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

Executive summary

The evaluation of the country strategic plan for Cambodia for 2019–2023 covered WFP's strategy, interventions and systems under the plan. Taking a utilization-focused, consultative approach, the evaluation served the dual purpose of accountability and learning.

Cambodia has a population of 16.7 million people, ranked 69th on the 2021 Global Hunger Index and is highly vulnerable to climate change. Stunting and wasting affect children under the age of 5, and the coronavirus disease 2019 and the 2022 price crisis have exacerbated poverty and food insecurity.

The transitional interim country strategic plan for Cambodia was developed in 2017 to align WFP's assistance with the Government's planning cycle for 2014–2018 and the United Nations development assistance framework for 2016–2018. Initially the transitional interim plan aimed to rationalize the scale and scope of WFP's programme in the country in order to facilitate the organization's gradual transition from the direct implementation of activities. The country strategic plan was designed to continue WFP's shift towards the strengthening of national capacities and the building of scalable programme models. The plan was implemented during a challenging period marked by natural disasters and the effects of the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic.

The evaluation found that both plans were aligned with national priorities and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, positioning WFP as a strategic government partner for sector priorities relating to food security and nutrition, education and disaster risk reduction.

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

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WFP school feeding interventions helped to improve educational outcomes, increase school retention and decrease dropout rates. However, the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic prevented the achievement of household food security targets. WFP also helped to develop resilient food systems and improve disaster risk management, although targets for improving coping capacity were not fully met. WFP helped to strengthen the capacity of Cambodian institutions to mitigate risks and coordinate shock preparedness and positioned itself as the main government partner in building a shock-responsive social protection framework for Cambodia. WFP's contributions to food security and nutrition were much broader than anticipated but were not always captured by corporate indicators. WFP fulfilled partners' demand for supply chain services, and its emergency response interventions supported national responses to the pandemic and floods in 2020.

WFP demonstrated flexibility and responsiveness, providing a timely response to the most vulnerable people during the 2020 floods and the coronavirus disease 2019 crisis. Despite paying increasing attention to cross-cutting issues, such as gender, inclusion, protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and accountability to affected populations, WFP's contribution to objectives in those areas was limited. Synergies and coordination among strategic outcomes improved during the implementation of the country strategic plan, but opportunities exist to maximize effectiveness across development and humanitarian work, in particular regarding shock-responsive social protection, resilience and climate change initiatives.

WFP demonstrated efficiency in its delivery of country strategic plan interventions, generally providing its assistance in a timely manner, which was supported by a gradual shift from in-kind food provision to the use of cash-based transfers. A meaningful measurement framework for capacity strengthening efforts was lacking, hampering the visibility of results at the outcome level and the utility of monitoring and evaluation across the strategic outcomes of the plan. Recent investments have been made in the systematic mainstreaming of evidence generation and use in all country strategic plan activities.

The evaluation concluded that the plan provided a suitable strategic framework for the areas of WFP support in Cambodia, but its siloed structure hindered cross-fertilization among strategic outcomes. WFP has significantly strengthened its partnerships with government counterparts and is well-positioned to ensure the sustainability of results, in particular the transition towards a government-owned home-grown school feeding programme. Building on current progress, there is an opportunity for WFP to reconsider its approach to gender, inclusion, the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse and accountability to affected populations by adopting a more sophisticated integration of those elements into future programming and the next country strategic plan.

The evaluation makes five recommendations to WFP, two of which are strategic and three operational: refine the strategic focus of the next country strategic plan in a more holistic way; build evidence-based systems and structures for country strategic plan implementation; develop an overall partnership strategy; build an overarching conceptual framework for the provision of support to the Government; and strengthen and mainstream cross-cutting issues.

Draft decision*

The Board takes note of the summary report on the evaluation of the country strategic plan for Cambodia (2019–2023) (WFP/EB.2/2023/6-A/3) and management response (WFP/EB.2/2023/6-A/3/Add.1) and encourages further action on the recommendations set out in the report, taking into account the considerations raised by the Board during its discussion.

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

Introduction

Evaluation features

1. The country strategic plan (CSP) evaluation was timed to provide evidence and lessons to inform the development of the next CSP for Cambodia.
2. The evaluation covered the Cambodia CSP for 2019–2023 and the transitional interim CSP (T-ICSP) for 2018 and was conducted between May 2022 and April 2023 – the timing took into consideration the revision of the CSP and its budget. Covering WFP’s activities from 2018 to September 2022, the evaluation assessed the quality of the CSP design process, and progress towards the planned strategic changes. Its main users are the WFP country office in Cambodia and internal and external stakeholders, including beneficiaries.
3. The evaluation adopted a theory-based, mixed-methods approach, drawing on monitoring data, a literature review, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions – including with beneficiaries – and site observations. A gender-responsive approach was applied throughout the process. Because of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, the evaluation was conducted through a hybrid approach, with the inception phase being conducted entirely remotely while data collection was through an in-country field mission. Findings, conclusions and draft recommendations were discussed with internal and external stakeholders during two in-country workshops in January 2023.

Context

4. Cambodia is a lower-middle-income country with a population of 16.7 million people¹ (see table 1). It is ranked 144th of 189 countries on the Human Development Index² and aims to reach upper-middle-income status by 2030. Progress to-date has been driven mainly by agriculture, garment exports, tourism, market liberalization and foreign direct investments, mainly from China. The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on Cambodia, causing a 3.1 percent contraction in gross domestic product in 2020, the first negative trend since 1980. In addition, school closures affected the education of 3.2 million children.
5. Although Cambodia almost halved its poverty rate from 34 percent in 2009 to 18 percent in 2019,³ in 2019–2020, 17.8 percent of the population lived below the national poverty line, and the poverty rate in rural areas – where 75 percent of the population lives – is five times higher than in Phnom Penh. Cambodia ranked 69th of 116 countries on the 2021 Global Hunger Index,⁴ and while the prevalence of undernourishment has decreased sharply in the last 20 years, 22 percent of children under the age of 5 are stunted and the wasting rate is 10 percent.
6. The people of Cambodia face issues with the availability and affordability of diverse, nutritious foods, contributing to nutrition insecurity⁵ while the 2022 price crisis has exacerbated the challenges to food affordability and had large impacts on imported food, fuel and fertilizers.

¹ World Bank. 2022. [DataBank World Development Indicators](#). (accessed 16 September 2022)











² United Nations Development Programme. 2020. *Human Development Report 2020. The next frontier: Human development and the anthropocene. Briefing note for countries in the 2020 Human Development Report. Cambodia*.

³ Government of Cambodia. Ministry of Planning. 2021. *Poverty in Cambodia. Setting the new poverty line*. Comparability with previous data may be limited because of the introduction of a new methodology for the calculation of the poverty line.

⁴ Global Hunger Index. [Cambodia](#).

⁵ Integrated Food Security Phase Classification. 2012. *Cambodia Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) Version 2.0. Acute Food Insecurity Situation Overview*.

7. Cambodia is one of the southeast Asian countries most exposed to climate change, experiencing delayed or shortened monsoons and erratic rainfall leading to natural disasters, such as seasonal droughts, floods and typhoons.

TABLE 1: SOCIOECONOMIC INDICATORS			
	Indicator	Value	Year
	Total population (million) (1)	16.7	2020
	Share of population in rural areas (%) (1)	75	2021
	Share of population under 15 years of age (%) (1)	29	2021
	Share of agriculture in gross domestic product (%) (2)	20.7	2020
	Human Development Index (rank) (3)	144 of 189	2020
	Poverty headcount ratio at national poverty line (% of population) (2)	17.8	2019
	Global Hunger Index (score and rank) (4)	17 69 of 116	2021
	Prevalence of moderate and severe stunting (% of children under 5) (5)	22	2022
	Gender Inequality Index (rank) (3)	117 of 162	2020
	Government expenditure on education, total (% of government expenditure) (6)	11.1	2022

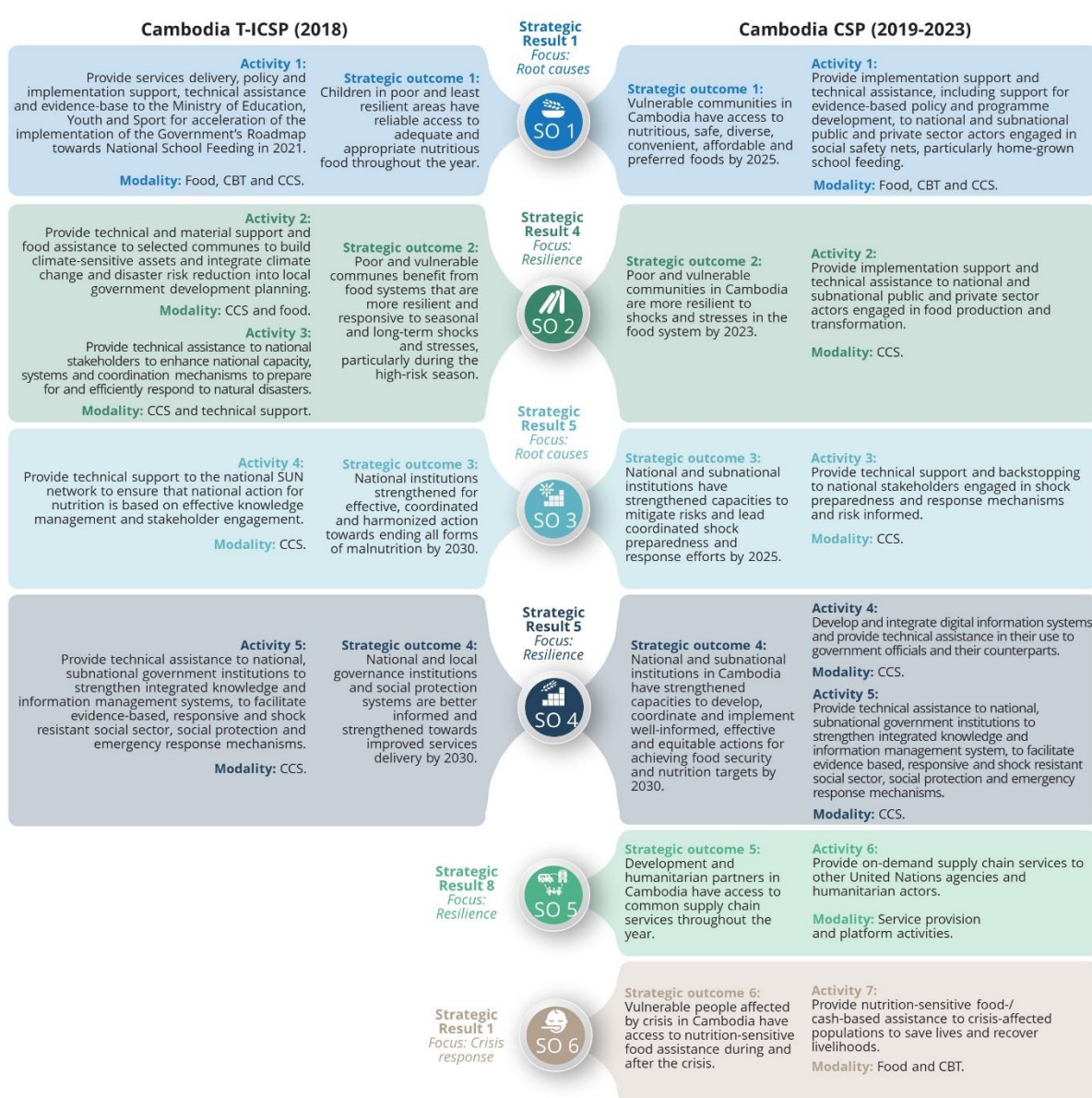
Sources: (1) [World Bank. 2020. Population, total – Cambodia](#); (2) Asian Development Bank. 2023. [Poverty Data: Cambodia](#); (3) United Nations Development Programme. [Human Development Data](#); (4) Global Hunger Index. [Cambodia](#); (5) National Institute of Statistics, Ministry of Health and ICF. 2022. [Cambodia Demographic and Health Survey 2021–22 Key Indicators Report](#); (6) Global Partnership for Education. 2022. [GPE 2025 Results Framework for Cambodia](#).

WFP country strategic plans

8. WFP has been present in Cambodia since 1979. The T-ICSP for Cambodia was developed in 2017 to align WFP's assistance with the Government's planning cycle for 2014–2018 and the United Nations development assistance framework for 2016–2018. It was implemented as a short-term bridge between the Cambodia country programme for 2011–2018 and the CSP for 2019–2023, allowing the continuation of activities while the CSP was being developed. The T-ICSP aimed to rationalize the scale and scope of WFP's programme in Cambodia, in line with the organization's gradual transition from the direct implementation of activities.
9. The CSP for 2019–2023 was designed to continue WFP's shift in focus from the implementation of activities to the strengthening of national capacities and the building of

- scalable programme models.⁶ That shift involved moving away from “downstream”-focused modalities towards the provision of “upstream” support for national entities and systems.
10. The CSP was designed to contribute to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2 and 17 and WFP strategic results 1, 4, 5 and 8 through work towards five strategic outcomes. A sixth strategic outcome was added in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and heavy flooding experienced in 2020.
 11. Figure 1 maps the linkages between the T-ICSP and the CSP; the six CSP strategic outcomes were implemented through seven activities focused on addressing the root causes of hunger, crisis response and resilience building. Activity modalities included cash-based transfers (CBTs), food transfers, capacity strengthening, and service provision and platform delivery.

Figure 1: Cambodia transitional interim country strategic plan and country strategic plan: overview of strategic outcomes and activities



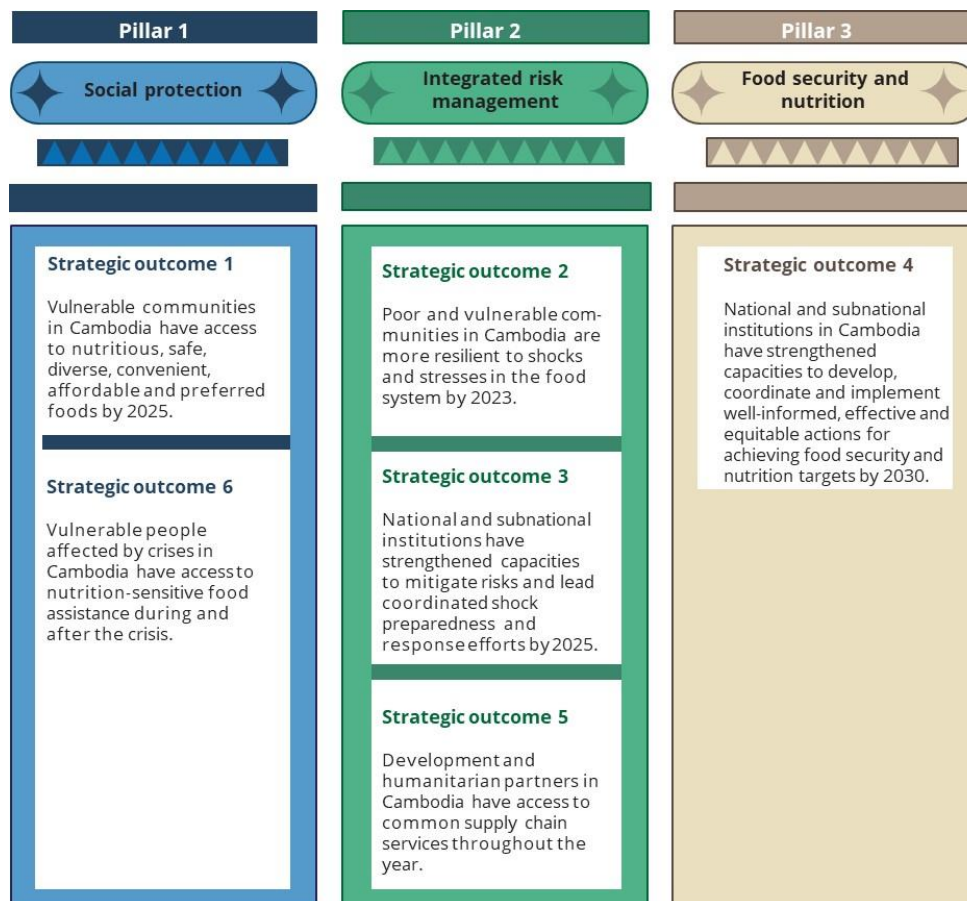
Source: Evaluation team. Inception report Cambodia country strategic plan evaluation (internal document). Cambodia transitional interim country strategic plan (2018), line of sight and logical framework 1.0 (internal documents).

Abbreviation: CCS = country capacity strengthening.

⁶ WFP. 2019. *Cambodia country strategic plan (2019–2023)*.

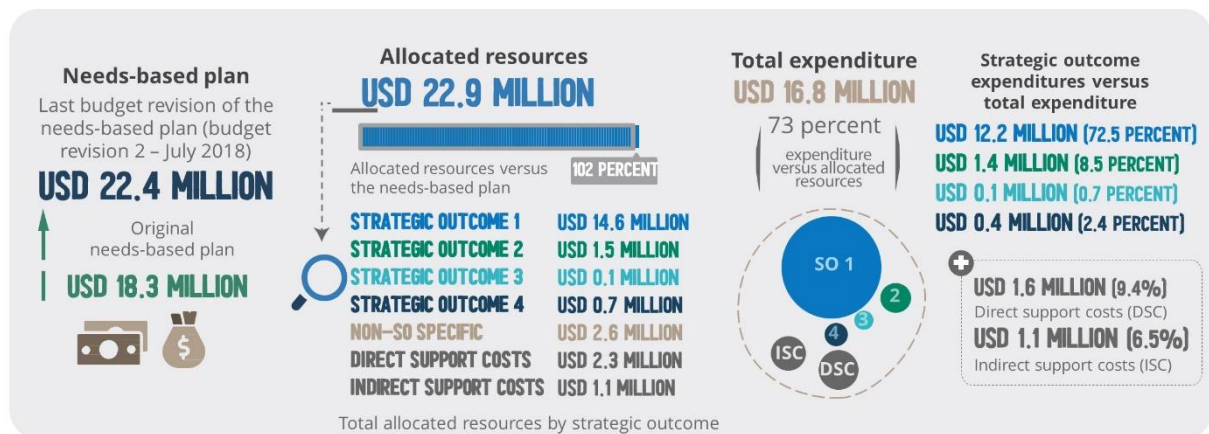
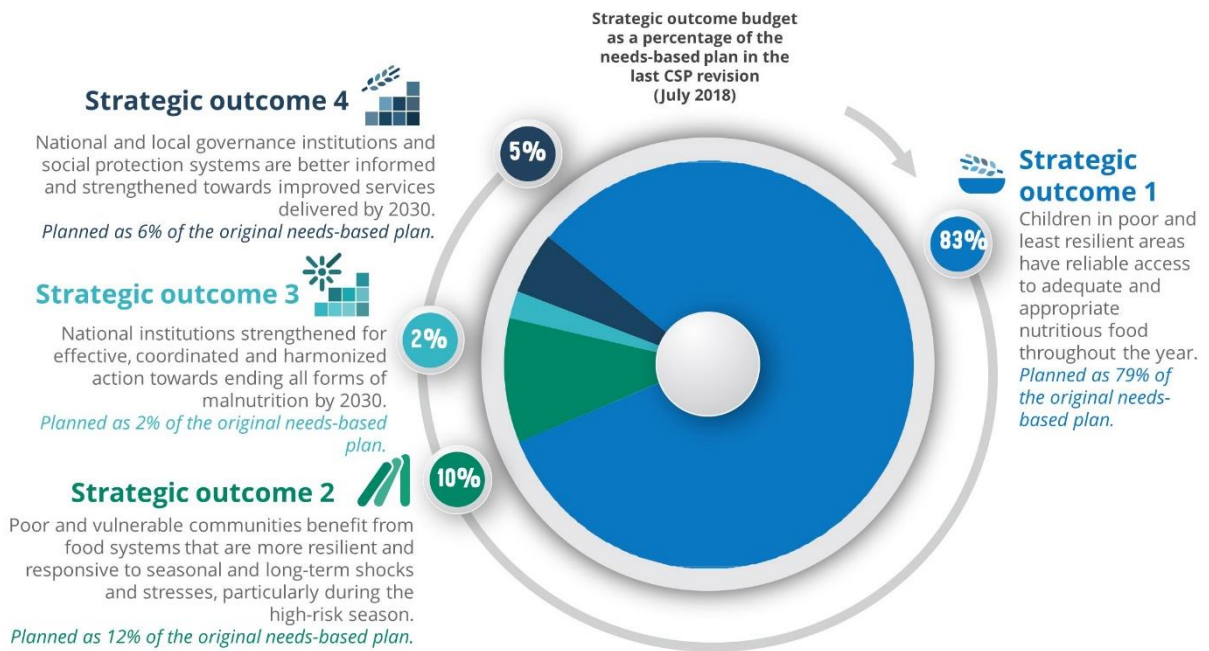
12. *CSP reorientation:* Given the changing context and emerging government priorities in Cambodia in the period from 2019 to 2021, the country office reoriented the CSP by basing it on three pillars (see figure 2) aimed at providing more coherence across the strategic outcomes: social protection, integrated risk management, and food security and nutrition.

Figure 2: Country strategic plan structure by pillar

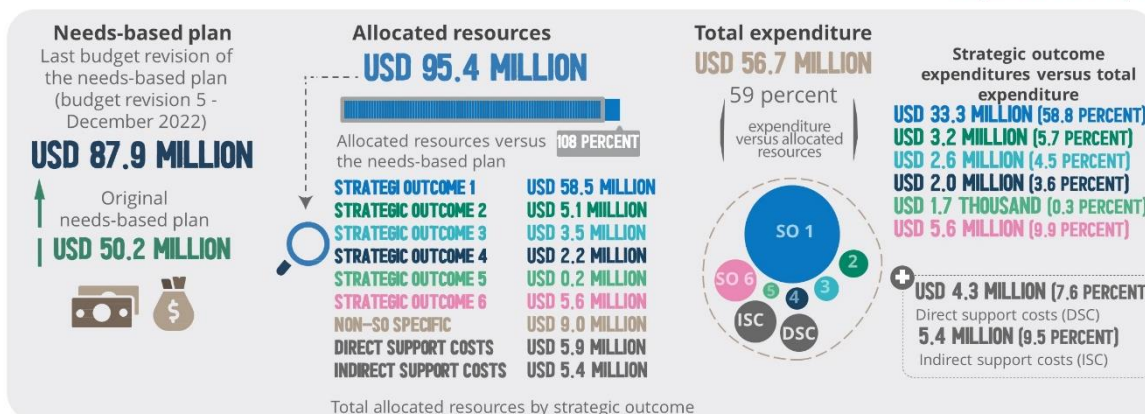
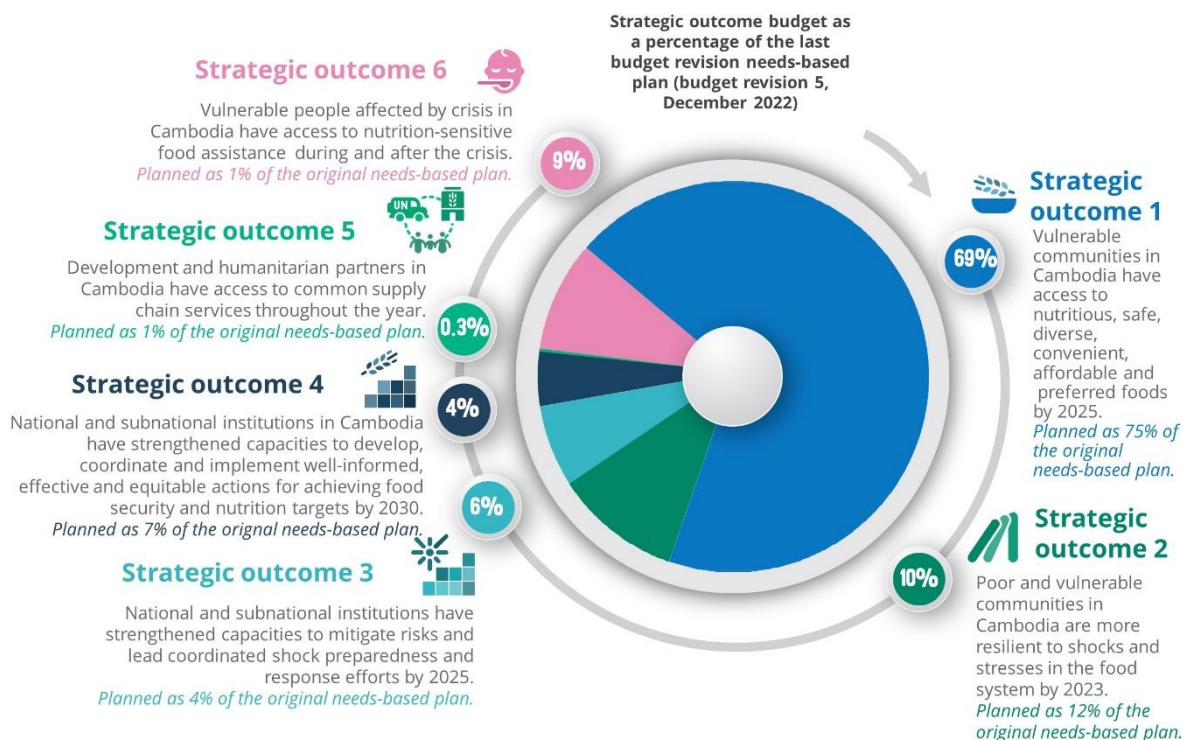


13. *Financial overview:* As shown in Figure 3, the T-ICSP for 2018 had a total budget of USD 18,319,500 and a goal of reaching 544,950 direct beneficiaries with food and CBTs during its 12-month duration. The original CSP budget was USD 50.241 million over four years to reach 424,640 direct beneficiaries with food and CBTs; by December 2022, following five CSP revisions, the budget and number of direct beneficiaries had been increased to USD 87,921,370 and 701,930 beneficiaries.

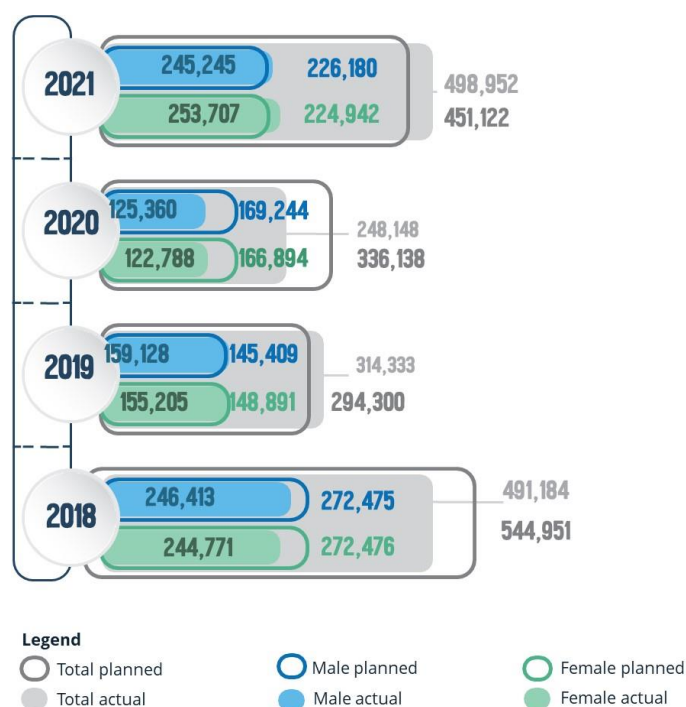
Figure 3: Financial overview, 2018–2022
T-ICSP (January–December 2018)



CSP (January 2019 – December 2023)



14. *Beneficiary data:* Figure 4 shows that in 2018, 90 percent of the planned beneficiaries were reached. The planned numbers of beneficiaries in subsequent years were lower than in 2018 but increased year on year. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic and related school closures resulted in only 74 percent of planned beneficiaries being reached; no CBTs were distributed. In 2021, with the mobilization of additional resources to support early recovery through CBTs, the coverage improved considerably. There were no substantial differences in the numbers of male and female beneficiaries.

Figure 4: Actual versus planned beneficiaries by sex, 2018–2021

Source: Data from WFP's COMET system, accessed on 16 May 2022.

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 and alignment

- The T-ICSP and CSP were highly relevant to, and aligned with, Cambodia's national priorities concerning food security and nutrition, education and disaster risk reduction, and its strategic and programmatic frameworks in those areas. Both plans were consistent with national SDG priorities and targets, particularly those under SDGs 2 and 17.
- WFP is positioned as a strategic partner for the Government and is a key actor in food security, nutrition, social protection and resilience-building activities. It has demonstrated ability and flexibility in adapting to evolving local circumstances and changing needs over time, for example by adapting to address emergency needs during flooding and the pandemic, including by shifting to take-home rations for school feeding activities. COVID-19 was a driver of reflection and reorientation, leading to a clearer overall CSP narrative.

Addressing the needs of the most vulnerable

- The CSP design used the evidence available at the time of CSP formulation to emphasize the needs of Cambodia's most vulnerable people, including children in vulnerable areas and those most exposed to climate-related shocks. It was based on WFP's historical and mandate-driven comparative advantage in Cambodia.
- The school feeding programme has provided continuity to WFP's programme in Cambodia since 1999. It applied geographical targeting to ensure that needs were addressed, but changing circumstances have raised questions regarding whether the most vulnerable areas are being targeted and led WFP and its partners to consider the expansion of the programme. Despite not being planned in the CSP, WFP also provided a valuable and context-specific response to the 2020 floods and the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 through the provision of food and CBTs to crisis-affected populations.

19. With United Nations partners moving away from the direct implementation of activities, there is limited demand for WFP's supply chain services, and the temporary increase of those services during the COVID-19 pandemic is not expected to continue.
20. WFP's technical assistance in nutrition is relevant to the needs in Cambodia, but that relevance is greatest when technical assistance is used as a modality for working across strategic outcomes rather than as a specific activity.

Coherence and alignment with the United Nations cooperation framework

21. WFP interventions are well-aligned and coherent with United Nations development assistance frameworks in the areas of WFP's comparative advantages in food security and nutrition and shock-responsive social protection. WFP's comparative advantage in addressing climate change, developed through its long experience of work at the community level, has added value in the United Nations system and positioned WFP for a future leadership role in that area.
22. Since 2011, WFP has been leading the Cambodia humanitarian response forum⁷ established to enhance coordination among development partners in responding to natural disasters.

What are the extent and quality of WFP's contributions to country strategic plan strategic outcomes in Cambodia?

Delivery of outputs and contribution to outcomes

23. Overall, the CSP met most output targets, but progress towards outcome targets was uneven across the strategic outcomes (see table 2). Corporate indicators were inadequately designed to demonstrate country capacity strengthening results, hampering the analysis of effectiveness and requiring additional qualitative assessment.
24. The framing of the CSP around the three pillars of social protection, integrated risk management, and food security and nutrition (see paragraph 12) was used to analyse performance against the CSP strategic outcomes.⁸

⁷ The forum is co-chaired by WFP and a non-governmental organization – DanChurchAid.

⁸ This section examines the contributions of WFP activities and outputs to the expected outcomes of the CSP and, to a lesser extent, the T-ICSP, for which data are available on only strategic outcomes 1 and 2, and not on outcomes 3 and 4.

	Strategic outcome	2019		2020		2021			
		Output	Outcome	Output	Outcome	Output	Outcome		
Social protection	1	88	100	50	47	36	18		
				32		53		41	82
		12		18		23			
	6	-	-	67	100	100	80		
			33	20					
Integrated risk management	2	33	100	100	100	60	100		
		67				40			
	3	40	100	100	100	100	100		
		60							
	5	100	100	100	100	100	100		
Food security and nutrition	4	43	100	86	100	57	100		
		57%		14%		29%			
						14%			

Source: Elaboration from Cambodia annual country reports for 2019, 2020 and 2021. Green = percentage of indicators with achievement rates of 90 percent or above; yellow = percentage of indicators with achievement rates of between 50 and 90 percent; orange = percentage of indicators with achievement rates below 50 percent.

25. *Social protection*: The long-standing school feeding programme has been implemented successfully, and the addition of a well-conceived emergency response component as part of the CSP provided a strong foundation for WFP as a partner to the Government in social protection:

- Under strategic outcome 1, the school feeding programme is recognized as an important social protection mechanism, promoting educational outcomes. It contributed to higher retention and lower drop-out rates in the assisted schools, but the COVID-19 pandemic prevented the achievement of household food security targets. The planned transition to a fully government-run home-grown school feeding programme is considered a good practice. WFP technical support for central government has been instrumental in creating the conditions for an effective national school feeding programme, but capacity gaps remain at all levels.
- Strategic outcome 6 was added through the third CSP revision as an emergency response intervention aimed at complementing the Government's response to the October 2020 floods and supporting the national COVID-19 response. Despite uneven implementation, with delays to CBT implementation arising from technical aspects of the transfer mechanisms used,⁹ outcome targets were broadly achieved owing to effective food transfers in 2020 and efforts to resolve the challenges related to CBTs

⁹ The challenges relate to the technical mechanism used for CBT delivery, which was not aligned with the transfer modality used in the IDPoor system led by the Ministry of Planning. This created confusion for beneficiaries: the WFP programme distributed CBTs via mobile phone, which resulted in some recipients needing to change their phone network, while others did not have access to CBTs because they did not have functioning phones or had been provided with invalid codes.

in 2021. Experience of those challenges provided WFP with lessons that will inform the implementation of future shock-responsive social protection plans.

26. *Integrated risk management:* Despite effective delivery of complementary activities to strengthen resilience at the subnational and national levels, corporate indicators do not fully capture country capacity strengthening results. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, WFP's Cambodia country office capitalized on the new national focus on shock-responsive social protection, positioning itself as a leading partner in that area:
- Under strategic outcome 2, WFP supported the development of resilient food systems through a series of subprojects focused on disaster risk management. Those included supporting national agencies in enhancing disaster risk reduction and strengthening local climate change adaptation, and constructing community assets using climate-smart technology, thus reducing weather-related disruption to markets, education and healthcare. Activities also contributed to the integration of climate change, food security and nutrition considerations into commune-level planning processes. However, targets for improving coping capacities were not met, signalling limitations in WFP's contribution to changing the status of some of the most vulnerable people within a short time span.
 - Under strategic outcome 3, WFP performed well, strengthening the capacity of national and subnational institutions to mitigate risks and lead coordinated shock preparedness and response efforts. For example, WFP helped to develop national and provincial disaster risk reduction plans and real-time impact monitoring systems. WFP positioned itself as the main government partner in building a shock-responsive social protection framework.
 - Under strategic outcome 5, while partners' demand for high-quality supply chain services, particularly warehousing, was consistently fulfilled, a comprehensive analysis of the demand for such services was lacking.
27. *Food security and nutrition:* WFP is considered a key player in food security and nutrition in Cambodia, with unique contributions based on its comparative advantage. WFP delivered results effectively, but the indicators applied do not fully capture the breadth and depth of its role in this area:
- Strategic outcome 4 does not adequately reflect the various activities and contributions that WFP has made in this area, which have been much broader than anticipated in the CSP design. Overall, work under this strategic outcome has been highly effective. WFP has strengthened the capacities of the Government and other food security and nutrition actors in Cambodia, helped to formulate the second national strategy on food security and nutrition for 2019–2023, and successfully promoted food security and nutrition at the highest political levels. It has also contributed significant research and analysis on the issue.

Contributions to cross-cutting aims

28. A full assessment of country capacity strengthening in Cambodia was hampered by the limited availability of evidence for measuring contributions to long-term changes. New comprehensive corporate tools and indicators are being made available and tested, including in Cambodia.
29. Gender and other issues of inclusion, such as disability, have not been sufficiently integrated into programme implementation. The lack of clear and ambitious (transformative) gender indicators in the CSP, a clear gender strategy and dedicated gender staff has been a key constraint. Results of the recent increase in WFP's efforts and investments in gender research and training programmes are yet to be visible. Protection issues were considered

at a basic level only at the CSP design stage, and have not been systematically addressed during CSP implementation.

30. Since the start of CSP implementation, accountability to affected population activities have not been conducted within an overall accountability to affected populations framework, but WFP has recently paid increasing attention to this area, regularly consulting beneficiaries and enhancing the feedback mechanism during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Some basic measures are in place to address the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, but the shift to more upstream modalities has meant a lack of clarity on the relevance of those measures in that largely development-focused context. Environmental concerns were mainstreamed into CSP interventions, but there was no overall environmental framing in the CSP.
31. WFP emergency response interventions adhered to humanitarian principles, being in line with the principles of humanity, impartiality and independence. Neutrality is not applicable in Cambodia.

Sustainability prospects

32. The prospects for the sustainability of school feeding are promising, with a well-considered approach to the transition to government ownership. However, sustainability will require continued engagement and analysis of the changing situation and emerging challenges and opportunities. Risks include a potentially rushed timeline and the need for stakeholders to accept the possible evolution of the current model, but the recently endorsed joint transition strategy addresses those risks and allows a strong level of confidence in the transition process.
33. Elsewhere, sustainable gains were made, such as the launch and operationalization of the second national food security and nutrition strategy for 2019–2023, but there is no evidence on the current or future financial or institutional commitment to these structures and policies nor on the capacity of the Government to implement them.

Humanitarian–development nexus

34. The CSP refers to the double (humanitarian–development) nexus.¹⁰ It does not include a specific strategy for operationalizing the linkages between humanitarian and development areas of activity, but the three-pillar approach reflects efforts in that direction.
35. In Cambodia, WFP has positioned itself at the double nexus through its work on shock-responsive social protection. Additional potential synergies can be explored, such as the linking of shock-responsive social protection to school feeding and humanitarian-oriented interventions, and the development of stronger linkages between humanitarian and resilience-building activities.

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

Timeliness

36. In Cambodia, WFP was able to rapidly adapt the school feeding programme to changing circumstances and continued to implement it in a timely manner; however, it experienced some delays in the planned handover to a government-owned home-grown school feeding programme owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. WFP responded rapidly to unforeseen circumstances in 2020, activating an emergency intervention in response to flooding and the pandemic, but technical challenges caused delays in the provision of CBT assistance.

¹⁰ Peacebuilding is not of primary relevance in Cambodia.

37. Overall, the evaluation found that most of WFP's country capacity strengthening and policy support activities were implemented within their intended timeframes, with some delays owing mainly to COVID-19-related restrictions regarding travel, meetings and social distancing, and the time required to lay firm groundwork for programme delivery during the first year of CSP implementation.

Appropriateness of coverage and targeting

38. The geographical targeting of CSP interventions was appropriate, focusing on children in vulnerable areas and those affected by COVID-19. Most beneficiaries were school-age children owing to the focus on school feeding. Changes in the vulnerability landscape have prompted consideration of programme expansion. The recent development, from 2020 onwards, of the on-demand IDPoor platform (see footnote 9) facilitates more effective targeting of the most vulnerable when combined with geographical data on disasters.

Cost-efficiency

39. WFP demonstrated cost-efficiency in its delivery of CSP results, facilitated by the conversion from in-kind food provision to the use of CBTs. Costs per beneficiary were higher for in-kind food distributions than for CBTs owing to the additional requirements associated with the purchase, transportation, storage and distribution of food.
40. Measures for keeping costs in check included ongoing monitoring, including through market-price studies. There were insufficient data to assess the cost-efficiency of capacity strengthening activities.

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

Adequate, predictable and flexible resources

41. The country office managed to increase resource mobilization over time, with the initial budget growing by 75 percent, to USD 87 million, by December 2022 (see paragraph 11). Overall, 108 percent of the cumulative needs-based plan was financed by December 2022, but most resources were earmarked at the activity level, thus limiting flexibility. Multi-year funding has helped to increase the predictability of CSP implementation.

Use of data and results-based management

42. The CSP was informed by various assessments and context analyses, including the mid-term and strategic review of the national strategy for food security and nutrition for 2014–2018.
43. Most relevant indicators were tracked and were aligned with corporate minimum requirements but monitoring and reporting focused mainly on school feeding activities, and a meaningful measurement framework for capacity strengthening was lacking. This hampered the utility of monitoring in informing management decisions under all strategic outcomes. Since 2021, however, the country office has made substantial investments in the evidence architecture, systematically mainstreaming evidence generation and use under all CSP activities.

Partnerships

44. The flexibility of the country office and its responsiveness to evolving priorities allowed it to maintain and develop effective partnerships. At the design stage, a conscious decision was made to develop strategic partnership agreements with various government entities, which has borne fruit, positively influencing performance and results under all activities. The CSP achieved its intended results with regard to partnerships with other United Nations entities, including the other Rome-based agencies, and partnerships with civil society and the private sector have been cultivated.

Country office structure and staff skills

45. The country office staffing structure and level of human resources capacity at the time of the CSP design was in accordance with an organizational realignment exercise. While consistent with the planned level of resources, the country office was conservative in setting its staffing level, which hindered effective delivery of CSP results. The “flat” staffing structure contributed to the “siloesd” design of the CSP and impeded efforts to address some cross-cutting issues.
46. Between 2021 and 2022, the country office was further reconfigured, increasing in size and strengthening coherence and coordination among key areas. This promises to support the effective implementation of the CSP. However, despite the shift to an “upstream” focus that requires different staff skill sets, the overall programme is still heavily weighted towards school feeding in terms of staffing and operational capacity.

Conclusions

47. The evaluation concluded that WFP’s strategic direction under the CSP was appropriate and well aligned with Cambodia’s national development priorities and that it remains so in the light of Cambodia’s macroeconomic status and socioeconomic challenges. The CSP was also aligned with WFP’s mandate, in particular in continuing the successful school feeding programme and in its work on climate change and resilience building with the Government and other actors.
48. While the CSP design provided a conducive framework with regard to its content, it was less optimal regarding its structure. Its siloesd nature has hindered cross-fertilization among all the strategic outcomes, and it lacked an overview of how activities would be linked across the CSP portfolio to maximize efficiencies in the use of staff time during implementation and in WFP’s partnerships in Cambodia. The reorientation of the CSP under the three pillars, and the reconfiguration of the country office’s staffing structure represent an initial step in addressing those issues.
49. The longstanding and valued school feeding programme has continued to gain momentum and WFP was able to demonstrate adaptive capacity, for example during the emergencies arising from flooding and the COVID-19 pandemic. The combination of those interventions has also contributed to further solidifying WFP’s role as a leading partner in shock-responsive social protection in Cambodia, providing a good opportunity to facilitate strategic linkages in WFP’s work at the humanitarian–development nexus.
50. WFP has worked effectively in providing complementary activities to strengthen resilience at the commune and national levels. The shift to more “upstream” support, the time required to establish solid foundations for programme delivery in the first year of the CSP, and external constraints led to a slower than planned implementation of certain capacity strengthening activities. However, WFP has been progressively implementing disaster risk reduction activities with a strong focus on climate change issues and increasing its effectiveness and credibility in that area.
51. WFP’s work in the area of food security and nutrition in Cambodia, as articulated under the third pillar of the CSP, has surpassed its original design and placed WFP in a strong strategic position. However, food security and nutrition is an area where there is further opportunity to maximize linkages between standalone nutrition interventions and the mainstreaming of nutrition and its interaction with all other areas.
52. WFP has significantly strengthened partnerships with government counterparts under the CSP and is well-positioned with various other actors to ensure the sustainability of results. WFP cultivated strong relationships with partners at various levels, but while those partnerships have positively influenced performance, they have also evolved organically

under the various strategic outcomes rather than as part of a comprehensive partnership strategy. The reframing of the portfolio under the three pillars permits a more holistic approach to partnerships, including with the other Rome-based agencies and the private sector.

53. The evaluation highlights the challenges of shifting WFP's focus so significantly to a more "upstream" approach to supporting government systems across the whole portfolio, particularly when that shift has been based partly on corporate direction rather than entirely on its suitability to the country context. While the shift has been successful in the case of school feeding, where WFP has the benefit of long experience in Cambodia, work under other strategic outcomes that are fully "upstream" has met challenges, and WFP's country capacity strengthening work, while based on capacity needs assessments, has not yet translated into measurable outcome results. The lack of meaningful corporate indicators for measuring sustainable institutional change has also limited the visibility of achievements.
54. The CSP has been weak in integrating cross-cutting issues into the design and implementation of interventions, particularly issues of gender, social inclusion, accountability to affected populations and the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse. Despite some recent improvements, gender equality has not yet been sufficiently integrated at the programme and implementation levels, and staff capacities in that area remain limited. WFP also lacks clear objectives and indicators for ensuring that gender considerations can be well integrated into activities under each strategic outcome. Regarding accountability to affected populations, complaints and feedback mechanisms were not adequately reflected as a priority focus area in CSP design or implementation. The relevance of the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse in Cambodia has not been clearly defined.
55. The evaluation concludes that the recent increase in staff capacities, including in skills specific to gender, inclusion and accountability issues, presents an opportunity for WFP to rethink – within the parameters of corporate focus and guidance – its approach to gender, inclusion, the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse and accountability to affected populations so as to adopt a more sophisticated integration of those elements into future programming and the next CSP.

Recommendations

56. The evaluation made five recommendations for shaping the strategic and operational direction of the next CSP for Cambodia. The recommendations are directed mainly to the country office, but also call for contributions from headquarters divisions and the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific.

Recommendations

#	Recommendation	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
1.	Strategic framing of the new country strategic plan: WFP should refine the strategic focus of the next country strategic plan in order to strengthen the integration of inclusive activities, maximize effectiveness across development and humanitarian work, link shock-responsive social protection to climate change adaptation and ground the design of the country strategic plan on WFP's comparative advantages.	Strategic	Country office	Regional bureau and headquarters Programme Cycle Management Unit	High	In the design of the new CSP – November 2023
1.1	WFP should consider framing the next country strategic plan in a more holistic way, with more activities clustered under strategic outcomes that have an overarching narrative both within each strategic outcome and among strategic outcomes. While the school feeding programme will remain a large financial and operational component of the overall programme, WFP should ensure that school feeding is positioned within a broader social protection framework, linking country capacity strengthening to the strategy for transitioning to a government-owned home-grown school feeding programme in order support coherence across the portfolio.		Country office senior management			In the design of the new CSP – November 2023
1.2	The framing of the next country strategic plan should include a specific, highlighted focus on shock-responsive social protection, linking it to climate change adaptation as part of food security and nutrition resilience and building on WFP's current activities and direction.		Country office senior management			In the design of the new CSP – November 2023

#	Recommendation	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
1.3	The new framing should embed gender, inclusion and protection considerations into all strategic outcomes (see recommendation 5).		Country office senior management			In the design of the new CSP – November 2023
1.4	Building on the current country office staffing structure, WFP should identify and leverage internal synergies among all strategic outcomes and various activities, noting that a change in structure is a helpful first step in this, but that bringing change to ways of working takes time and does not necessarily happen automatically. The country office should consider what is necessary, including communications and opportunities for cross-team collaboration, and ensure that by the time implementation of the next country strategic plan starts, there are more genuine linkages among the various areas of work, supported by and embedded in the new staffing structure.		Country office senior management			November 2023
2.	Operationalization of the new country strategic plan: Supported by a strong foundation based on evidence generation, WFP should build on the achievements of the current country strategic plan by leveraging the newly identified linkages across the three pillars and should focus on building evidence-based systems and structures to inform country strategic plan implementation and management in a timely manner.	Operational	Country office	Regional bureau and headquarters	Medium	November 2028 – the end of the new CSP period
2.1	In the next country strategic plan, WFP should build on the successful restructuring of the current country strategic plan under the three pillars, with explicit linkages among pillars, including shock-responsive social protection activities under both the social protection and the integrated risk management pillars, and food security and nutrition as an overarching concept as well as a stand-alone pillar, as it is the core mandate of WFP.		Country office senior management			In the design of the new CSP – November 2023

#	Recommendation	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
2.2	WFP should prioritize the setting up of the necessary systems and processes to ensure that the newly structured research, assessment and monitoring unit is able to provide equal levels of support under all strategic outcomes for informing decision-making in a timely manner and contributing to learning.		Country office senior management and research, assessment and monitoring unit			December 2023
2.3	WFP should take the necessary steps to ensure that all the evidence produced from research, assessment and monitoring is fully gender-, inclusion- and protection-sensitive, beyond the simple gender disaggregation of data, and that it provides meaningful analysis of gender, inclusion and protection dimensions.		Deputy country director and country office gender focal point, and programme and research, assessment and monitoring units			November 2028 – the end of the new CSP period
3.	Partnerships: WFP should develop an overall partnership strategy focused on the sustainability of results. The strategy should be coherent with the various partnerships that WFP has in Cambodia – with the Government, other United Nations entities, civil society and the private sector – and, in line with recommendations 1 and 2, it should explicitly highlight the opportunities for linkages and alignment across various strategic outcomes and partnerships.	Strategic	Country office	Regional bureau and headquarters Partnerships and Advocacy Department	Medium	June 2024
3.1	WFP should build on its current strong relationships with various government entities to identify and maximize the linkages among strategic outcomes within WFP and its relationships with government partners related to various areas of work, in line with increasing internal synergies.		Country office senior management, partnerships officer, head of programme and research, assessment and monitoring unit			In the overall partnership strategy – by June 2024

#	Recommendation	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
3.2	WFP should build on its current good partnerships with other United Nations entities, ensuring that linkages and WFP's contributions and areas of leadership are embedded in the new United Nations sustainable development cooperation framework and that WFP's close relationship with the other Rome-based agencies is maximized.		Country office senior management, partnerships officer, head of programme and research, assessment and monitoring unit			In the overall partnership strategy – by June 2024
3.3	WFP should build on its current partnerships with civil society, the private sector and academia, ensuring that – as part of a partnership strategy – those partners are clearly recognized as key to achieving the sustainability of results alongside the Government.		Country office senior management, partnerships officer, head of programme and research, assessment and monitoring unit			In the overall partnership strategy – by June 2024
3.4	WFP should explore the broadening of the donor base, particularly with a view to strengthening support for the Government's capacity to implement and manage priority programmes under the funding to financing agenda.		Country office senior management and partnerships officer			In the overall partnership strategy – by June 2024
3.5	In the partnership strategy, WFP should include a clear monitoring plan that ensures the visibility of results from various partnership types and informs robust management decision-making with regard to continued and new partnerships.		Country office senior management, partnerships officer and monitoring and evaluation team			In the overall partnership strategy – by June 2024

#	Recommendation	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
4.	WFP support for the Government: WFP should develop an overarching conceptual framework for its support for the Government based on the mapping of existing national capacity needs and strengthened partner coordination, customizing and contextualizing the corporate policy framework¹¹ and in line with updated corporate guidance¹² and the corporate results framework for 2022–2025.¹³	Operational	Country office	Regional bureau and headquarters Country Capacity Strengthening Unit	High	November 2023
4.1	The country office should develop an overarching conceptual framework for the provision of support to the Government that is aligned with corporate key documents and applicable to all relevant strategic outcomes in the next country strategic plan. The framework should be used to ensure that all WFP staff have a consistent understanding of WFP's work in support of the Government at the national and subnational levels.		Deputy Country Director and country office head of programme and research, assessment and monitoring unit			November 2023
4.2	WFP should build on the capacity needs and mapping exercises conducted for the current country strategic plan, but with more systematic and predictable planned processes in place to ensure that the exercises are fully used as implementation and monitoring guides.		Deputy Country Director and country office research, assessment and monitoring, and programme units			November 2023

¹¹ WFP. 2022. "[Country capacity strengthening policy update](#)" (WFP/EB.A/2022/5-A).

¹² WFP. 2023. *WFP corporate framework for country capacity strengthening*.

¹³ WFP. 2022. "[Corporate results framework \(2022–2025\)](#)" (WFP/EB.1/2022/4-A/Rev.1).

#	Recommendation	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
4.3	The country office should ensure that there is documented evidence from the piloting of new corporate indicators that the country office has volunteered to take part in with the regional bureau. WFP should ensure that learning from the piloting process includes documentation of the support received and the future support required from the regional bureau, and of the lessons learned from and for all upstream strategic outcomes.		Deputy Country Director and country office head of programme and research, assessment and monitoring unit			November 2023
4.4	WFP should use the learning from the current utilization of capacity needs mapping exercises, the learning from the piloting exercise on corporate indicators and the process of developing the new country strategic plan to develop a comprehensive systems-building approach to the monitoring and evaluation of the support provided to the Government by WFP under the various strategic outcomes, including the related theories of change, capacity needs assessments and monitoring and evaluation plans. Monitoring and evaluation plans should be based on monitoring at various output and outcome levels, such as those assessing pre- and post-test knowledge, and more sophisticated measurements (developed with the support of the regional bureau and headquarters) for outcome-level results, within the parameters of corporate frameworks (see recommendation 4).		Deputy Country Director and country office head of programme and research, assessment and monitoring unit, with support from the regional bureau and headquarters			November 2023
4.5	The country office should take the necessary steps to ensure that gender, inclusion and protection considerations are embedded in the overarching conceptual framework for the provision of support to the Government.		Deputy Country Director and country office gender focal point and research, assessment and monitoring unit			November 2023

#	Recommendation	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
5.	Cross-cutting issues: WFP should strengthen and mainstream gender-transformative approaches, inclusion and accountability to affected populations in the design and implementation of the new country strategic plan as much as possible, while remaining aligned with corporate guidance.	Operational	Country office	Regional bureau and headquarters Gender Equality Office and programme units	High	In the design of the new CSP – November 2023
5.1	<p>The country office should ensure that gender, inclusion and disability considerations are fully incorporated into the design of the next country strategic plan, along with the corporate cross-cutting indicators that cover those considerations, including those that look beyond physical disabilities. The considerations should be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ applicable to all strategic outcomes and activities in the country strategic plan; and ➤ supported by meaningful output and outcome indicators. <p>The cross-cutting issues incorporated into the next country strategic plan should be aligned with WFP's corporate direction, including the cross-cutting indicators in the corporate results framework for 2022–2025.</p>		Deputy Country Director and country office gender and inclusion officer and programme units			In the design of the new CSP – November 2023
5.2	With support from the regional bureau, the country office should ensure that the most up-to-date accountability to affected populations complaints and feedback mechanisms are in place for strategic outcomes with tier 1 beneficiaries.		Deputy Country Director and country office accountability to affected populations officer, research, assessment and monitoring unit and relevant programme units			November 2023

Acronyms

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