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Management response to the recommendations in the summary report on the evaluation of the country strategic plan for the Lao People's Democratic Republic (2017–2021)

Background

1. This document presents the management response to the recommendations in the summary report on the evaluation of the country strategic plan (CSP) for the Lao People's Democratic Republic (2017–2021).
2. The evaluation was conducted between July 2020 and April 2021 and covered WFP strategy, interventions and systems.
3. Taking a utilization-focused and consultative approach, the evaluation served the dual purpose of accountability and learning and has informed the preparation of the next CSP for the Lao People's Democratic Republic.
4. The evaluation made three strategic recommendations and two operational recommendations; sub-recommendations describe how each recommendation can be implemented.
5. The matrix below sets out whether WFP management agrees, partially agrees or disagrees with the evaluation recommendations and sub-recommendations. It presents the actions taken or to be taken and the related responsibilities and timelines for implementation of the recommendations.

Focal points:

Mr J. Aylieff
Regional Director
Asia and the Pacific
email: john.aylieff@wfp.org

Mr J. Delbaere
Country Director
email: jan.delbaere@wfp.org

Recommendations and sub-recommendations	Recommendation and sub-recommendation lead office (with supporting offices and divisions in brackets)	Management response	Actions to be taken	Action lead office (with supporting offices and divisions in brackets)	Action deadline
<p>Priority: High</p> <p>Overall deadline: December 2021</p> <p>1. 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>	Country office (Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific (RBB), Corporate Planning and Performance Division (CPP))	Agreed			
<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> <p>i) development of a situational analysis that articulates the factors facilitating or impeding achievement of the current strategic outcomes;</p> <p>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;</p> <p>iii) development of a prioritization plan for reaching the most vulnerable people or maximizing the number of beneficiaries reached;</p> <p>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</p>	Country office (RBB)	<p>Agreed</p> <p>The country office agrees with this recommendation, although the timeline has been extended beyond December 2021 for some action items. Also note that some work has already been commenced or completed.</p> <p>Regarding 1.1 as a whole, a theory of change has already been developed for each strategic outcome. A theory of change for the whole CSP will be developed to tie together the strategic outcomes. Synergies will be identified through the assumptions.</p> <p>On 1.1 i), WFP was involved in the development of the common country analysis as part of the United Nations sustainable development cooperation framework (UNSDCF) process. The common country analysis – which will be updated annually –</p>	1. Develop a theory of change for each strategic outcome, mapping out clear pathways from activities to outputs, intermediate outcomes and strategic outcomes (response to 1.1).	Country office (RBB)	Completed
			2. Contribute and fully engage in the development and annual update of the common country analysis (response to 1.1 i)).	Country office (RBB)	December 2021 and annually
			3. Update targeting guidelines (including those on identifying the most vulnerable), which will be reviewed and updated regularly as new information becomes available (response to 1.1 ii)).	Country office (RBB, School-based Programmes Division (SBP))	March 2022 and ongoing
			4. Develop an outline for strategic outcome strategies and finalize the strategies themselves in 2022, including targeting guidelines and the identification of internal and external synergies between WFP programming and development partners (a theory of change for the entire CSP will help identify	Country office (RBB)	December 2021

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<p>Government is able to provide for the programme;</p> <p>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</p> <p>vi) identification of the internal and external synergies between WFP programming and development partners.</p>		<p>has informed the development of the CSP as a situational analysis.</p> <p>On 1.1 iv), a policy gap analysis has been completed for strategic outcome 1 (school feeding).</p> <p>On 1.1 v), extensive analysis is ongoing by RBB and the country office as part of the development of a transition strategy. The mid-term review of the United States of America fiscal year 2017 McGovern-Dole award is also looking into issues related to capacity strengthening and government capacity.</p>	<p>these synergies; for external synergies, please see the response to recommendation 2.1 on partner mapping); develop a standalone capacity strengthening strategy or integrate the capacity strengthening strategy into each strategic outcome strategy. (response to 1.1 ii), 1.1 iii), 1.1 v) and 1.1 vi)).</p>		
<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>Country office (RBB)</p>	<p>Agreed</p> <p>The country office agrees with this recommendation, although the timeline has been extended beyond December 2021.</p> <p>The country office recognizes that additional efforts can be made to ensure that interventions are appropriately targeted to vulnerable populations.</p>	<p>6. Ensure the development of targeting guidelines (including on identifying the most vulnerable) as part of strategic outcome strategies.</p>	<p>Country office (RBB)</p>	<p>Completed</p> <p>March 2022</p>

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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.	Country office (RBB)	<p>Agreed</p> <p>The country office already reviewed staffing during the design phase of the CSP and will regularly review staffing during CSP implementation. The staffing review took into account long-term needs for fixed-term posts, as well as short-term project-based needs. The country office has also looked into training required for existing staff, as well as the need for staff with new skills that will require external recruitment.</p>	7. Conduct a staffing review for the new CSP.	Country office (RBB)	Completed
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.	CPP	<p>Agreed</p> <p>While the new CSP is due to be presented for approval at the 2021 second regular session of the Board, presentation of the new corporate results framework has been postponed to the Board's 2022 first regular session.</p> <p>At the country level, the country office will incorporate elements dictated by the country context, such as ethnicity and language, that are not present in the corporate results framework.</p>	8. Revise the corporate results framework in the light of the new strategic plan.	CPP	February 2022
			9. A monitoring, review and evaluation plan is in place for the new CSP. Consultations will take place with RBB on any modification or expansion of the plan required in the light of this recommendation, building on the monitoring and evaluation and vulnerability analysis and mapping budgeting tool for the new CSP.	Country office (RBB)	March 2022

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		The country office agrees with this recommendation, although the timeline has been extended beyond December 2021.			
<p>Priority: High Overall deadline: December 2022 2. 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>	Country office (RBB)	Agreed			
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. (December 2022)	Country office (RBB)	<p>Agreed</p> <p>A partnership action plan (PAP) has been developed to accompany the CSP for 2022–2026. It is a living document that will be updated periodically. The PAP includes partner mapping, which will be further developed and updated regularly.</p>	1. Update and strengthen the PAP to include more comprehensive mapping of existing and potential partnerships, including strategic engagements with food security actors with the aim of enhancing policy engagement.	Country office (RBB)	December 2021
2.2 Efforts to strategically expand joint programming with other United Nations agencies, particularly FAO, IFAD and UNICEF. (December 2022)	Country office (RBB)	<p>Agreed</p> <p>In recent years, WFP has engaged in joint programming with other United Nations agencies, including an agriculture for nutrition project covering 2016–2022 with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), with whom WFP is now applying for funding for a joint project on nutrition-sensitive</p>	<p>2. Lead the UNSDCF (2022–2026) results group on nutrition and food security in order to facilitate joint programming with other United Nations entities.</p> <p>3. Apply for at least two joint programmes with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), IFAD, UNICEF or other United Nations entities.</p>	Country office (RBB)	December 2022 and annually

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		agriculture. WFP also submitted a joint proposal on the integrated management of acute malnutrition with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in 2020/21, although the bid was unsuccessful.			
2.3 Streamlining of the partnership process and/or development of long-term agreements with selected organizations that facilitate strategic working. (December 2022)	Country office (RBB)	<p>Partially agreed</p> <p>WFP agrees that the partnership process can and should be more streamlined and that long-term agreements that facilitate strategic work should be pursued. In fact it has a number of such projects, including the five-year school feeding programme funded by the United States Department of Agriculture, as well as the multi-year agriculture for nutrition project. It also has strategic school feeding partnerships with Catholic Relief Services, which is the other main non-government actor in school feeding in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, as well as a strategic collaboration with IFAD on the agriculture for nutrition project.</p> <p>However, there are also many funding streams and projects that are short-term (1–2 years) in nature. Given their short</p>	<p>4. Use the United Nations partner portal as the default platform for engaging with non-governmental organization (NGO) cooperating partners and develop standard operating procedures for engaging with NGO partners, including for managing field-level agreements.</p> <p>5. Develop a PAP that maps existing and potential partnerships, including strategic engagements with food security actors, for enhanced policy engagement.</p>	Country office (RBB)	December 2021

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		<p>timeframes, these projects are less conducive to strategic partnerships.</p> <p>The PAP will set out the thoughts of the country office regarding strategic partnerships.</p>			
2.4 An annual meeting with partner international non-governmental organizations and non-profit associations for the exchange of information and experiences. (December 2022)	Country office (RBB)	<p>Not agreed</p> <p>The country office has mechanisms for such exchanges including sector working group meetings and bilateral exchanges with NGO partners. The country office commits to continued regular engagement with NGO partners to facilitate the exchange of information and experience but does not agree to hold a separate annual meeting.</p>			
2.5 Finalization of the fundraising strategy in line with the next CSP, focusing on: <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. (December 2022) 	Country office (RBB)	<p>Agreed</p> <p>The country office has developed PAP to accompany the CSP for 2022–2026. The PAP outlines the country office fundraising strategy, addressing the issues raised in the recommendation. As described in the PAP:</p> <p>i) in terms of diversifying funding sources, between 2017 and 2020/21, WFP expanded its donor base from four to ten donors. WFP continues to pursue new partnerships, particularly with</p>	Strengthen the PAP for the CSP for 2022–2026 and update it regularly to ensure CSP needs continue to be met. RBB will support this work by mapping partners in the fields of gender equality and the empowerment of women and organizations of persons with disabilities.	Country office (RBB)	Completed/ongoing

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		<p>emerging donors and international financial institutions.</p> <p>ii) WFP will continue to seek flexible funding, particularly from private sector donors in Japan and China and through headquarters, for the development of innovative programming. WFP will also continue to pursue multi-year funding through mechanisms such as the Global Agriculture and Food Security Programme.</p> <p>iii) The PAP also outlines the country office strategic approach to partnerships, including systematic advocacy for traditionally underfunded areas such as resilience.</p>			
<p>Priority: Medium</p> <p>Overall deadline: December 2021</p> <p>3. Develop and integrate a country office approach to resilience strengthening and emergency preparedness and response.</p>	Country office (RBB)	<p>Agreed.</p> <p>While the country office generally agrees with the recommendations, it is not feasible to develop and integrate a country office approach to resilience and emergency preparedness by December 2021. RBB will be consulted regarding the potential for the country office to build on the work done</p>			

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		by the resilience building blocks team.			
3.1 Incorporate emergency preparedness and response into the new CSP, developing links between humanitarian and development work. (December 2021)	Country office (RBB)	Agreed The country office agrees with this recommendation, although the timeline has been extended beyond December 2021 for one of the action items.	1. There is a strategic outcome related to emergency preparedness and response in the new CSP.	Country office (RBB)	Completed
			2. Conduct a series of meetings with the Department of Social Welfare under the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and other United Nations entities in order to outline priority areas and potential gaps in emergency preparedness and response programming.	Country office (RBB)	December 2021
			3. Draft a theory of change for WFP's emergency preparedness and response approach.	Country office (RBB)	Completed
			4. Develop a draft paper on links between humanitarian and development programming for WFP in the Lao People's Democratic Republic.	Country office (RBB)	June 2022

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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. (December 2021)	Country office (RBB)	Agreed The country office agrees with this recommendation, although the timeline has been extended beyond December 2021 for one of the action items.	5. Hold an internal workshop to map national climate change and resilience models with line ministries associated with WFP programming.	Country office (RBB)	March 2022
			6. Map existing and potential partnerships that offer strategic advantages in advancing climate resilience strengthening related to the objectives of the new CSP.	Country office (RBB)	December 2021
			7. Develop a basic theory of change for mainstreaming climate resilience strengthening activities under strategic outcomes 1 and 2.	Country office (RBB)	December 2021
<p>Priority: Medium</p> <p>Overall deadline: December 2025</p> <p>4. Strengthen the capacity of WFP staff to design and implement country capacity strengthening.</p>	Country office (RBB, Technical Assistance and Country Capacity Strengthening Service (PROT))	Agreed			
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. (December 2025)	Country office (RBB)	Agreed. On recommendation 4.1, action 2: this process will vary according to the type of expertise and programme. For example, the country office is further along in the process of transition from international to national staff within the WFP school feeding	1. Short-term consultants hired to provide expertise in areas of limited capacity, e.g. climate change; disaster risk reduction; nutrition; protection, gender and accountability to affected populations; and food fortification.	Country office	December 2021

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		team because the programmes themselves are more mature and the country office is already in the transition phase. On the other hand, for areas like disaster risk reduction and emergency preparedness, the country office is in an earlier phase so external expertise (in the form of short-term consultants) will probably be needed for longer. The capacity of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare is also quite limited in these areas.	2. Identify gaps in national staff capacity and get support from short-term consultants to build their knowledge and skills in order to prepare for nationalization in the coming years. The overall deadline is December 2024. The mid-term review will be an important opportunity to review results and find ways to accelerate progress where necessary.	Country office	December 2024
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. (December 2025)	Country office (RBB)	Agreed The country office reviewed staffing during the CSP design phase and will continue to do so periodically during the term of the CSP. As the country office shifts to providing technical assistance, this exercise will be aligned with the capacity strengthening strategy, which will be developed in line with the response to recommendation 1.1.	3. Identify candidates with specific expertise, especially for local field-based posts in remote areas.	Country office	December 2024
			4. Enhance staff capacity to be role models in providing technical support to government counterparts at all levels.	Country office	December 2024
			5. Review and refine WFP tools for assessing country capacity and country capacity strengthening (CCS) gaps.	PROT	December 2022

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4.3 At the corporate level establish a skills development programme for building the capacity of country office staff involved in capacity strengthening activities. (December 2025)	PROT	Agreed	6. Develop a learning curriculum to augment and upgrade the CCS skills of the WFP workforce. The curriculum will draw on established CCS learning programmes and focus on WFP CCS technical skills. It will be expanded to accommodate thematic areas and reflect practical experience in the field.	PROT (Programme and Policy Development Department, Emergency Operations Division, Supply Chain Operations Division, Human Resources Division)	December 2025
<p>Priority: High</p> <p>Overall deadline: December 2021</p> <p>5. Reappraise and reinforce WFP's approach to supporting the Government's strategy for taking over the school meals programme.</p>	Country office (RBB, SBP, PROT)	Agreed			
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.	Country office	<p>Agreed</p> <p>The country office agrees with this recommendation, although the timeline has been extended beyond December 2021 for one of the action items.</p> <p>Extensive work is under way to survey and analyse schools that have been handed over to the Government and to use the findings to formulate an updated transition strategy for school feeding. Ongoing work includes</p>	1. Continue to monitor and gather data in schools that have been handed over to the Government.	Country office	December 2021
			2. Consolidate evidence from schools that have been handed over to inform the transition strategy for school feeding. Since April, RBB has been supporting the realignment of school feeding in the Lao People's Democratic Republic – shifting	Country office (RBB)	March 2022

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		working with consultants to consolidate information and data in order to identify early findings and gaps in information; the development of a transition framework; and a mid-term review of the fiscal year 2017 McGovern-Dole award that will examine the schools that have been handed over.	WFP's role from implementer to enabler. Data collection from schools that have been handed over is ongoing and the data will be included in the next school feeding evaluation. Part of the terms of reference of the RBB consultant is to draft a transition strategy (school feeding capacity building strategy); this work is currently planned to start in October 2021.		
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.	Country office	Agreed	3. Hold regular (at least quarterly) technical meetings with the Inclusive Education Promotion Center to discuss the transition.	Country office	March 2022
			4. Hold pre-handover meetings at the provincial level to gather lessons learned for the transition.	Country office	December 2021

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<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). 	Country office	<p>Agreed</p> <p>The country office agrees with this recommendation, although the timeline has been extended beyond December 2021.</p> <p>Groundwork for a long-term transition strategy has been under way since the second quarter of 2021. The country office has been working with consultants to consolidate evidence, conduct stakeholder consultations, gather information to fill evidence gaps and develop a long-term transition strategy for school feeding in order to facilitate further government ownership and to identify WFP's role during various stages of this process. This work is being undertaken within the structure of the five policy pathways. An updated SABER exercise is also planned.</p>	<p>5. Develop country-level transition strategy structured around the five policy pathways.</p> <p>This will subsequently be refined in line with SBP transition guidance, due to be finalized by December 2022.</p>	Country office (RBB)	March 2022

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 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

CCS	country capacity strengthening
CPP	Corporate Planning and Performance Division
CSP	country strategic plan
FAO	United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
NGO	non-governmental organization
PAP	partnership action plan
PROT	Technical Assistance and Country Capacity Strengthening Service
RBB	Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific
SABER	Systems Approach for Better Education Results
SBP	School-based Programmes Division
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNSDCF	United Nations sustainable development cooperation framework