation of FFA activities not carried out in the usual post-harvest period.

WFP's strategic positioning in an evolving national context

18. Overall, WFP was able to adapt to changing circumstances and crises. Positive examples included its support to the adaptive social protection system, which was adjusted to national capacities and long-term technical needs, and the COVID-19 crisis response, with the integration of the lean season response into the national response plan.
19. With WFP's support, significant progress was made in establishing a national early warning, preparedness and response planning mechanism and in the elaboration of a national crisis response fund.
20. While WFP's institutional anchoring and support to the Government placed it in a key position, capacity strengthening had yet to be perceived as a comparative advantage for the organization. In terms of resilience building, a lack of institutional anchoring similarly hindered the emergence of a more prominent support role for WFP. Further, WFP faced challenges in intervening in cases of a rapid-onset crisis and in adapting intervention timeframes to the time-bound plans needed during the lean season.

²In Mauritania, the convergence zones are the *wilayas* (regions) where the Government and United Nations entities are expected to deliver a coordinated, multisectoral package of assistance to build the resilience of local communities as part of the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel.

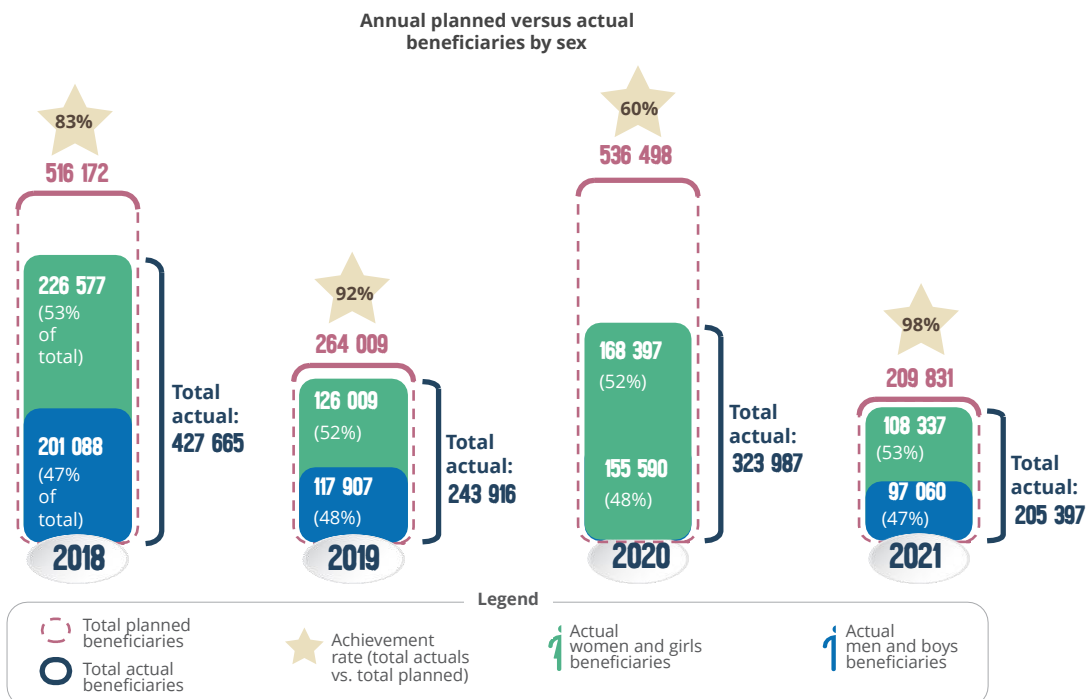
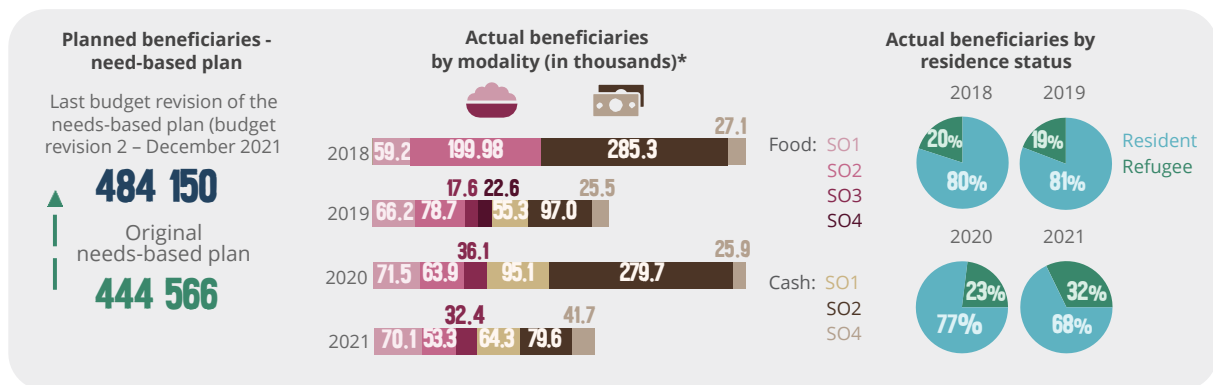
Coherence with United Nations actors and other partners

21. The CSP was aligned with the CPDD to which WFP contributed during its design and implementation. According to several stakeholders, however, the CPDD had prioritized few lines of approach, which limited its capacity to guide WFP's strategy and operations.
22. WFP's leadership and technical expertise in food crisis management, which are widely recognized by partners in Mauritania, have been effective in enabling it to provide institutional support to the adaptive social protection system. While its operational and logistical capacity and its know-how in terms of coordination are broadly recognized by partners as essential comparative advantages for WFP, this is not yet the case with respect to its efforts in providing institutional capacity strengthening support in the field of social protection.
23. The CSP has enabled the development of a more strategic dialogue with donors, focusing on WFP's orientations. Strategic partnerships in the areas of social protection and resilience building are in place with the World Bank and various United Nations entities, such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the International Organization for Migration, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). In contrast, partnerships are less well developed in the key areas of nutrition, gender, protection and environment. At the operational level, WFP has relied mainly on consortia of national non-governmental organization partners.

What are the extent and quality of WFP's contribution to country strategic plan strategic outcomes in Mauritania?***Beneficiary analysis***

24. While the target number of planned beneficiaries was met in 2019 thanks to the use of internal funding mechanisms, low levels of funding resulted in a smaller than expected caseload in 2020. The figures for refugee beneficiaries as a percentage of the total number of beneficiaries remained relatively stable – at around 20 percent – until 2020 and increased to 32 percent in 2021. Children of ages 5 to 11 years represented nearly one-third of the total. Overall, peaks in the total number assisted were observed in the crisis years of 2018 and 2020, during the Sahel region drought and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 3: Actual versus planned beneficiaries by sex, 2018–2021



* The numbers under this section might contain overlaps as some beneficiaries might receive both food and cash-based transfers and under more than one strategic outcome.

Sources: Mauritania annual country reports for the period 2018–2021 and WFP country office tool for managing effectively reports CM-R001b and CM-R020.

Contribution to strategic outcomes

- The following paragraphs present an overview of the main achievements under each strategic outcome.
- Strategic outcome 1: Crisis-affected people are able to meet their basic food and nutrition needs (refugee assistance, COVID-19 response).** During the CSP period, the refugee population in the Mbera camp continued to be highly dependent on WFP food assistance, which contributed to a general equalization of food security and nutrition indicators among beneficiary and non-beneficiary households. The agroecological and socioeconomic conditions were not conducive to progress in the development of durable solutions for refugees. A slight deterioration in food consumption was observed as food prices peaked and rations were adjusted following shortfalls in funding. While the prevention and treatment of MAM led to improved dietary diversity and high recovery rates, school feeding in the refugee camp does not seem to have been a sufficient incentive for improving school attendance rates.

27. The COVID-19 crisis cash-based-transfer response introduced in July 2020 was particularly underfunded and was not associated with any request for support from the Government. Redistribution among households served to sustain pre-existing solidarity mechanisms.
28. **Strategic outcome 2: Food-insecure people have access to an adequate and nutritious diet (lean season support, school feeding).** The food transfer modality of lean season support has been gradually replaced by cash-based transfers with a view to optimizing cost-efficiency and responding to the assisted households' preferences, although beneficiaries have not always been well informed about the size and frequency of the transfers. In 2019, the distribution of supplementary food to prevent MAM was neither regular, owing to funding and supply issues, nor systematically coupled with general food distribution programmes. While child dietary diversity remained at the lower limit of the target range, improvements were observed over the duration of the CSP in terms of the dietary diversity of women and girls and reduced recourse to coping strategies.
29. Regarding school feeding, attendance and retention rates have deteriorated significantly between 2019 and 2020, owing mainly to pandemic-related school closures. The extent to which school feeding affected school enrolment rates has been difficult to measure owing, in particular, to the major impacts of the COVID-19 crisis and issues to do with the quality of the monitoring system. The evaluation observed that school feeding alone, without any improvement in the quality of education provision (including infrastructure, supplies and staff), was unlikely to have a significant effect on attendance and retention rates.
30. **Strategic outcome 3: The nutritional status of vulnerable groups has improved (MAM treatment).** The performance indicators for MAM treatment for malnourished children age 6–59 months and for pregnant and lactating women were very high over the entire CSP period, with recovery rates of close to 100 percent. Performance rates were slightly poorer in Nouakchott, highlighting a number of constraints specific to urban areas, such as in mobilizing carers and beneficiaries. Fewer pregnant and lactating women and girls were treated in 2019 because of a lack of funding and the focus was on children faced with a higher immediate risk of mortality. In 2020, on the other hand, the number of beneficiaries increased for both those groups, reflecting an increase in the number of centres supported.
31. **Strategic outcome 4: Vulnerable communities exposed to climate shocks have more resilient livelihoods and more sustainable food systems (FFA).** The FFA activity was implemented in 74 sites across three regions, with the significant scale-up that started in late 2018 hampered in 2020 by COVID-19-related restrictions on movement. According to the beneficiaries, the main effects of FFA included increased production, reduced migration, stronger social cohesion and reduced tensions, the recharging of groundwater resources and the learning of new techniques in the areas of water conservation and soil conservation, protection and restoration. Cash-based transfers were used mainly for basic needs (food, health and schooling), housing-related construction (sheds and latrines) and the purchase of animals (goats). The institutional anchoring of resilience building interventions remained ineffective at the state level, hampering the coordination and harmonization of approaches among the actors involved.
32. **Strategic outcome 5: The capacity of national institutions to manage food security and social protection policies and programmes is strengthened (institutional capacity strengthening).** Most of the institutional support for the Government was devoted to the adaptive social protection system, enabling WFP to show strong leadership in that innovative area of activity. Capacity strengthening support has been provided to the national food security commission and the food security monitoring agency for, inter alia, the creation of a national shock prevention and response system and the setting up of sentinel sites. Awareness-raising sessions were organized to build a sense of ownership within local authorities and civil society, although a high turnover of public servants has been a major

challenge for that activity. Opportunities also exist to improve information sharing and develop feedback loops among the actors involved.

33. **Strategic outcome 6: Humanitarian and development actors have enhanced access to targeted areas (United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) and other common services).** UNHAS services have been key to enabling the humanitarian community to rapidly reach affected people and communities, including in the area hosting Malian refugees. Significant improvements in UNHAS services were observed from 2018 in terms of transport capacity and the number of destinations served, and levels of user satisfaction have been high. UNHAS also ensured the recovery of its own running costs. In 2020, a new logistics service was made available to the Government for the reception, transport and storage of parcels during the COVID-19 crisis, along with training and coaching activities.

Gender

34. While WFP structured its interventions in such a way as to promote gender equality, the transition from a gender mainstreaming to a gender-transformative approach has yet to come into effect. WFP encouraged the equal participation of women and men in locally organized community committees for the targeting and management of activities, for example, and a gender balance was achieved in 2019 and 2020. Women's participation in those committees was sometimes symbolic, however, and the opportunity cost for women engaging in them was not monitored; activities based on community mobilization rely on women devoting half of their time to them, meaning that the opportunity cost is potentially significant for the women.

Accountability to affected populations, protection and environment-related considerations

35. WFP's approach shifted from one-way to two-way communications, with the introduction of a complaints system and a toll-free helpline number. Owing to some persistent communication gaps, the target population groups' awareness of WFP activities, including on targeting criteria, was sometimes limited. The protection dimension appeared to be adequately integrated into FFA activities, which also included environmental and social risk analysis carried out before the creation of new assets. Civil-military collaboration, on the other hand, does not seem to have been considered in a structured and systematic way and did not benefit from dedicated resources. The use of security escorts in the Hodh El Chargui region, for example, had an impact on the confidentiality required for certain activities and on how WFP was perceived by the population. In addition, while disability was included as a vulnerability criterion in the targeting exercises, the mainstreaming of that approach was considered beyond the scope of WFP's activities. The extent to which environmental considerations have been integrated into the internal functioning of WFP and its cooperating partners has remained limited.

Sustainability and the triple nexus approach

36. The CSP was marked by a strong focus on sustainable engagement with state actors and on institutional capacity strengthening. Exit strategies were developed for most of WFP's activities since the CSP design phase, but the lack of means and capacity at the decentralized level compromised their operationalization. Local management committees for each activity in the integrated resilience package received little support from non-governmental partners and remained fragile.
37. Overall, the sustainability of FFA activities remained uncertain, as the maintenance of more complex community assets required technical skills and financial resources that were not always available at the community level. On the other hand, the institutionalization of the school feeding programme and the support for improving smallholder farmers' access to markets, with a view to boosting local purchasing linked to other activities, are likely to promote sustainability.

38. The search for durable solutions for refugees, which was one of the priorities identified by the CSP, included adapting WFP's assistance to household vulnerabilities and supporting the integration of refugees into the social register and national social safety nets. The approach also foresaw the implementation of the integrated resilience package in the Bassikounou reception area to strengthen peaceful coexistence between host communities and refugee populations, although that component has not been successful owing to a lack of buy-in at the community level.
39. The adoption of a multi-year strategic plan facilitated the implementation of a humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach focused on three dimensions: refugee assistance and a transition to national social safety nets and peaceful coexistence with host communities; a transition from seasonal food assistance to adaptive social protection; and an integrated resilience approach. The support provided to the adaptive social protection system has contributed to the nexus approach by promoting greater integration between emergency response and the prevention and addressing of chronic food insecurity. However, the predominance of humanitarian-specific funding linked to emergency response plans has represented a major challenge to the implementation of the nexus approach, with nutrition activities having received support only from humanitarian programmes, for example.

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

Timeliness

40. Activities were generally implemented according to schedule and WFP demonstrated its ability to anticipate changing circumstances. The switch to cash-based transfers reduced the risk of delays in the delivery of assistance. MAM prevention and treatment activities suffered most from inadequate funding cycles and pipeline breaks. On the sites of WFP's integrated resilience package, the layering of activities remained underexplored as a possible efficiency factor.

Coverage and targeting

41. WFP's coordination with its partners in response plans has helped improve the allocation of limited resources to cover needs. Some compromises in terms of geographical prioritization and targeting needed to be made between humanitarian actors and the Government in the emergency response, and the logic underlying the geographic concentration of interventions in integrated resilience package sites was neither well understood nor accepted by government actors, particularly in regard to school feeding.
42. The quality of targeting has improved throughout the CSP period thanks to the efforts of the food security cluster. While inclusion errors appeared limited, exclusion errors – which are the more serious – remained significant and are in need of further scrutiny. Challenges persist in terms of beneficiaries' acceptance of the targeting of lean season and refugee support.

Cost-efficiency and cost-effectiveness

43. Budget execution levels were satisfactory and support costs remained stable over time. While the average cost per beneficiary also remained relatively stable, it was generally higher than planned owing to increases in commodity prices and shipping costs.
44. Reductions in distribution costs contributed to the efficiency of activities, particularly of cash-based transfers for refugees, lean season support and FFA activities. Food transfer costs were affected by high transport and management costs.

45. Food loss rates were very low and kept under control and the activities under strategic outcome 6 presented efficiency gains in terms of logistics costs and time savings. The overall efficiency of the CSP was also facilitated by organizational reviews and improved contracts and relationships with partners.
46. In terms of cost-effectiveness, WFP has not conducted any studies on the comparative advantages of the various transfer modalities, although it did conduct regular market monitoring to inform its decision making in that regard.

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

Evidence base

47. Overall, the development of the CSP was informed by a small but varied range of reliable evidence sources, including independent evaluations, national nutrition assessments and the food security monitoring system. The WFP country office in Mauritania was also a forerunner in the use of a participatory methodology for the diagnosis conducted prior to the provision of institutional support for an early warning system. On the other hand, while more precise targeting is needed in a context of budgetary constraint, there are only a few studies available that can help to refine the targeting criteria.

Financial and human resources

48. While WFP remained the best funded humanitarian actor in Mauritania over the period 2018–2021, the budget share allocated to crisis response decreased significantly between the transitional interim CSP and the CSP, with a corresponding increase in the resilience building budget (from 11 percent to 49 percent); and while progress was made in mobilizing multi-year funding, WFP remained highly dependent on funds earmarked for humanitarian interventions, with school feeding and nutrition being the least funded activities. Overall, funding levels remained stable, at around 50 percent of the needs-based budget, which represented a steady increase since the pre-CSP phase.
49. Since 2018, WFP has participated in the African Risk Capacity Replica insurance scheme with the aim of ensuring compensation in the event of severe droughts. Activated in 2020, that financial mechanism has allowed an early start to lean season support.
50. The recruitment of national experts, especially women, in the sub-offices has remained challenging due to the limited local expertise available. Nevertheless, WFP has been able to increase its human resources in order to meet the objectives of the CSP and significant efforts are under way to make posts more attractive and to support WFP's strategic directions, including in the areas of resilience building and social protection.

Partnerships and coordination

51. Overall, the shift in WFP's strategic approach has led to stronger partnerships and harmonization efforts. New agreements were reached at the ministerial level and with other United Nations entities in the areas of resilience building, social protection and school feeding, for instance, although the degree to which they have been implemented has varied. Through its participation in the relevant committees, WFP has become a recognized ally of non-governmental organizations and has supported agreements on an aligned, needs-based approach to response plans.
52. Opportunities exist for improving coordination with the various social safety net actors and enhancing the complementarity of resilience support and the adaptive social protection system. Regarding nutrition activities, the effectiveness and sustainability of interventions was affected by a lack of continuity in care between cases of severe and moderate acute malnutrition due to insufficient institutional coordination.

Flexibility and adaptation to crises

53. WFP has maintained its capacity for rapid response to crises throughout the CSP period. While funding at the activity level was mostly earmarked, the CSP was designed to allow flexibility in the transfer of resources between activities (subject to the agreement of the donor), thereby ensuring a more even distribution of resources among the strategic outcomes. WFP demonstrated its adaptability during the COVID-19 crisis by introducing new activities through a CSP revision, although the need to coordinate those activities with the national response caused some delays.

Other factors affecting WFP's performance

54. Other success factors that affected WFP's performance in implementing activities included more effective monitoring thanks to multi-year planning, despite the challenges in measuring the combined effects of activities forming part of the integrated resilience package; an improved, more tailored approach to communication with stakeholders; and the regional bureau's support for the Mauritania country office, in particular for resilience building and the COVID-19 response. On the other hand, limiting factors included the weakness of national decentralization processes, which hampered local ownership and undermined the sustainability of WFP interventions; the operational challenges posed by the telecommunications networks; the need to be escorted when travelling in the Hodh El Chargui region; and the associated limitations on monitoring activities.

Conclusions

55. **Strategic positioning.** The CSP was in line with the strategic goal of achieving zero hunger by addressing both the immediate and chronic needs of the most vulnerable people and communities. While WFP remained a key humanitarian actor in the country, with the multi-year strategic framework of the CSP strengthening its ability to position itself in relevant sectors, such as adaptive social protection and resilience, its strategic positioning and actions are still lacking in visibility at the government level.
56. **Cross-cutting issues.** While progress was made in taking into consideration the cross-cutting issues of gender, accountability to affected populations, protection and environment over the duration of the CSP, there is a clear need for further improvement. WFP's efforts to put in place a gender mainstreaming approach have had positive results, but a clearer strategy would be needed to support a truly transformative approach.
57. **Refugees and hosting areas.** WFP supported the identification of sustainable solutions in coordination with UNHCR while ensuring the stabilization of food and nutrition security levels. In the face of persistent funding challenges – and in order to adequately respond to the needs of refugees and host communities – WFP relied on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach developed with partners to combine humanitarian efforts with sustainable solutions, including the integration of refugees into the social register and national social safety nets, a gradual reduction in the number of assisted refugees and the – as yet unsuccessful – deployment of the integrated resilience package in the areas hosting refugees.
58. **Integrated resilience package.** With the support of the regional bureau, the country office formulated the strategic directions of the integrated resilience approach in keeping with the institutional approach deployed in the Sahel, focusing on ecosystem rehabilitation combined with nutrition and school feeding activities aimed at improving the resilience of systems, communities and households. Full synergy among the various activities has yet to be achieved, as has national ownership of the approach. While geographical convergence and concerted planning with UNICEF were effective, synergies between the respective activities of WFP and UNICEF are still being sought.

59. **Nutrition.** The management of acute malnutrition continued to suffer from a lack of funding and institutional fragmentation and ultimately, despite good performance, had little impact on the prevalence and incidence of acute malnutrition. Notwithstanding effective coordination with UNICEF, challenges related to financing, supply and joint planning have impeded the continuity of treatment between cases of severe and moderate acute malnutrition. Malnutrition prevention activities are limited to ensuring access to fortified foods and to awareness-raising activities and opportunities to promote complementarity between nutrition activities and the adaptive social protection system or the integrated resilience package have not yet been fully explored.
60. **School feeding.** While WFP strives for the institutionalization of school feeding, challenges remain in regard to donor funding and the operationalization and sustainability of the programme. The Government and WFP diverge to some degree over the vision and purpose of school feeding, with the former focusing on enrolment and a full cycle of schooling and the latter on food and nutrition security and integration into the resilience package. Overall, the monitoring of school feeding has been strengthened through the more direct involvement of non-governmental organization partners.
61. **Responsiveness.** WFP has demonstrated a strong capacity for adaptation, flexibility and responsiveness in the face of changing circumstances. During the COVID-19 crisis, the use of the social register made it possible to extend the coverage of beneficiaries without a specific targeting exercise. Flexibility in the management of resources across interventions was limited by the earmarking of funding for specific activities. The activation of the African Risk Capacity Replica insurance mechanism in 2020 represented a good opportunity to adapt lean season assistance to the pastoral calendar.
62. **Internal organization.** A major reorganization of internal procedures in the areas of human resources and information management, among others, has led to the stabilization of teams, strengthening of skills and development of a more regular and diversified communication strategy. While coordination between activity and budget monitoring has been strengthened, facilitating implementation and related financial management, difficulties persist in mobilizing national expertise, especially women, which has had an impact on the integration of cross-cutting themes.
63. **Funding.** WFP has been able to increase its funding during the implementation of the CSP and mobilized substantial additional funds for responding to various crises, such as the Sahelian drought and the COVID-19 pandemic. Its fundraising strategy has evolved from a donor guidance-based approach to one based on its own strategic directions. However, WFP remains largely dependent on inflexible annual humanitarian funding and still lacks full recognition among development-oriented donors other than the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development.
64. **Monitoring and evidence generation.** WFP has greatly improved the quality of its indicators, tools and methods for data collection and sharing, but monitoring the effects of the integrated resilience package, institutional support, capacity building and school feeding remains difficult.

Recommendations

65. The evaluation made two strategic and three operational recommendations that take into account the considerations raised in discussions with the country office, the Regional Bureau for Western Africa and external partners at two stakeholder workshops held in March 2022.

Recommendation	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Supporting entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
Recommendation 1: Strengthen the combined strategy of adaptive social protection and integrated resilience.	Strategic	Country office		High	
1.1 Expand WFP's strategic engagement in social protection to strengthen the Government's vision and leadership and expand the coverage of social protection programmes with a view to strengthening their contribution to shock-response plans and the population's resilience and nutrition.			Ministry of Social Affairs, Children and the Family; Taazour (national social protection agency)		December 2023
1.2 Support the institutionalization and strategic anchoring of the integrated resilience approach (non-sectoral, territory-based) at the level of national strategic frameworks and the next United Nations sustainable development cooperation framework (formerly the United Nations sustainable development partnership framework).					December 2023
1.3 Maintain a balance between public policy engagement and the capacity to respond to immediate needs in order to put in place sustainable solutions and ensure greater visibility of WFP's actions at the central level.			National social registry; regional bureau		December 2022
1.4 Continue WFP's commitment to capacity strengthening at the central and decentralized levels.			National crisis prevention and management system; cooperating partners; technical services; local authorities		December 2022

Recommendation	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Supporting entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
Recommendation 2: Ensure greater consideration of cross-cutting issues.	Strategic	Country office		High	December 2022
2.1 <i>Gender</i> : operationalize the shift from an integrative to a transformative approach.			National crisis prevention and management system; regional bureau		
2.2 <i>Accountability</i> : strengthen accountability and feedback to stakeholders to increase buy-in.			Regional bureau		
2.3 <i>Environment</i> : ensure greater consideration of environmental issues in the implementation of WFP interventions.			Regional bureau		
Recommendation 3: Review the strategy for assisting refugees and host communities based on the comparative advantages of stakeholders, including local communities.	Operational	Country office		High	December 2022
3.1 Strengthen the deployment of sustainable solutions.			Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development; national social registry; Taazour (national social protection agency); Tekavoul (national social protection programme); local communities; United Nations country team		

Recommendation	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Supporting entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
3.2 Strengthen WFP's positioning and capacity in regard to protection and humanitarian access issues and better calibrate interventions to the constraints.			Regional bureau; headquarters		
Recommendation 4: Strengthen the impact of the integrated resilience package.	Operational	Country office		High	December 2022
4.1 Strengthen the operationalization of synergies between the activities of the integrated resilience package.		Sub-offices (including resilience focal points)	United Nations Children's Fund; regional bureau; international non-governmental organizations		
4.2 Strengthen the sustainability of the integrated resilience package at the regional, departmental, community and activity levels, in conjunction with efforts at the national level.		Sub-offices (including resilience focal points)	International non-governmental organizations		
4.3 Strengthen the generation of quantitative and qualitative evidence related to the integrated resilience package and its components.		Research, Assessment and Monitoring Division	United Nations Children's Fund; other international organizations; actors engaged in resilience support; regional bureau		

Recommendation	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Supporting entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
Recommendation 5: Strengthen national policy support for school feeding and the management of acute malnutrition.	Operational	Country office		High	December 2022
5.1 Strengthen WFP's support for the Government in the operationalization of the national school feeding programme and demonstrate the effects of school feeding.			Ministry of National Education and Reform of the Education System; other international organizations; regional bureau		
5.2 Review WFP's strategy on moderate acute malnutrition and the related strategic partnerships to ensure effective implementation.			National food security commission; United Nations Children's Fund; Ministry of Health		

Acronyms

COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
CPDD	United Nations sustainable development partnership framework
CSP	country strategic plan
FFA	food assistance for assets
MAM	moderate acute malnutrition
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UNHAS	United Nations Humanitarian Air Service
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNSDCF	United Nations sustainable development cooperation framework