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Summary report on the evaluation of the country strategic plan for the Lao People's Democratic Republic (2017–2021)

Executive summary

An evaluation of the country strategic plan for the Lao People's Democratic Republic for the period 2017–2021 was conducted between July 2020 and April 2021 and 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 and informed the preparation of a new country strategic plan for the Lao People's Democratic Republic. The evaluation assessed WFP's strategic positioning, its contribution to outcomes, the efficiency with which the plan has been implemented and the factors explaining WFP's performance.

The Lao People's Democratic Republic is a lower-middle-income country with economic disparities among geographic regions, ethnic groups and education levels. Food insecurity and undernutrition are a preoccupation. The Government has localized the Sustainable Development Goals and integrated them into its national planning framework.

The CSP articulates a shift from the provision of food assistance to policy engagement and an intensification of country capacity strengthening, with four strategic outcomes focused on schoolchildren in rural remote areas, stunting levels, resilience with regard to climate shocks, and national and local institutional strengthening.

Overall, the CSP is relevant to national priorities and government commitments with regard to Sustainable Development Goal 2 and has been successfully adapted to respond to emergency situations, including the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. WFP operates across a large geographic area, although it faced challenges in reaching some of the

In line with the Evaluation Policy (2016–2021) (WFP/EB.2/2015/4-A/Rev.1), to respect the integrity and independence of evaluation findings the editing of this report has been limited and as a result some of the language in it may not be fully consistent with the World Food Programme's standard terminology or editorial practices. Please direct any requests for clarification to the Director of Evaluation.

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most remote communities and striking a balance between reaching remote areas and maximizing the number of beneficiaries reached by targeting those that were relatively accessible.

WFP contributed significantly to improving the policy and budget landscape for a national school meals programme, but increasing community ownership and capacity requires continuous follow-up for the handover strategy to be fully successful.

Individual activities in nutrition, agricultural production and resilience have shown success. A comprehensive approach to developing resilience and an articulated overarching strategy for strengthening institutional capacity under all strategic outcomes would have facilitated more significant progress.

Although WFP has mobilized a high percentage of the funds called for in the needs-based plan, use of the funds has been limited by delayed receipt of contributions and earmarking. The country strategic plan has enabled stronger partnerships with the Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic at all levels.

The evaluation concludes that development partners in the country appreciate WFP for its traditional strengths and extensive reach. At the same time, WFP is encouraged to demonstrate further its ability to engage with partners to execute development work effectively. The implementation of the plan as a strategy would have benefited from a stronger analysis of internal and external capacity to implement it and to shift to more strategic engagement in the country.

The evaluation makes five recommendations for the WFP country office, which include enhanced utilization of evidence to support the shaping and implementation of a realistic scope and focus for the next country strategic plan; strategic engagement with partners with the aim of more effectively integrating partnerships into programming; development of a country office approach to resilience strengthening and emergency preparedness and response; capacity building for WFP staff in country capacity strengthening; and reinforcement of WFP's approach to the handover of the school meals programme.

Draft decision*

* As presented to and endorsed by the Bureau at its 19 July 2021 meeting, when a CSP evaluation and a new CSP for a particular country are presented jointly during a formal Board session, one single decision is to be approved by the Board to cover both items. For this evaluation, please refer to the decision available in the Lao People's Democratic Republic country strategic plan (2022–2026) in document WFP/EB.2/2021/7-A/2/Rev.1.

Introduction

Evaluation features

1. An evaluation of the Lao People's Democratic Republic country strategic plan (CSP) for the period 2017–2021 was conducted between July 2020 and April 2021. Combining accountability and learning objectives, it was timed to inform the design of the next CSP for the country, with fieldwork conducted in October 2020. The main users of the evaluation are the WFP country office, the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific and headquarters technical units and other WFP stakeholders.
2. The evaluation scope covers WFP activities implemented under the CSP for 2017–2021, assessing WFP's strategic positioning and the extent to which WFP made the shift expected under the CSP; WFP's effectiveness in contributing to the CSP strategic outcomes; the efficiency with which the CSP was implemented; and factors explaining WFP's performance.
3. An independent external evaluation team undertook the evaluation using mixed methods, drawing on monitoring data, document review and semi-structured interviews with more than 200 stakeholders at the national and local levels. Data collection ended on 30 October 2020. Attention was paid to accountability to affected populations, ethical considerations, and gender equality and women's empowerment. Information was triangulated using various sources to ensure the validity of the findings.
4. Travel restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic were partially compensated for by a hybrid approach to data collection: part of the team collected data in person, particularly in the field, while the other part worked remotely. Limited availability of monitoring data limited the assessment of outcomes and cost-efficiency.
5. The evaluation process was coordinated with three other United Nations evaluations running concurrently for the United Nations Partnership Framework, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Population Fund.

Context

6. The Lao People's Democratic Republic is a land-locked country with 67.1 percent of the population living in rural areas. It is a lower-middle-income country with a growing economy and increasing socioeconomic disparities among geographic regions, ethnic groups and education levels. The COVID-19 pandemic is affecting labour-intensive sectors of the economy.

TABLE 1: LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC SOCIOECONOMIC INDICATORS		
Year	Indicator	Value
2020	Total population ^a	7.2 million
2018	Life expectancy ^b	68 years
2018	Gross domestic product per capita ^b	USD 2 460
2018/19	National poverty head count ^c	18.3 percent
2012	GINI coefficient ^b	36.4
2018	Gender inequality index score ^d	0.604
2017	Prevalence of under 5 stunting ^e	33 percent
2017	Prevalence of under 5 wasting ^e	9 percent
2015	Over 15 literacy rate ^b	85 percent

Sources:

^a Worldometer elaboration of the latest United Nations data. Available at: <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/>.

^b World Bank. World Development Indicators.

^c Lao Statistics Bureau and World Bank. 2020. *Poverty Profile in Lao PDR: Poverty Report for the Lao Expenditure and Consumption Survey 2018–2019*.

^d United Nations Development Programme. 2019. *Human Development Report 2019*.

^e Lao Statistics Bureau. 2018. *Lao Social Indicator Survey II 2017, Survey Findings Report*.

7. People living in remote regions are more vulnerable to food insecurity, with 11 percent of rural households classified as having “severe” food insecurity compared with 6 percent of urban households.¹ The prevalence of undernutrition remains high overall (see table 1) and varies by geographic location and ethnic group.² People with livelihoods dependent on agriculture or natural resources are particularly vulnerable to natural hazards induced by climate change.
8. While primary education net enrolment reached 98.8 percent in 2016, the retention rate at grade 5 is lower, at 81.1 percent in 2017.³ Gender patterns are highly diverse among the 49 ethnic groups, and the country consistently ranks low in gender equality indices.
9. The Government's 8th Five-year National Socio-Economic Development Plan (2016–2020),⁴ aims to achieve socioeconomic development, industrialization and modernization and to paving the way to graduation from least-developed country status by 2026. The Government has localized the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and integrated them into its national planning framework.
10. The United Nations Partnership Framework for 2017–2021 for the country supports the Government through action under three thematic pillars: inclusive growth, livelihoods and resilience, and human development and governance.

¹ Lao Statistics Bureau and World Bank. 2020. *Poverty Profile in Lao PDR: Poverty Report for the Lao Expenditure and Consumption Survey 2018–2019*.

² Lao Statistics Bureau. 2018. *Lao Social Indicator Survey II 2017, Survey Findings Report*.

³ United Nations Development Programme. *Sustainable Development Goals. Lao PDR. Goal 4: Quality education*.

⁴ Available at: https://laopdr.un.org/sites/default/files/2019-08/2016_8th%20NSED%202016-2020_English.pdf.

Country strategic plan

11. The CSP articulates a shift from the provision of food assistance to policy engagement and an intensification of country capacity strengthening through ten activities under four strategic outcomes (see figure 1).

Figure 1: Line of sight – Lao People’s Democratic Republic country strategic plan (2017–2021)

WFP Strategic Goal 1 (SDG 2)			WFP Strategic Goal 2 (SDG 17)	
WFP Strategic Results				
1: Everyone has access to food (SDG Target 2.1)	2: No one suffers from malnutrition (SDG Target 2.2)		4: Food systems are sustainable (SDG Target 2.4)	5: Developing countries have strengthened capacity to implement the SDGs (SDG Target 17.9)
Strategic outcomes				
1: Schoolchildren in remote rural areas have sustainable access to food by 2021	2: Stunting levels among children under 2 in provinces with high levels of malnutrition meet national targets by 2025		3: Vulnerable households in climate-sensitive districts are more resilient to seasonal and long-term shocks and stresses	4: National and local governance institutions are strengthened to improve service delivery, especially in hard-to-reach areas, by 2025
Activity 1: Provide policy support, technical assistance and capacity transfer	Activity 4: Provide technical assistance for evidence-based policy dialogue	Activity 5: Stimulate access to local specialized nutritious food for children aged 6–23 months	Activity 7: Build community resilience through the creation of productive assets and sustainable livelihood opportunities	Activity 8: Invest in national governance capacity for food and nutrition security
Activity 2: Accelerate implementation of the Government’s plan of action for the school meals programme	Activity 6: Develop a social behaviour change communication strategy and nutrition schools for farmers		Activity 9: Enable communities to lead and own their food and nutrition security solutions	
Activity 3: Support a national process for handover of the school meals programme to communities and the Government			Activity 10: Enhance the capacity of government at all levels to prepare for and respond to natural disasters	

12. By September 2020, WFP had been able to mobilize 90 percent of the funding it needed to implement the CSP – USD 88 million following a fourth budget revision – with 56 percent of the total coming from the United States of America’s McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program.

Evaluation findings

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

Relevance to national policies, plans and strategies

13. Developed in consultation with the Government, the CSP is overall relevant to the national priorities of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic through appropriate alignment with key national policies and strategies such as the 8th Five-year National Socio-Economic

Development Plan (2016–2020), the national policy on promoting school lunch, the national nutrition strategy and the national strategy for gender equality. The CSP is also aligned with government commitments to the achievement of SDG 2.

Addressing the needs of the most vulnerable people and communities

14. The CSP used appropriate vulnerability indicators to identify the most vulnerable groups for targeting under each strategic objective. WFP demonstrated impressive reach by operating in 22 percent of all the villages in the country across 17 of the Government's 23 priority poor districts. However, the absence of a clear prioritization strategy and the limited availability of up-to-date data during the development of the CSP may have affected WFP's ability always to reach the most vulnerable people. WFP also faced challenges in reaching some of the most remote communities and in striking a balance between reaching remote areas and maximizing the number of beneficiaries reached by targeting those that were relatively accessible.

Adaptation

15. WFP successfully adapted its strategic position to respond to emergency situations such as the floods that occurred in 2018 and 2019, even though emergency response was not a feature of the original CSP design. Various national counterparts provided positive feedback on WFP's emergency responses, which together with support for emergency preparedness and food distribution are recognized as WFP's comparative advantages in the country. The CSP also allowed WFP to respond appropriately to changing needs such as the increased pressure on vulnerable households that resulted from COVID-19. WFP responded through adaptation of its school feeding work under activity 2 and its agriculture for nutrition support under activity 6 and by increasing the number of cash-based transfer beneficiaries under activity 7.

Partnerships

16. The CSP offers a conceptually coherent approach to the achievement of zero hunger through support for United Nations partnerships. The CSP's strong alignment with the overall objectives of the United Nations Partnership Framework for the country contributed to working relationships with the other Rome-based agencies and the United Nations Population Fund and has resulted in complementarity with activities of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in some provinces. To enhance coherence further, WFP has also joined and helped establish several multi-partner working groups.

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

Delivery of outputs and contribution to outcomes

17. The overall assessment of performance on delivery (see table 2) shows that WFP has made progress and experienced success in delivering its programme, but successful delivery at the output level has not always resulted in progress towards expected outcomes.

TABLE 2: PERFORMANCE IN THE DELIVERY OF OUTPUTS AND ACHIEVEMENT OF OUTCOMES ^a			
Strategic outcome	Progress towards delivery of outputs (2017–2019) ^b	Progress towards strategic outcome (at end of 2019) ^c	Likelihood of achieving end-of-CSP (2021) outcome ^d
1 Schoolchildren in remote rural areas have sustainable access to food by 2021	Significant progress	Significant progress ^e	Will fall somewhat short
2 Stunting levels among children under 2 in provinces with high levels of malnutrition meet national targets by 2025	Significant progress	Limited progress	Will fall somewhat short
3 Vulnerable households in climate-sensitive districts are more resilient to seasonal and long-term shocks and stresses	Significant progress	Limited progress	Will fall somewhat short
4 National and local governance institutions are strengthened to ensure improved service delivery, especially in hard-to-reach areas, by 2025	Very limited progress	Very limited progress	Will fall significantly short given the nature of the engagement and progress so far ^f

^a Output indicators are defined in the WFP country office tool for managing effectively (COMET), and may be downloaded from COMET in target baseline and follow-up reports, which are designated as CM-R008 reports. The outputs referred to in table 2 do not cover beneficiaries reached, cash-based transfers distributed or food distributed, which are reported separately in CM-R007 annual distribution (CSP) reports.

^b Analysis of output indicators is based on the specific activities undertaken rather than the activities planned. Levels of progress are based on performance against CSP year-end targets: “somewhat off-target” implies a difference of less than 30 percent between the target and the actual result, and “significantly off-target” implies a difference of at least 30 percent.

^c Performance data on outcomes are drawn from country office monitoring data in COMET outcome indicator reports (CM-R010b) for 2017, 2018 and 2019.

^d Based on the markers of progress that the evaluation team expected to find rather than the indicators of outcome-level change used in the country office monitoring framework.

^e Based on indicators related to education outcomes monitored from 2017 to 2019.

^f This finding does not reflect progress in capacity strengthening activities under other strategic outcomes.

18. Under strategic outcome 1 WFP largely delivered on its annual plans. There is significant evidence of the positive effects of school feeding on children’s school attendance and, in some cases, ability to study. Between 2017 and 2019, dropout rates for girls decreased more slowly than those for boys, and as of 2019 targets for dropout rates had not been reached. Field observations showed that while some schools were able to ensure the provision of five meals a week, that was not universally achieved as intended.
19. WFP made significant contributions to improving the policy and budget landscape for a national school meals programme, reflecting the Government’s commitment to school feeding. WFP has been engaging closely with the Government on strengthening institutional frameworks and capacity for a phased handover of the programme, while providing capacity strengthening and coordination activities for authorities, coordination mechanisms and committees at the village, district and provincial levels.
20. At the start of CSP implementation, WFP undertook a community capacity assessment to assess the readiness of each school community to contribute to the management and sustainability of the school meals programme, and to determine how best to tailor support. Capacity training activities for community- and village-level authorities, coordination mechanisms and committees were aimed at supporting the school meals programme but in some cases were not sufficient to build sustainable capacity.

21. The handover model is based on strong ownership of the school meals programme at the community level. Efforts to increase community ownership showed mixed results. While some communities demonstrated clearly that the model works, others were confronted by high turnover of counterparts and community staff, limited government funding and lack of incentives for village-level authorities. These factors posed challenges for capacity strengthening efforts and the management and monitoring of post-handover activities. The capabilities of communities were not reassessed just before handover, resulting in limited understanding of their readiness for handover. Challenges in the handover process put at risk sustainable access to food for children in remote areas.
22. Under strategic outcome 2, WFP engaged with government actors at various levels on activities for addressing stunting in provinces with high levels of malnutrition and on individual activities that resulted in positive outputs. Although a Scaling Up Nutrition business network was successfully established early in the CSP it has engaged in little subsequent activity. The agriculture for nutrition project with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) has had positive results at the community level, with indications that it is helping to address malnutrition and food insecurity.
23. WFP has established a number of successful farmer nutrition schools with a high proportion of women participants. WFP reached remote communities with nutrition awareness raising campaigns and provided specialized nutritious foods for pregnant and lactating women and girls and children under 2 years of age. WFP is also contributing to the development of rice fortification standards.
24. While those activities have laid important foundations for future work, current results do not provide a coherent picture of WFP's contribution to government-led efforts to tackle malnutrition.
25. Under strategic outcome 3 there have been fewer activities than intended in seeking to build the resilience of vulnerable households in climate-sensitive districts with regard to seasonal and long-term shocks and stresses. WFP used part of the funding for strategic outcome 3 to provide emergency flood response assistance, and there have also been successful examples of food assistance for assets activities, such as the creation of rice banks, which have good potential for the enhancement of community resilience.
26. In partnership with the Government and supported by the global logistics cluster, WFP started implementing a logistics preparedness project to support national emergency preparedness and response operations.
27. The CSP set out an ambitious strategic outcome 4 focused on capacity strengthening. WFP has successfully used opportunities to strengthen capacity in areas such as emergency preparedness, but the programming of activities in ways that would have been expected to guide and accelerate capacity building under the other strategic outcomes has been limited. The absence of an overarching approach to strengthening institutional capacity affected progress towards the objectives and strategic outcomes of the CSP.

Gender and cross-cutting aims

28. The targeting of beneficiaries was largely needs-based and gender-balanced (see table 3). Efforts were made to reach various age groups and ethnically diverse communities, to include persons with disabilities and to adapt delivery so as to reach beneficiaries safely. WFP set up a beneficiary feedback mechanism in every village of operation, but use of the mechanisms has decreased significantly over time.

TABLE 3: TOTAL COUNTRY STRATEGIC PLAN BENEFICIARIES BY GENDER, 2017–2019						
Year	2017		2018		2019	
	Planned	Actual	Planned	Actual	Planned	Actual
Women and girls	102 771	287 414	120 788	330 472	114 895	118 925
Men and boys	96 229	223 998	120 838	339 857	115 630	118 841
Total	199 000	511 412	241 626	670 329	230 525	237 766
Women and girls as a percentage of total	52	56	50	49	50	50

Source: WFP CSP annual country reports 2017, 2018 and 2019.

29. While implementation of the gender action plan that was developed to guide the implementation of the CSP slowed for a period, gender considerations were generally mainstreamed into the implementation of the CSP, and WFP took active steps to gradually improve gender parity in staffing.
30. WFP has also taken several measures to consider environmental concerns, such as environmental risk screening for asset creation and village development plans and training on environmental and social safeguards for staff.

Sustainability

31. WFP contributed to seven pieces of legislation that will support the sustainability of the school meals programme and made good progress in programme handover. In 2019 and 2020, 515 schools were handed over to the Government, and the handover of 924 was planned for June 2021.⁵
32. Community ownership is a vital component of sustainable handover. Recognizing ongoing challenges to the handover process – such as a lack of clarity in the process, government funding limitations and capacity shortages at the local level – WFP is now providing post-handover technical support for school feeding programmes and continuous follow-up aimed at strengthening community ownership where needed.

Linkages between humanitarian and development work

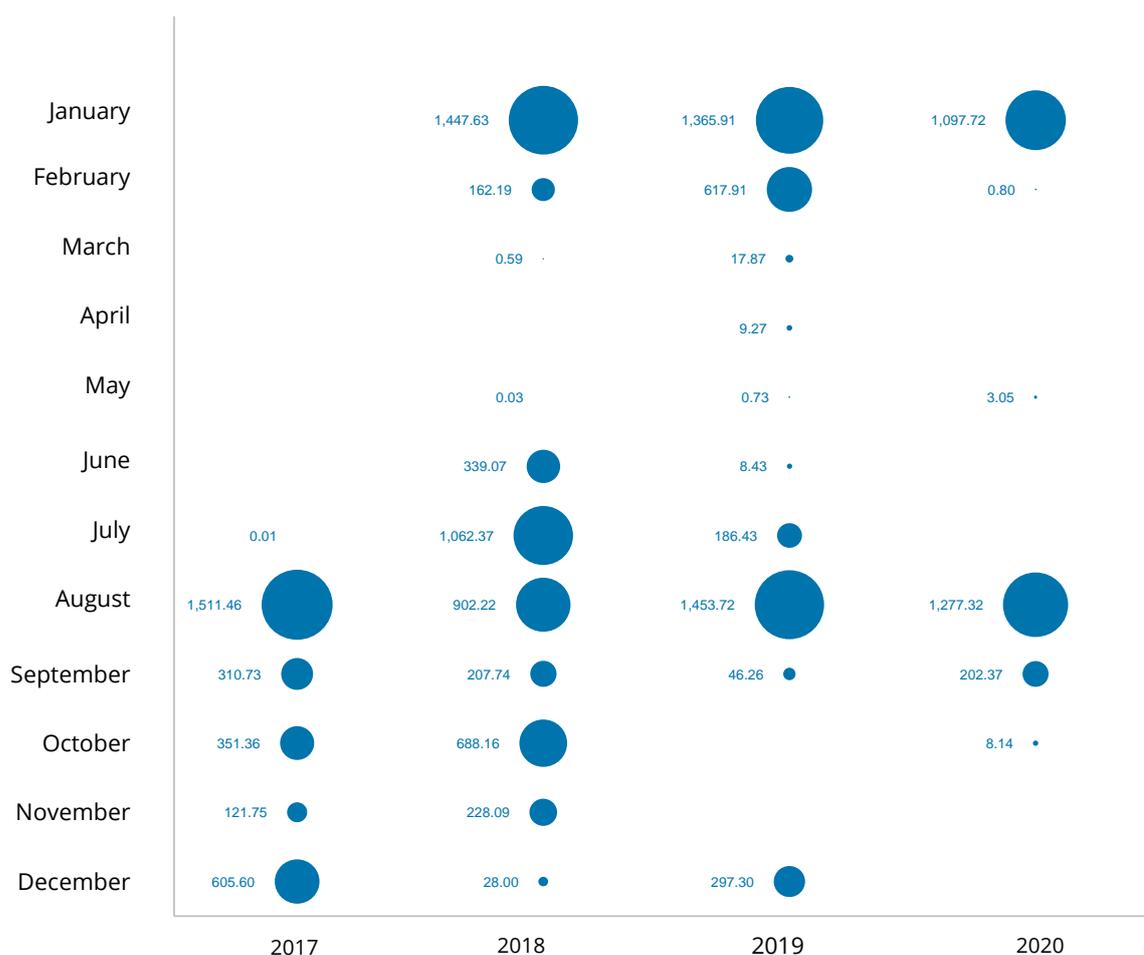
33. The CSP clearly articulates a link between humanitarian and development work under strategic outcome 3, but shortfalls and delays in funding have hindered activities at the nexus between the two. Although the absence of an emergency-related outcome and focus area in the CSP limited WFP's ability to create strategic links between emergency response and development work, the organization was able to develop some innovative links such as a campaign to promote the use of cash-based transfers to support dietary diversity and nutrition.

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

Timeliness of delivery and coverage

34. The evaluation found that the delivery of activities has generally been timely and that the efficiency of food delivery has improved over the course of the CSP (see figure 2).

⁵ Since June 2021 is outside the period evaluated, the evaluation team did not ascertain the extent to which the planned handover of the 924 schools was completed.

Figure 2: Food delivery to schools for school feeding activities, by month (mt)

Source: WFP country office 2020.

35. While WFP reached about 74 percent of the schools in targeted provinces, the level of vulnerability and the remoteness of the schools that were not reached are not clear. Activities under strategic outcomes 2 and 3 were geographically targeted appropriately according to the vulnerabilities that they aimed to address.

Cost-efficiency and cost-effectiveness

36. There were insufficient data for a comprehensive analysis of the cost-efficiency of WFP assistance. However, analysis of available data indicates that the cost-efficiency of activities has improved over the duration of the CSP. For instance, distribution costs for school feeding decreased substantially between 2017 and 2020.
37. WFP carried out several assessments and activities aimed at demonstrating its awareness of the need for cost-effectiveness in programme design. These included a cost-benefit analysis of the school meals programme and the implementation of a procurement programme aimed at improving the cost-effectiveness of food assistance through local and regional procurement. However, there was no clear evidence that such awareness translated into systematic analysis of more cost-effective alternatives.

Staffing

38. In view of the shift from direct food assistance to national capacity strengthening, WFP conducted a workforce review that identified a need to either gradually abolish or transform some staff positions. At the same time, there was also a move towards the employment of national staff in the office. This led to the strengthening of national staff capacity, while positions such as nutrition or gender specialists remained vacant for some time.

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

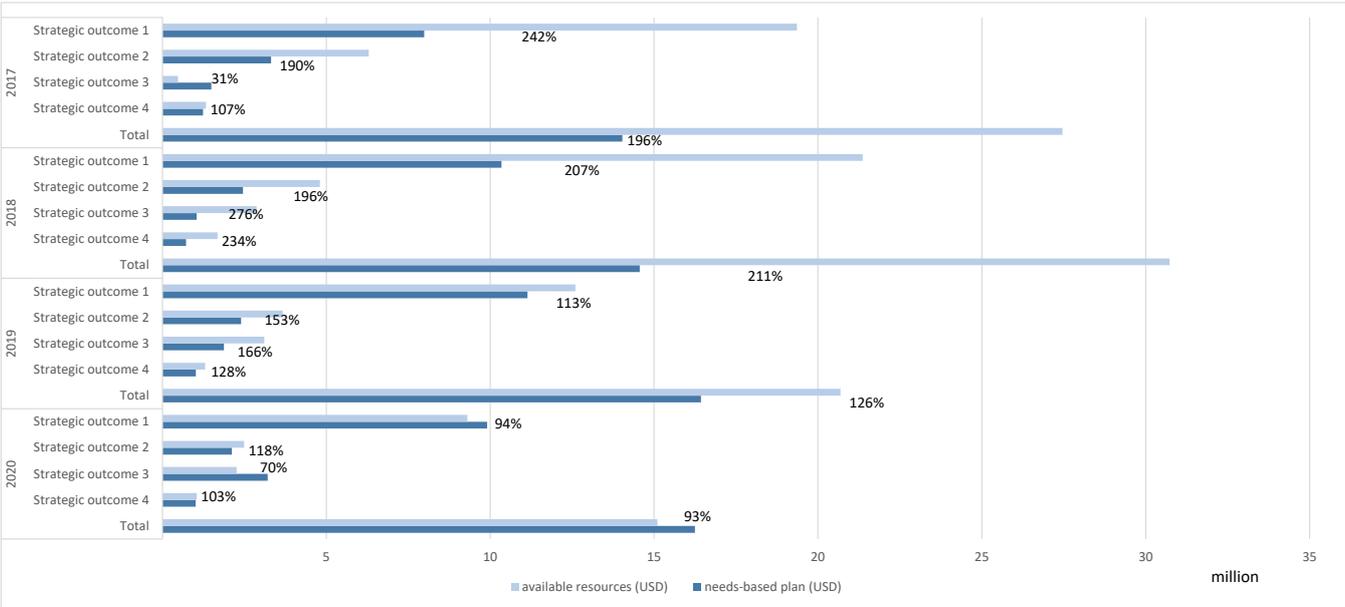
Use of existing evidence

39. WFP extensively used a variety of existing analyses to develop the CSP, drawing predominantly on official government statistics and census data, World Bank and UNICEF analyses of poverty and nutrition, and a strategic review of food and nutrition security commissioned by WFP.

Resource mobilization

40. WFP mobilized a very high percentage of the funds called for in the needs-based plan (see figure 3). However, the amount of resources available at the end of each year masks both the underfunding of some activities such as capacity strengthening under strategic outcomes 2 and 4 and significant delays in the receipt of funds. In addition, although much of the funding was predictable it was not flexible, as resources, in particular the McGovern-Dole funding for school feeding, have tended to be multi-year allocations earmarked for specific strategic outcomes and activities. In addition, a significant proportion of the funding received has come through the continuation of funding streams developed prior to the CSP period.

Figure 3: Needs-based plan and available resources (USD million)



Sources: WFP. CSP results and resources overviews for 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020. Available resources consist of the yearly allocation of contributions plus the unspent balance of allocated contributions carried forward from previous years and advances and other resources for the current year.

Partnerships

41. The CSP's shift to increased technical assistance has repositioned WFP's partnerships with government stakeholders and enabled stronger partnerships at all levels. That is particularly evident in activities that have involved the development of national legislation and policy on school feeding or that support the handover strategy.
42. WFP has working partnerships with United Nations agencies, mainly the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and IFAD. WFP's strategic approach to partnerships has been limited. Some development partners are not fully confident in WFP's current capacity to work fully effectively in development programming. While WFP has had some difficulty developing partnerships with non-governmental organizations owing to lengthy processes including administrative authorization, it has developed strong and beneficial partnerships with a small number of local and international civil society organizations.

Flexibility of the country strategic plan

43. The shift to a CSP has increased WFP's flexibility and its ability to work in the Lao People's Democratic Republic. This has been demonstrated in various ways, such as when WFP responded to flood emergencies by expanding the reach of activities under strategic outcomes 1 and 3 and when it adjusted activities under strategic outcome 1 to account for the impact of changing weather conditions. WFP utilized its existing partnerships and significant field presence to bolster its response to COVID-19 and showed some adaptability in ongoing programming to account for COVID-19-related restrictions. The CSP's potential to facilitate greater flexibility in shaping activities and the scale of outcomes is unclear given the continued dominance of donor earmarking of funding for specific activities.

Conclusions

44. Overall, the CSP and its strategic outcomes are appropriate to the operational setting and aligned with the direction of the Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic. Representing a significant and relevant shift in WFP operations, the CSP was designed as, and has been, a relevant approach to supporting the Government in meeting the food and nutrition needs of the country. The shift to increased technical assistance has strengthened government partnerships and positioned WFP for greater engagement in strategic national legislation and policy development.
45. The CSP allowed WFP to adapt its operations and respond to government requests for support in responding to flooding and COVID-19. Inclusion of support for emergency response in the CSP and the portfolio budget, would have allowed WFP to better link its humanitarian and development work.
46. The objectives and approaches of the CSP were aligned with those of other United Nations organizations and development actors in the country. While shared features and WFP's comparative advantage have led to some partnerships, they have not been very strategic in nature.
47. Development partners in the country appreciate WFP for its traditional strengths and extensive reach. The country office, which makes good use of its solid connections with the Government and its expertise in warehousing and logistics support and related capacity strengthening, is valued as a trusted partner in humanitarian assistance. At the same time, WFP is encouraged to demonstrate further its ability to engage with partners on effective development work.

48. The potential trade-off between focusing WFP efforts on reaching the most vulnerable people in the hardest-to-reach areas versus maximizing the number of beneficiaries served will be an important topic for discussion in the development of the next CSP.
49. There has been significant progress in addressing the root causes of food insecurity for schoolchildren in remote areas. The school meals programme that has been implemented throughout the country has improved the prospects for food security for a large number of pre-primary and primary schoolchildren. While WFP's support at the policy level has facilitated a significant degree of success in the handover of the programme, WFP needs to address constraints that challenge its sustainability.
50. Agricultural production and household nutrition were improved and diversified in communities with high levels of malnutrition through an agriculture for nutrition project. Farmer nutrition schools have also proved to be a successful pathway to improved farming and nutrition knowledge, with early signs of improving the nutrition status of children under 2 years of age. Strengthening WFP's contribution to the broader government-led effort to tackle undernutrition through institutional and policy-related work is a complex task. It requires that WFP articulate coherently the areas in which it is making progress and exerting influence and that it support them through strategic partnerships with other international actors.
51. WFP has not yet realized the comprehensive approach to resilience needed for the success of the CSP. Considering the COVID-19 pandemic and climate-related challenges that impeded the success of some CSP activities, it is important to have a comprehensive approach to the mainstreaming of resilience in various strategic outcomes.
52. The design of the CSP with a specific strategic outcome for engagement in the strengthening of national and local governance institutions to ensure improved service delivery, especially in hard-to-reach areas, was appropriate, although results are limited so far. While WFP approached capacity strengthening as a cross-cutting concern, there was a need for more rigorous consideration of how the three interdependent levels of country capacity strengthening – national, community and village – could improve service delivery in hard-to-reach areas. Limitations in WFP's monitoring framework restricted understanding of effectiveness, sustainability and targeting.
53. Gender considerations have been widely mainstreamed and incorporated into implementation of the CSP. Despite staffing challenges, WFP increased gender parity, increased the number of female staff, engaged with the limited gender groups available locally, made progress in the tracking of gender outcomes, and improved gender equality in decision making.
54. The CSP for the Lao People's Democratic Republic was one of the first CSPs developed by WFP. The execution of the CSP as a strategy would have benefited from a stronger analysis of internal and external capacity to implement and engage in the shift to a more strategic engagement in the country.
55. Significant donor earmarking of contributions has limited WFP's flexibility in allocating funds among the CSP's strategic outcomes. As development of the next CSP takes into account the progress made and reframes WFP's approach, WFP will have to develop a new funding and partnership strategy that supports the effective shaping and implementation of the plan.

Recommendations

	Recommendation	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Level of priority	Deadline for completion
1	<p>WFP needs to deepen its utilization of up-to-date evidence that supports the shaping and implementation of a realistic scope and focus for the CSP for 2021–2025.</p> <p>1.1 Develop a theory of change that articulates and maps out clear pathways from activities and outputs through to intermediate outcomes and strategic outcomes. This necessitates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) development of a situational analysis that articulates the factors facilitating or impeding achievement of the current strategic outcomes; ii) for clarity in the design of the next CSP and to ensure that activities under the next CSP are appropriately adjusted, updating of WFP's targeting guidelines, clarifying the prioritization of indicators used to identify the most vulnerable people and utilizing the results of recent primary and secondary information; iii) development of a prioritization plan for reaching the most vulnerable people or maximizing the number of beneficiaries reached; iv) analysis of policy gaps to better understand the mechanisms that support or impede the financing of the school meals programme and the financing that the Government is able to provide for the programme; v) analysis of the institutional capacity of the Government at the national, community and village levels to manage and monitor the school meals programme independently; and vi) identification of the internal and external synergies between WFP programming and development partners. <p>1.2 Tailor and integrate adapted interventions to target the most vulnerable population groups, including women, men, girls and boys of ethnic groups and people living in remote rural areas.</p> <p>1.3 During implementation of the new CSP, periodically review staffing (the number of staff and their skills) and funding against the needs identified under recommendation 1.1 and unfolding challenges.</p>	Strategic	Country office with support from the regional bureau	High	2021

	Recommendation	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Level of priority	Deadline for completion
	1.4 At the corporate level refine the corporate results framework and at the country level strengthen the CSP monitoring and evaluation frameworks to develop systems that generate and use information and evidence beyond the output level, monitor the results of capacity strengthening activities and provide disaggregated data, including by ethnicity.		Corporate Planning and Performance Division		
2	<p>Engage strategically with partners in order to better integrate partnerships into programming and to enhance resource mobilization.</p> <p>Actions to achieve this include:</p> <p>2.1 Identification and mapping of existing and potential partnerships and their positions with regard to the strategic objectives of the United Nations development system and WFP outcomes.</p> <p>2.2 Efforts to strategically expand joint programming with other United Nations agencies, particularly FAO, IFAD and UNICEF.</p> <p>2.3 Streamlining of the partnership process and/or development of long-term agreements with selected organizations that facilitate strategic working.</p> <p>2.4 An annual meeting with partner international non-governmental organizations and non-profit associations for the exchange of information and experiences.</p> <p>2.5 Finalization of the fundraising strategy in line with the next CSP, focusing on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) diversifying funding sources; ii) continuing advocacy with donors for flexible and multi-year funding; and iii) mobilizing resources for under-resourced activities in resilience strengthening and the provision of technical assistance and national capacity strengthening. 	Strategic	Country office with support from the regional bureau	High	2021–2022
3	<p>Develop and integrate a country office approach to resilience strengthening and emergency preparedness and response.</p> <p>3.1 Incorporate emergency preparedness and response into the new CSP, developing links between humanitarian and development work.</p> <p>3.2 Build on good relationships with partners to support the mainstreaming of resilience strengthening activities for climate-proofed activities under strategic outcomes 1 and 2.</p>	Strategic	Country office with support from the regional bureau	Medium	2021

	Recommendation	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Level of priority	Deadline for completion
4	<p>Strengthen the capacity of WFP staff to design and implement country capacity strengthening.</p> <p>4.1 Continue to increase the proportion of national staff in the country office by temporarily increasing the use of short-term consultants to work with national staff to build internal capacity in the key area of country capacity strengthening.</p> <p>4.2 As an agent of change with regard to government institution systems, increase efforts to recruit staff with blended technical expertise and influencing skills in the priority areas identified through the gap analysis referred to in recommendation 1.3. At the corporate level review the efficiency of existing WFP tools for assessing capacity gaps. Based on the review, refine a suite of tools for assessing country capacity strengthening.</p> <p>4.3 At the corporate level establish a skills development programme for building the capacity of country office staff involved in capacity strengthening activities.</p>	Operational	<p>Country office with support from the regional bureau and headquarters</p> <p>Country office with support from the regional bureau and headquarters</p> <p>Technical Assistance and Country Capacity Strengthening Service</p>	Medium	2021–2025
5	<p>Reappraise and reinforce WFP's approach to supporting the Government's strategy for taking over the school meals programme.</p> <p>5.1 Conduct an in-depth survey of the school meals programme in the schools where the programme has already been handed over to the Government.</p> <p>5.2 Conduct a structured and systematic series of participatory lessons-learned workshops with the central Government and local authorities to facilitate the identification of solutions to the challenges that face the successful transition of the school meals programme to the Government.</p>	Operational	Country office with support from the regional bureau and headquarters	High	2021

	Recommendation	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Level of priority	Deadline for completion
	<p>5.3 With the Government, develop a long-term transition plan that ensures the sustainability of the school meals programme. Drawing from the WFP country capacity strengthening framework and working through a SABER (Systems Approach for Better Education Results) exercise, the plan should systemically address existing gaps in five policy pathways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Policy pathway 1 – Policy framework: Building on the policy analysis for school health and nutrition conducted by the country office in 2020, support the engagement of national stakeholders in devising an action plan for the policy framework improvements required for the sustainability of the school meals programme. – Policy pathway 2 – Budget and financing: Carry out an analysis of the budgetary support required for the sustainability of the school meals programme after handover. – Policy pathway 3 – Institutional capacity and coordination: Based on an institutional capacity assessment (recommendation 1) develop an approach to strengthening institutional capacity at the central and school levels (including by developing guidance, processes and human resources for continued support for schools after handover when necessary). – Policy pathway 4 – Programme delivery (design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation): To support handover of the school meals programme at the school level, design a gradual handover process that uses the grading of schools as an indicator of their readiness for handover; develop links between food security and nutrition activities and poverty alleviation activities for communities that lack the resources to contribute food for the programme; and develop (and institutionalize into national systems and frameworks) structured guidance for the handover process, communicating the guidance to local authorities and communities early in the process. – Policy pathway 5 – Role and participation of non-governmental stakeholders (including communities): Develop (and institutionalize into national systems and frameworks) an approach to building capacity relevant to community ownership of the school meals programme. 				

Acronyms

COMET	country office tool for managing effectively
CSP	country strategic plan
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
SABER	Systems Approach for Better Education Results
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund