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Summary report on the evaluation of the country strategic plan for Sierra Leone (2020–2025)

Executive summary

The evaluation of the country strategic plan for Sierra Leone for 2020–2025 served both accountability and learning purposes, providing key findings, conclusions and recommendations aimed at informing the design of Sierra Leone's next country strategic plan. The plan builds on the transitional interim country strategic plan for Sierra Leone for 2018–2019, which focused on recovery from the impact of the 2015 Ebola virus disease outbreak, and introduces strategic adjustments, including enhanced crisis response capacity, support for government-led school meal programmes, assistance for smallholder farmers, and the transition to a home-grown school feeding model. It also emphasizes social protection, shifting from the treatment to the prevention of malnutrition, and promoting gender equality and women's empowerment.

The country strategic plan was well-targeted, addressing key food security and nutrition challenges through a thorough analysis that aligned with national priorities and WFP's global strategies. Although the design of the plan did not fully prioritize integration in development activities, WFP made significant progress in enhancing geographic and programmatic linkages throughout its implementation.

The distribution of specialized nutritious foods during the 2019 coronavirus disease pandemic contributed to reducing malnutrition, and food assistance helped to improve short-term food security, although its effect was constrained by the short duration of assistance and the timing of payments, which were not synchronized with the lean season. School meal programmes significantly increased enrolment and attendance in school, but rapid expansion led to a reduction in the frequency of meals or the size of rations and increased the strain on teachers and school infrastructure. WFP's local procurement efforts created linkages to agricultural markets for

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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farmers, but delays in delivery and in the payments made to farmers hindered the effectiveness of the home-grown school feeding programme.

WFP's efforts to treat moderate acute malnutrition were effective, but the shift towards stunting prevention had limited effects. Social and behaviour change initiatives had a positive influence on children's diets, but there were missed opportunities to engage older women and increase the resources for nutrition programmes. The local production of complementary foods faced challenges but holds potential for long-term improvements in nutrition. Food assistance for assets activities gave smallholder farmers incentives to rehabilitate agricultural assets, thereby improving productivity, particularly in rice cultivation. Asset creation and livelihood activities promoted smallholders' resilience through the increased production of vegetables and orange-fleshed sweet potatoes. However, procurement delays and price fluctuations created cash flow issues, limiting progress in food security despite increased incomes for farmers.

The evaluation found that WFP adhered to humanitarian principles and effectively upheld its commitments to accountability to affected people. However, there is potential to further integrate environmental, climate and gender considerations into the next country strategic plan. As an example, improved gender analysis could help to identify and address the unintended negative effects of WFP-supported activities on beneficiary women and girls, such as increased workloads without adequate remuneration.

About half of the activities under the plan met output targets, with 60 percent implemented on schedule. Delays in school meal activities, food production and the provision of agricultural inputs affected performance. Despite these challenges, WFP improved cost efficiency, especially in school meal initiatives, and supply chain efficiency, eliminating operational redundancies by closing a port warehouse and a logistics base.

The country strategic plan was well-funded with a diversified donor base, although the short duration of grants and the earmarking of donations posed planning challenges. Long-term funding for activities such as the prevention of moderate acute malnutrition remained scarce. Outcome tracking was adequate, but there were gaps in data use, particularly for capacity strengthening indicators. WFP collaborated well with the Government of Sierra Leone and other partners but should explore other strategic partnerships, especially in the education sector.

The evaluation makes five recommendations: four strategic and one operational. The strategic recommendations focus on integrating resilience-building programming while maintaining flexibility for emergency response; enhancing the national school meal programme through improved partnerships and monitoring; investing in nutrition for the first 1,000 days of life; and strengthening gender and environmental considerations in the next country strategic plan through standardized guidance on analysis. The operational recommendation calls for the strengthening of smallholder farmers' market access through adapted procurement approaches.

Draft decision*

The Board takes note of the summary report on the evaluation of the country strategic plan for Sierra Leone (2020–2025), (WFP/EB.2/2025/6-C/8) and the management response (WFP/EB.2/2025/6-C/8/Add.1).

* 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 WFP Office of Evaluation commissioned and managed the evaluation of the country strategic plan (CSP) for Sierra Leone for 2020–2025. The evaluation serves both accountability and learning objectives, and its findings, conclusions and recommendations are intended to inform the design of the next CSP for Sierra Leone.

2. The primary users of the evaluation are WFP's Sierra Leone country office, the Western and Central Africa regional office, relevant divisions at headquarters in Rome, and the Executive Board. External users include the Government of Sierra Leone and its various ministries and agencies collaborating with WFP, the United Nations country team, and cooperating partners. The beneficiaries of CSP activities are also key stakeholders in this evaluation.

Context

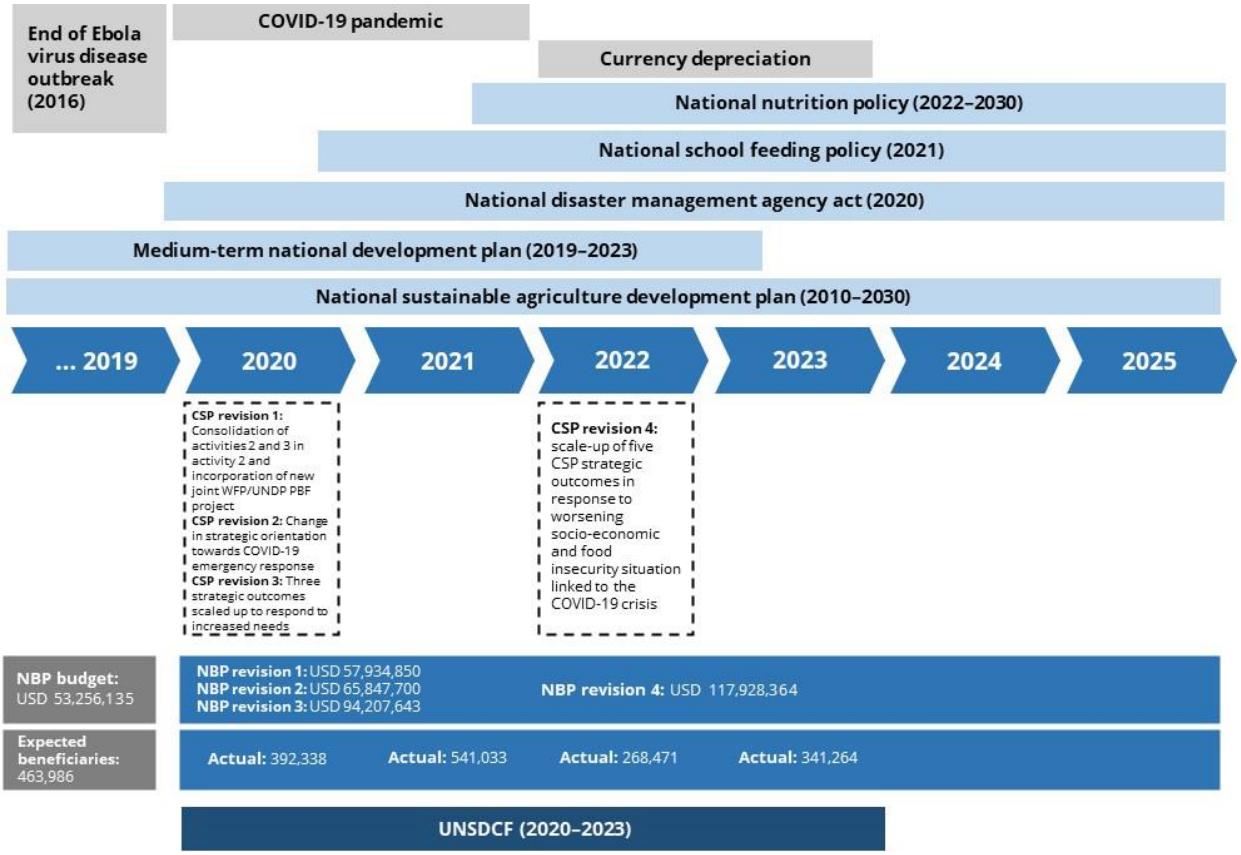
3. Sierra Leone, a low-income West African country, has made considerable economic and social progress since its civil war ended in 2002, but economic recovery has been hindered by external shocks such as the 2015 Ebola virus disease outbreak, the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and inflation. About 26 percent of the population lives below the poverty line, and 59.2 percent is multidimensionally poor. With a young population and moderate-income inequality, Sierra Leone faces challenges such as teenage childbearing and a relatively low life expectancy.

4. Food insecurity in Sierra Leone has significantly worsened, with the proportion of food-insecure households rising from 53 percent in 2018 to 82 percent in 2024, largely owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, chronic and acute undernutrition rates remain concerning, with stagnating or increasing rates of stunting, reaching 26.3 percent in 2021, and wasting, at 5.2 percent in 2024. While there has been some progress in maternal and child feeding, anaemia rates remain high, and child nutrition indicators such as meal frequency and dietary diversity have not improved.

5. Agriculture is the backbone of Sierra Leone's economy, contributing 57.5 percent of gross domestic product in 2022 and employing half of the labour force. Although 74 percent of the land is suitable for cultivation, less than 10 percent is cropped; most farmers are smallholders, and women perform 75 percent of the labour. The Government's national priorities include improved productivity and commercialization in the agriculture sector, rice intensification and agricultural diversification.

6. Sierra Leone has one of the world's lowest literacy rates, with 49 percent of people of 15 years and above being literate in 2022. While primary school enrolment and completion rates are somewhat higher, secondary school completion is low, at 21.7 percent. Education remains a priority for the Government, with increased spending – at 33.4 percent of total government spending in 2021, up from 15.2 percent in 2013 – and school meal programmes to promote attendance.

Figure 1: Country context and WFP operational overview, 2020–2025



Abbreviations: NBP = needs-based plan; PBF = peacebuilding fund; UNDP = United Nations Development Programme; UNSDCF = United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework.

Source: Evaluation team.

Country strategic plans

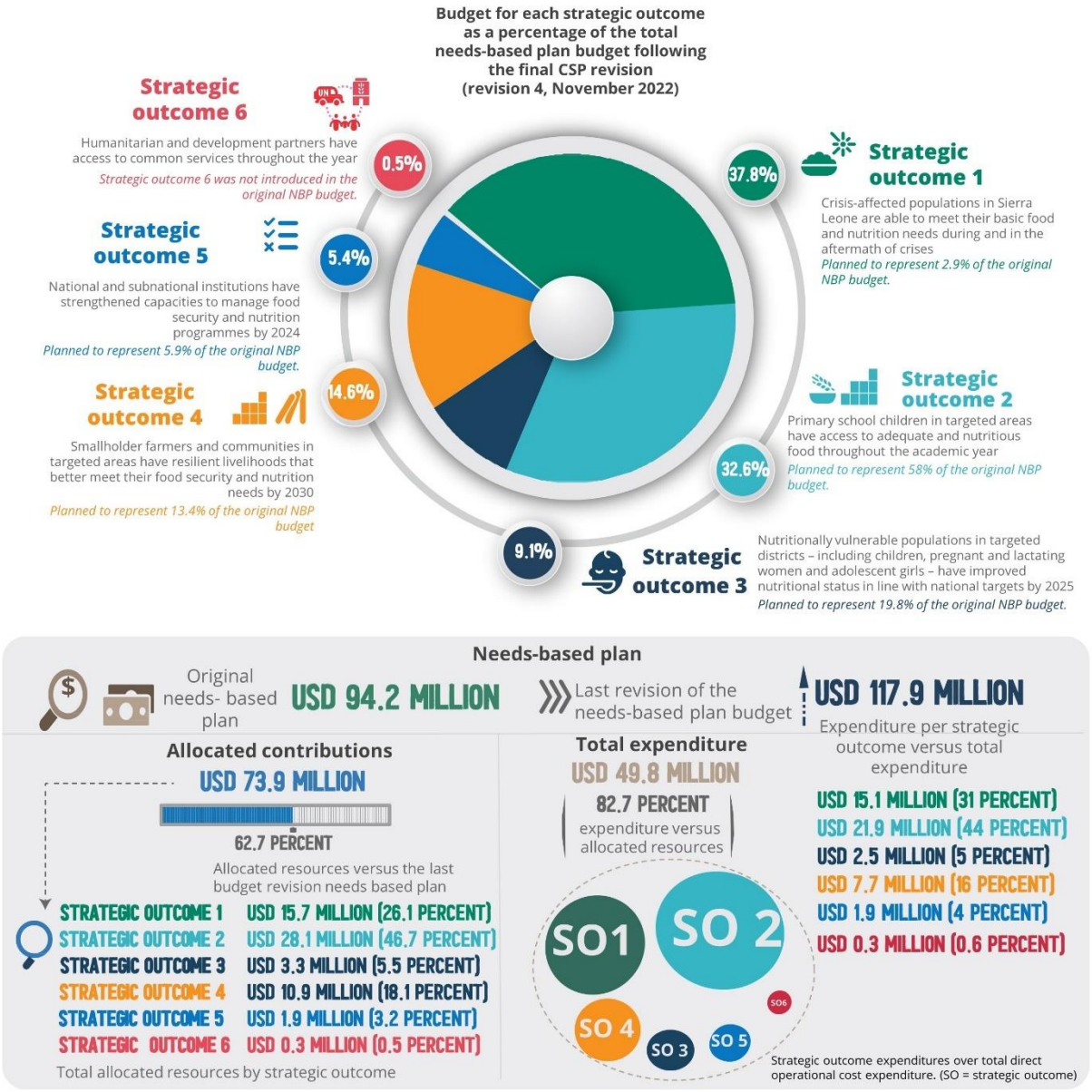
7. The transitional interim CSP for Sierra Leone for 2018–2019 focused on recovery from the impact of the Ebola virus disease outbreak, aligning with the Government's priorities and building on the previous WFP recovery operation, and was in line with the United Nations development assistance framework for Sierra Leone. The current CSP – originally for 2020-2024 but subsequently extended to 2025 – has a similar focus but with strategic adjustments, including to enhance crisis response capacity, support government-led school meal programmes, assist smallholder farmers, and facilitate a transition to a home-grown school feeding (HGSF) model. It also emphasizes strengthening social protection, shifting from malnutrition treatment to prevention, and promoting gender equality and women's empowerment.

8. Developed in consultation with the Government and stakeholders, the CSP was informed by needs assessments and the 2019 national zero hunger strategic review. It aims to contribute to the Government's priorities and the United Nations sustainable development cooperation framework for 2020–2023, primarily supporting Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2 on zero hunger and 17 on partnerships.

9. The CSP has six strategic outcomes: strategic outcome 1 was designed to ensure that crisis-affected people in Sierra Leone met their basic food and nutrition needs. Strategic outcome 2 was aimed at providing primary schoolchildren with consistent access to nutritious food. Strategic outcome 3 was intended to improve the nutrition status of vulnerable population groups. Strategic outcome 4 was focused on strengthening the resilience of smallholder farmers and communities. Strategic outcome 5 was intended to build the institutional capacity needed to manage food security and nutrition programmes, and cuts across all other outcomes. Supporting the operationalization of the National Disaster Management Agency has been one of WFP's priorities under strategic outcome 5, particularly in view of the increasing risks associated with natural disasters induced by climate change. Strategic outcome 6 was aimed at ensuring that humanitarian and development partners had access to common services. It was introduced in July 2020 to enable WFP to undertake service provision activities in support of national disaster preparedness and response, particularly in the areas of supply chains and emergency telecommunications.

10. The original CSP needs-based plan was USD 53.2 million over five years but the CSP and its budget were revised four times, largely in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and WFP's declaration of a global Level 3 emergency. With the fourth revision, in 2022, the total needs-based plan reached USD 117.9 million, with the largest share allocated to strategic outcome 1, at 32.9 percent, followed by strategic outcome 2, at 28.4 percent, and strategic outcome 4, at 12.7 percent; this contrasts with the original needs-based plan, of which the largest share – 45.2 percent – was allocated to strategic outcome 2. As of August 2024, the CSP was funded at 70.6 percent of the needs-based plan, up from 62.7 percent in December 2023. Beneficiary numbers increased steadily throughout the term of the CSP, rising from 463,986 at its start to 1,191,831 by its end, an overall increase of 156.9 percent.

Figure 2: Sierra Leone CSP strategic outcomes, budget, funding and expenditures



Note: Allocated resources and expenditures by strategic outcome exclude direct and indirect support costs.

Sources: System for Project Approval Plus for the needs-based plan, FACTory for allocated contributions, and IRM analytics for allocated resources and expenditures, as of 31 December 2023.

Key evaluation messages

Relevance, coherence and adaptive capacity

The CSP was effectively targeted, aligning with national priorities and adapting to changing circumstances. It was well coordinated with the activities of the United Nations country team in Sierra Leone and aligned with WFP's global strategies, capitalizing on the organization's comparative advantages in an increasingly integrated portfolio of programmes.

11. The CSP was developed based on a thorough analysis of the prevailing hunger challenges facing key population groups, addressing critical food security and nutrition issues in Sierra Leone at the time of its design. It drew on multiple relevant data sources, including a comprehensive food security and vulnerability analysis, national nutrition surveys, reports from the food security monitoring system, an evaluation of WFP's protracted relief and recovery operation in the country, and the 2019 zero hunger strategic review.

12. The CSP is closely aligned with Sierra Leone's national policies, strategies and programmes in the areas of food security and nutrition, social protection, disaster management, school meals and resilience building. Among other initiatives, the CSP is aligned with the "Feed Salone" programme, a flagship initiative of the Government aimed at boosting agricultural productivity to fuel inclusive growth, increase local food production, reduce hunger and build resilient food systems.

13. The CSP strategic outcomes and activities are aligned with and reflect sector-specific strategies and plans aimed at achieving SDG 2, zero hunger, while also having strong links to SDGs 1, 3, 4, 5, 13, 15 and 17. The CSP is closely aligned with and informed by Sierra Leone's United Nations sustainable development cooperation framework for 2020–2023. WFP's comparative advantages in Sierra Leone stem from its expertise in food security and school meal programmes and its extensive field presence and robust supply chain capacity. These strengths are strategically aligned so as to maximize WFP's contributions to the broader United Nations system's strategies and plans in the country.

14. The CSP is aligned with WFP's broader policy frameworks, including its strategic plan for 2022-2025 and its policies on procurement, nutrition and school meals. Areas for improvement remain, however, such as increasing the proportion of local procurement, allocating more resources to nutrition activities, expanding programming for adolescent girls, and developing plans and timelines for the hand-over of school meal activities to the Government.

15. Under the CSP, WFP facilitated links at the humanitarian–development nexus. While the design of the CSP did not fully prioritize integration among development activities, WFP made significant progress in maximizing its comparative advantages through greater geographic and programmatic integration of its activities throughout the CSP period. Programmatic linkages were established, such as by clustering programming geographically or connecting WFP-supported agricultural producers to HGSF initiatives, creating multiplier effects. WFP also fostered links at the humanitarian–development–peacebuilding nexus, notably by successfully convening two joint peacebuilding projects.

16. Overall, the CSP maintained its relevance as a strategic and flexible programming framework, particularly in disaster response, school meal and nutrition activities, despite the evolving conditions during the implementation period. Guided by the CSP, WFP aimed to adapt to changing circumstances and resource constraints, shifting from the direct implementation of activities to the provision of policy support and strengthening of the capacity of national interventions.

17. The increased focus on preventing malnutrition and producing local complementary foods in Sierra Leone, while maintaining a contingency component for the treatment of moderate acute malnutrition (MAM) in emergencies, remained relevant to the country's nutrition challenges throughout the CSP period. WFP activated the contingency component in response to critical malnutrition levels during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021. However, the CSP design lacked a clear strategy for shifting from MAM treatment to prevention, and the evaluation found no evidence of plans to provide MAM treatment to address the critical malnutrition levels reported in 2024.

Effectiveness of the CSP in Sierra Leone: overall performance and key contributions to change

18. While food and cash-based transfers provided under the crisis response during the COVID-19 pandemic saved lives, the key strength of the CSP was its focus on promoting resilience and addressing the root causes of hunger through initiatives such as school meals, social and behaviour change, and asset creation and livelihood activities. School meals boosted enrolment and attendance, while social and behaviour change campaigns positively influenced children's diets. Asset creation and livelihood initiatives improved agricultural production for smallholder farmers, strengthened value chains and farmer-based organizations, and helped to increase incomes for vulnerable farmers. Nonetheless, these same activities also faced notable challenges, including inadequate food supplies for school students, payment delays and cash flow constraints affecting smallholder farmers.

19. The contributions of strategic outcome 5 are reflected under the relevant outcomes from strategic outcomes 1–4, particularly where they have contributed to change. As activities under strategic outcome 6 focused primarily on support for the National Disaster Management Agency, strategic outcome 6 is discussed together with strategic outcome 1.

Meeting basic food and nutrition needs for crisis-affected populations – strategic outcome 1

The evaluation highlights the effectiveness of specialized nutritious foods in reducing malnutrition during critical periods, and improving food security for vulnerable groups, with potential long-term benefits. Food assistance and cash-based transfers improved short-term food security for vulnerable groups. WFP's efforts to strengthen logistics and coordination capacity for crisis response were valuable, but challenges in managing non-localized emergencies affecting multiple districts or provinces remain.

20. The evaluation found that specialized nutritious foods distributed during the COVID-19 pandemic were effective in reducing malnutrition during critical periods of children's growth and provided potential long-term benefits. Targeted distributions of specialized nutritious foods for vulnerable groups played a crucial role in addressing malnutrition sustainably, reinforcing the importance of nutrition-sensitive activities under the CSP.

21. Food assistance and cash-based transfers provided during the CSP period contributed to short-term improvements in food security, particularly for vulnerable people. However, the effect was limited by the short duration of assistance and the timing of payments, which were not synchronized with the lean season. While unconditional food assistance and cash-based transfers primarily delivered immediate life-saving outcomes, their effectiveness in achieving sustained food security outcomes was limited.

22. WFP's support for the National Disaster Management Agency has been instrumental in strengthening logistics and coordination capacity for crisis response, with WFP playing a leading role among United Nations entities in this area. Through its country capacity strengthening efforts, WFP has contributed to the building of national capacity in key areas of emergency response, including policy, organizational and institutional frameworks, and individual capacity strengthening.

23. While WFP's support has led to significantly enhanced national leadership and coordination in disaster response, there remain opportunities to further strengthen institutions, particularly in managing and coordinating the response to non-localized emergencies affecting multiple districts or provinces outside of Freetown.

Providing consistent access to nutritious food for primary schoolchildren – strategic outcome 2

School meal programmes increased enrolment and attendance in school, but rapid expansion led to reduction in the frequency of school meals or the size of school meal rations, and strained school capacity, including that of teachers and infrastructure.

24. Using its global comparative advantages in school meal activities, WFP worked with the Government to implement the latter's policy of expanding the national school meal programmes. There is widespread qualitative evidence that school meals contributed to increased school enrolment and attendance, with activities meeting CSP targets for attendance while also generating educational, nutritional and social benefits, including improved food consumption, reduced financial burden on parents, higher retention rates, and enhanced attention and academic performance among students. However, it is unclear how much of the attendance gains resulted from increased access for previously out-of-school children and how much from the relocation of students previously attending schools that were not part of the school meal programme.

25. Primary data collection revealed that actual school enrolment consistently exceeded estimates. While the school meal programme delivered significant benefits, its rapid expansion outpaced schools' capacity for effective implementation. The underestimation of school enrolment and the corresponding shortage of food forced some schools to reduce the frequency of meals or the ration sizes. In addition, logistics challenges contributed to delays. The transportation companies contracted to deliver food often lacked the capacity to deliver on time and to the required destinations, resulting in frequent delays. Compounding these issues, there was no increase in educational resources – such as teachers, classrooms or water, sanitation and hygiene facilities – to accommodate the growing numbers of students, placing increased strain on both teachers and school infrastructure.

26. WFP took the lead nationally in rolling out the HGSF programme. School meal programmes are increasingly creating opportunities for local farmers, including farmer-based organizations supported by asset creation and livelihood activities, by procuring agricultural commodities such as rice, pulses, orange-fleshed sweet potatoes and vegetables from them. Local procurement for HGSF establishes vital market linkages for farmers, creating incentives for higher productivity by providing a stable market for their produce. However, reliance on private sector transportation partners, many of whom lacked the capacity to deliver food on time and to designated locations, led to frequent delays in deliveries of food for school meals.

27. In addition, WFP supported the Government by providing equipment and training for school meal monitors, contributing to the strengthening of school meal monitoring capacity. While staffing and knowledge gaps remain, better-trained school meal monitors have enhanced oversight, ensuring that food was received, stored and accounted for, reducing wastage, and helping to meet feeding targets in pursuit of enrolment outcomes.

Improving the nutrition status of vulnerable groups – strategic outcome 3

WFP's efforts to reduce malnutrition showed positive results, but the effect on stunting was limited because activities were short term. Social and behaviour change improved children's nutrition, although challenges in community involvement remained. Local food production holds potential, and greater focus on nutrition for pregnant women and girls, and young children could strengthen long-term outcomes.

28. MAM treatment programmes supported by WFP contributed to reductions in malnutrition owing to their broad reach and long duration. While the shift in focus to stunting prevention was appropriate, its effect on stunting rates was limited, owing primarily to the short duration and reach of the activities.

29. Social and behavioural change efforts over several years have positively influenced children's diets, probably contributing to improved nutrition. However, this has placed the responsibility for implementing community- and household-level programmes on unpaid mothers. Qualitative reports suggest an increase in men's participation in and support for maternal, infant and young child feeding activities, but a quantitative survey found limited evidence of this. In addition, despite the significant cultural influence of older women on such activities in Sierra Leone, the evaluation found no intentional inclusion of older women in mother support groups or social and behaviour change activities. To further enhance the programme's effect, opportunities to engage older women as change agents, leveraging their traditional roles, should be seized.

30. Introducing the production of local complementary foods in three districts has proven to be a complex and challenging undertaking for local mother support groups. Key challenges in establishing a manufacturing unit include the acquisition of land, the securing of a reliable electricity supply, issues with substandard equipment and frequent breakdowns, irregular remuneration, and the need for on-the-job learning in areas such as management, procurement and marketing. However, if successful as a sustainable enterprise, and in reaching vulnerable people, the production of local complementary foods could make a significant contribution to improving nutrition.

31. Despite WFP's considerable progress in building the capacity of community-based organizations during the CSP period, some such organizations may face challenges in sustaining themselves without continued support and monitoring from WFP. For instance, past experience indicates that the mobilization of mother support groups relies on ongoing engagement and oversight.

32. There are additional opportunities to maximize development outcomes by allocating more resources to nutrition programmes targeting pregnant and breastfeeding women and girls, and children under 2. Strengthening activities that support infants and children during the critical first 1,000 days of life is essential for achieving long-term effects. Aligning these efforts with school meal activities for primary-school-age children could further reinforce nutrition gains and support broader development objectives.

Strengthening the resilience of smallholder farmers and communities – strategic outcome 4

The food assistance for assets model helped smallholder farmers improve their productivity and rehabilitate agricultural assets, particularly for the production of rice, vegetables and orange-fleshed sweet potatoes. While incomes increased, challenges such as food-price inflation, delayed payments, and market price fluctuations affected food security and profits.

33. The evaluation found that WFP's food assistance for assets model provided effective incentives for community participation in the rehabilitation of unproductive agricultural assets, notably inland valley swamps. Asset rehabilitation targets were consistently met, contributing to increased productivity and facilitating multi-cropping. Through asset creation and livelihood activities, smallholder farmers benefited from enhanced rice production, improved agricultural inputs, training in climate-smart practices, and better water and post-harvest management.

34. Asset creation and livelihood activities enhanced the agricultural productivity of smallholders by promoting improved practices, strengthening farmer-based organizations and reinforcing local rice value chains. Mechanization and the introduction of improved rice varieties have reduced labour demands and boosted yields, while training in post-harvest management, processing, marketing and organizational skills has improved the performance of farmer-based organizations. Support from local authorities and community-based organizations contributed further to effective implementation and monitoring.

35. Rice was the primary focus of asset creation and livelihood activities, but the cultivation of vegetables and orange-fleshed sweet potatoes gained significance in recent years, particularly in supporting the HGSF programme. These crops, produced and marketed mainly by women, play an increasingly important role in strengthening local food systems.

36. There is evidence of improved incomes for vulnerable farmers, although outcomes related to food security and nutrition have shown less progress, probably owing to rising food-price inflation in Sierra Leone. WFP's purchases of rice from smallholder farmers increased significantly during the CSP period, in both volume and sales. Agricultural producers selling to WFP reported several benefits, such as bulk sales, premium prices, reduced transport costs and lower wastage compared with sales through local markets.

TABLE 1: SMALLHOLDER FARMERS' SALES THROUGH WFP-SUPPORTED AGGREGATION SYSTEMS

	2020	**2021**	**2022**	**2023**	**2024**	**CSP target**
Value of smallholder sales through WFP-supported aggregation systems *(USD)*	34 752	45 707	98 831	92 840	840 085[1]	≥ 420 000
Sales volume by smallholder farmers through WFP-supported aggregation *(mt)*	50	70.45	125.9	125.15	1 015.6[2]	≥ 600

Source: Country office monitoring data.

[1] Rice: USD 530,264; pulses: USD 309,821.

[2] Rice: 616 mt; pulses: 399.6 mt.

37. WFP's local procurement supports the development of food production value chains, creating stable markets for smallholder farmers and contributing to important outcomes in local agricultural value chains and food systems. However, the procurement process is lengthy, and smallholder farmers reported cash flow challenges due to payment delays, leading to the adoption of negative coping strategies. In addition, some farmers noted that fluctuations in market prices, exacerbated by inflation, risked undercutting the profits generated from agreements to supply agricultural products for WFP's HGSF programmes at prices below prevailing market rates. In this regard, the evaluation team observed that contracting modalities sometimes lacked sufficient flexibility to account for such price fluctuations.

WFP's performance on cross-cutting issues in Sierra Leone

WFP adhered to humanitarian principles and ensured accountability, but the integration of environmental considerations and gender-related outcomes was limited. Beneficiary women and girls faced increased workloads without adequate compensation, affecting their livelihoods. Accountability to affected people was not consistently operationalized.

38. The evaluation found that WFP largely adhered to **humanitarian principles** throughout the implementation of the CSP and effectively upheld its commitments to providing accountability to affected people. All CSP activities, including those related to humanitarian and crisis response, were generally in line with relevant humanitarian principles. Beneficiaries were able to participate in WFP programmes without concerns related to safety, dignity or integrity. Most beneficiaries were aware that there was a community feedback mechanism, but many were reluctant to use it. Nevertheless, the evaluation found that accountability to affected people was not consistently operationalized throughout WFP programming, which made it impossible to compile complete data on beneficiary feedback and to meet related targets.

39. With regard to **environmental and climate issues,** while they were to a degree integrated into the CSP, they were not systematically embedded in the design of all programme activities. This limitation stemmed from a lack of the technical expertise and other human resources needed at the country office to conduct thorough environmental and climate analyses. Although there are examples of climate-related activities, such as the incorporation of environmental factors into specific initiatives, more can be done to proactively address environmental and social risks in all programming. There is a need for more comprehensive assessments to ensure that environmental and climate issues are fully integrated into the programme design process.

40. **Efforts to address gender inequality and promote the economic empowerment of women and girls** have made tangible progress under the CSP, with numerous examples illustrating efforts to integrate gender-related concerns into key activities. Initiatives such as the distribution of "wonder stoves" to smallholder farmers, the prioritization of women in the targeting of activities related to village savings and loan associations, and the gender parity observed within farmer-based organizations provide evidence of these efforts. However, the CSP has not achieved outcomes related to the equal sharing of power between women and men, with the notable exception of women's increased participation in decision-making in farmer-based organizations.

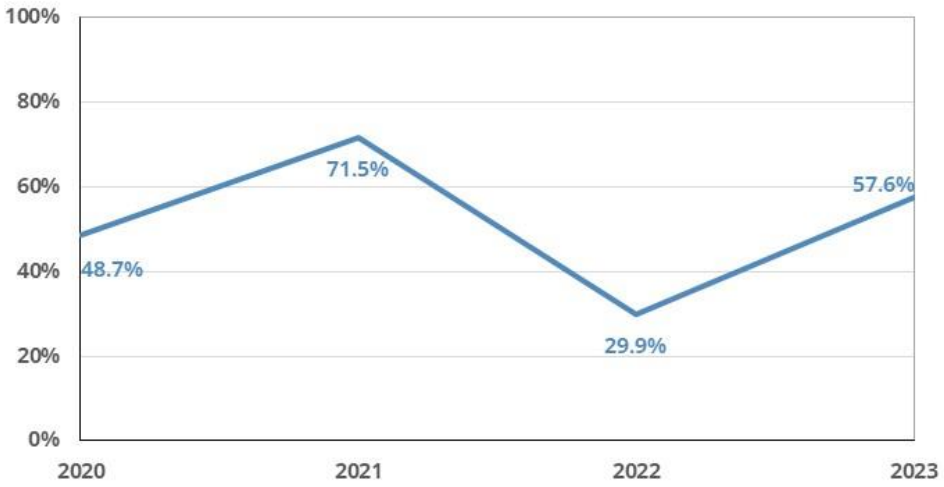
41. There were unintended negative consequences for beneficiary women and girls, particularly under strategic outcome 3, on nutrition. Women, especially those running local complementary food production sites supported by WFP, experienced increased workloads without adequate remuneration. Slow start-ups and repeated equipment failures at these sites exacerbated the situation, further burdening women. Time spent at these sites also limited women's ability to engage in local farming, undermining their opportunities to engage in sustainable livelihoods and their capacity to support their families. Systematic gender analyses could help to address these challenges by identifying specific areas where women's needs and the potential risks they face can be more effectively addressed and mitigated.

Efficiency and timeliness

CSP implementation faced delays, particularly in respect of school meal activities, but achieved cost-efficiencies through streamlined supply chains and local purchases.

42. The utilization of CSP financial resources was uneven owing to challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and other implementation constraints, particularly delays in school meal initiatives. Various factors affected operational efficiency, with school meal activities experiencing significant delays. Despite these challenges, WFP achieved key cost efficiencies by expanding its school meal programme, which had the lowest expenditure per beneficiary among WFP activities. In addition, the country office took strategic steps to streamline the supply chain, notably by eliminating operational redundancies through the closure of the Freetown port warehouse in 2021 and the Makeni logistics base in 2022, resulting in considerable cost savings.

Figure 3: Total annual utilization rate of available resources



Source: IRM Analytics (ACR5-A Annual financial overview, 2018–2023).

43. In implementing activities under the CSP, WFP generally employed cost-efficient modalities. In cases where relatively high-cost programming approaches were used, they were justified by their contributions to broader development outcomes. For example, while local purchases from smallholder farmers for the HGSF programme were often more expensive than imported food commodities, they played a crucial role in strengthening local value chains and markets.

44. Fewer than 60 percent of activities were implemented as scheduled. Delays were particularly notable under strategic outcome 2, including setbacks in signing agreements with the Government of Sierra Leone and delivering food to schools. Similar challenges affected strategic outcome 3, with delays in establishing local complementary food production sites, and strategic outcome 4, where delays in the delivery of agricultural inputs hindered progress.

Key factors underpinning WFP's performance in Sierra Leone

WFP's performance in Sierra Leone was supported by strong funding, although donors' limited interest in crisis response and malnutrition prevention created challenges. Financial constraints and donors' short-term priorities hindered progress towards CSP outcomes, while WFP's monitoring systems remained a key strength for the targeting of food security activities.

45. The CSP was largely well-funded, benefiting from an increasingly diversified donor base. As of August 2024 – the end of the data collection period – 70.6 percent of the needs-based plan had been funded. However, most funding shortfalls stemmed from a lack of donor interest in crisis response following the Ebola virus disease outbreak and in nutrition prevention and country capacity strengthening activities. School meal programmes remain the highest priority for WFP's donors in Sierra Leone and are a core component of WFP's operations in the country.

46. Despite the relatively strong funding base, a large share of CSP resources was allocated on a year-to-year basis, creating challenges for programme planning. Most donors prioritized short-term interventions, such as food distribution – including school meals, MAM treatment, and the response to the COVID-19 pandemic – rather than the multi-year, community-based approaches needed to prevent malnutrition. In addition, most funding was earmarked, limiting the country office's flexibility to adapt to shifting needs.

47. Financial constraints combined with external challenges hindered progress towards CSP outcomes. Key contextual factors – including the COVID-19 pandemic, structural issues such as poverty and the rising cost of living, and a limited donor pool – negatively affected WFP's performance. Specifically, donors' reluctance to fund malnutrition prevention activities limited WFP's shift from MAM treatment to a more preventive approach. These financial limitations restricted the scope of nutrition activities under the CSP, with donors favouring short-term outcomes over sustainable, long-term activities such as MAM prevention.

48. Most outcome indicators for measuring progress were effective, except for those related to country capacity strengthening activities. Overall, WFP's monitoring and reporting systems tracked inputs and activity coverage effectively but were less robust in demonstrating progress toward expected outcomes. Data generated externally through the comprehensive food security and vulnerability analysis, the food security monitoring system, and price monitoring, which the Government and other agencies use to design and target food security interventions more effectively, constituted a key comparative advantage for WFP.

Effectiveness and contributions to aid coordination of WFP's partnerships

WFP formed strong partnerships with the Government of Sierra Leone and key United Nations entities, focusing on short-term outcomes and national priorities. Collaboration with non-governmental and international organizations also played a key role in reaching vulnerable communities and enhancing programme effects.

49. WFP established strong partnerships with the Government, focusing on complementary programme activities aligned with national priorities. Key government ministries and agencies, such as the National Disaster Management Agency, the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security and the Ministry of Health, were integral to the implementation of CSP activities. This collaboration was essential

for delivering results at both the national and subnational levels, although it mainly emphasized short-term outcomes rather than fostering long-term strategic partnerships.

50. WFP also engaged in the United Nations country team and with specialized agencies of the United Nations to implement the CSP. Collaboration with other country team members was essential, particularly with the International Organization for Migration, the United Nations Development Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations on jointly implemented peacebuilding projects. WFP also worked alongside the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development in providing up-to-date vulnerability assessments such as a food security and welfare survey and a comprehensive food security and vulnerability analysis. However, there are untapped opportunities for strategic cross-sector collaboration, such as partnering the United Nations Population Fund to address adolescent girls' nutrition through mother support groups.

51. Relationships with cooperating partners were crucial throughout implementation of the CSP. WFP worked successfully with cooperating partners in leveraging their national reach and capacity to reach the most vulnerable communities.

52. WFP also engaged in various other partnerships, including with the Sierra Leone agricultural research institute. An emerging strategic partnership on water, sanitation and hygiene holds significant potential for future collaboration. Further partnerships could also strengthen efforts in teacher training and enhance nutrition awareness programmes in schools.

Recommendations and sub-recommendations	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP office and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
Recommendation 1: Address slow-onset emergencies through a targeted and increasingly integrated portfolio of programming that builds resilience and addresses the root causes of hunger, while maintaining flexible emergency response capacity to work at the humanitarian–development nexus.	Strategic	Country office (crisis response, nutrition, asset creation and livelihoods, and research, assessment and monitoring (RAM) units)	National Disaster Management Agency, Western and Central Africa regional office/Office of Evaluation, UNICEF, Ministry of Health, including the Food and Nutrition Directorate, Scaling Up Nutrition secretariat	Medium	For the next CSP
1.1 Maximize outcomes by increasing integration throughout WFP's programming portfolio by, for example, working from geographic hubs using the linkages among programmes to deliver critical elements of resilience building in various combinations, starting with key activities and progressively integrating and layering other programmes – including HGSF and nutrition – based on local conditions, livelihoods and capacity.	Strategic	Country office (school feeding, nutrition, and asset creation and livelihoods units)	N/A	Medium	For the next CSP
1.2 Expand capacity strengthening support for the National Disaster Management Agency, focusing on its capacity to implement and coordinate disaster response outside of Freetown.	Operational	Country office (crisis response unit)	National Disaster Management Agency	Medium	From 2024 into the next CSP
1.3 Develop and use indicators that better measure the contributions made in the different domains of WFP's country capacity strengthening activities, such as policy and technical support, organizational and institutional support, and individual support.	Operational	Country office (crisis response and RAM units)	Regional office and Office of Evaluation	Medium	For the next CSP

Recommendations and sub-recommendations	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP office and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
1.4 Develop and maintain a contingency plan for the treatment of MAM when MAM rates reach critical levels, in partnership with agencies treating severe acute malnutrition.	Operational	Country office (crisis response and nutrition units)	Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education, National School Feeding Secretariat (NSFS), UNICEF, World Vision, and other cooperating partners (including partners such as the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security)	Medium	For the next CSP
Recommendation 2: Strengthen support for the national school meal programme through improved partnership and collaboration.	Strategic	Country office (school feeding and procurement units)	Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education, NSFS, UNICEF, World Vision and other cooperating partners	Medium	From 2024 into the next CSP
2.1 Pursue greater strategic collaboration with partners, with WFP serving in a facilitation role – alongside the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education and in relevant technical working groups – to help promote partnerships based on its own comparative advantages to deliver holistic multisectoral school meal programmes with better connections to work on nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene, education and other areas.	Strategic	Country office (school feeding unit)	NSFS, UNICEF, World Vision and other cooperating partners (including partners such as the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security)	Medium	From 2024 into the next CSP
2.2 Review long-term agreements with high-performing private transporters, refining the vendor pool to promote vendors that possess the capacity to engage in contracts with WFP. These efforts might be supported by secondary bidding processes aimed at ensuring competition and helping to provide access to newly qualified potential partners.	Operational	Country office (school feeding and procurement units)	N/A	Low	For the next CSP

Recommendations and sub-recommendations	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP office and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
Recommendation 3: Increase investment in nutrition programming for the first 1,000 days of life in order to provide the foundation for a continuum of development activities that change the lives of Sierra Leoneans throughout their lifespans, with nutrition programming for the first 1,000 days of life targeting pregnant and breastfeeding women and girls and children under 2, and, for the next 4,000 days, targeting schoolchildren for school meal programmes, and young people for asset creation and livelihood activities.	Strategic	Country office (nutrition unit, Country Director and Deputy Country Director and partnerships unit)	Ministry of Health, including the Food and Nutrition Directorate, donors and others	High/medium	For the next CSP
3.1 Budget and plan for a significantly scaled up portfolio of malnutrition prevention programming, advocating with donors for more multi-year funds to increase nutrition programming aimed at achieving gains in the first 1,000 days of life, thus also reinforcing other funding investments for later in life, such as school meal programmes for children, and asset creation and livelihood activities for young people and adults.	Strategic	Country office (nutrition unit, Country Director and Deputy Country Director and partnerships unit)	Ministry of Health, including the Food and Nutrition Directorate and donors	High	From 2024 into the next CSP
3.2 Expand nutrition programming to include adolescent girls, stepping up community advocacy to overcome any cultural barriers that may impede their participation in mother support groups, either directly through WFP activities or indirectly through strategic partnerships, and – where culturally appropriate – target older women as change agents and key members of mother support groups.	Operational	Country office (nutrition unit)	N/A	Medium	For the next CSP

Recommendations and sub-recommendations	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP office and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
3.3 Develop a clear plan for moving from the start-up phase of local complementary food production to the profitability phase, which includes sharing and consolidating early experiences across production sites, including with regard to standards for profitability such as break-even points, labour such as fair and living wages, capacity strengthening and training on organizational governance, financial and business management[1] and other issues. "Do-no-harm" and sustainability issues should also be considered, including through analysis of potential negative impacts.	Operational	Country office (nutrition unit)		High	For the next CSP
3.4 Leveraging WFP's strengths in supply chains, expand the distribution networks for local complementary foods beyond production sites by including income-generating opportunities for mother support groups that enable them to serve as intermediaries in reselling the foods to other communities, family members, neighbours, markets, etc.; and by exploring the production options for using smaller packages in quantities and at prices that are affordable to vulnerable households in the areas where WFP is working.	Operational	Country office (nutrition unit)	Private sector	Medium	For the next CSP
Recommendation 4: Continued asset creation and livelihood support for farmer-based organizations should include links to market linkages through procurement processes and systems that match the needs of smallholders with limited financial and other resources.	Operational	Country office (school feeding, asset creation and livelihoods, and procurement units)	Regional office and headquarters in Rome	Medium/low	By the end of the next CSP

[1] The activities under recommendation 3.3 can be pursued in collaboration with partners such as private sector entities that can provide business and management training to mother support group members; cooperating partners with a track record in developing local complementary foods (e.g., Helen Keller International and World Vision); and research institutions that can promote and evaluate good local complementary food production practices (e.g., the International Food Policy Research Institute, Emory University, McGill University, the University of Toronto and others).

Recommendations and sub-recommendations	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP office and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
4.1 Conduct regular, such as annual, assessments of systemic issues related to identifying inefficiencies and bottlenecks in existing procurement processes.	Operational	Country office (procurement unit) and regional office	N/A	Medium/low	For the next CSP
4.2 Continue to make local procurement contracting processes more efficient within existing WFP guidelines, aiming to continue to decrease the length of the local procurement process from the point of delivery to the payment of smallholder farmers.	Operational	Regional office and country office (school feeding, asset creation and livelihoods, and procurement units)	Headquarters in Rome	Medium	By the end of the next CSP
4.3 Develop flexible pricing and contracting mechanisms that foster a "do-no-harm" approach and prioritize the profits of smallholder farmers in case of market volatility, especially when prices increase dramatically.	Operational	Country office (procurement unit)	Regional office and headquarters in Rome	Medium	By the end of the next CSP
Recommendation 5: Expand efforts to promote gender equality, women's economic empowerment and environmental sustainability throughout the next CSP.	Strategic	Country office (crisis response, school feeding, nutrition, asset creation and livelihoods, and RAM units) and headquarters in Rome	Regional office and headquarters in Rome	Medium	By the end of the next CSP
5.1 Apply the WFP environmental and social sustainability framework to all programming to ensure that environmental dimensions are appropriately recognized and addressed and better identify opportunities for promoting equality and women's empowerment.	Strategic	Country office	Regional office and headquarters in Rome	Medium	By the end of the next CSP

Recommendations and sub-recommendations	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP office and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
5.2 Conduct assessments of the participation of women volunteers in WFP programming, including the members of mother support groups and the cooks of school meals, in order to determine the options for women's economic empowerment and their participation in WFP's programmes such as those for village savings and loan associations, agricultural support, market linkages to local complementary food production sites and HGSF.	Operational	Country office (school feeding, nutrition and RAM units)	Regional office and headquarters in Rome	Medium	By the end of the next CSP
5.3 Better incorporate indicators related to gender equality and women's empowerment, environment and climate throughout the portfolio of activities to encourage monitoring, reporting and progress in both areas, with appropriate support from headquarters in Rome to fill capacity gaps in the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment and in environmental screening, identify the most appropriate indicators, and support continuous monitoring and data collection.	Strategic	Country office (crisis response, school feeding, nutrition, asset creation and livelihoods, and RAM units) and headquarters in Rome	Regional office	Medium	For the next CSP

Acronyms

COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
CSP	country strategic plan
HGSF	home-grown school feeding
MAM	moderate acute malnutrition
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund