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Lao People's Democratic Republic country strategic plan (2022–2026)

Duration	January 2022–December 2026
Total cost to WFP	USD 79,158,740
Gender and age marker*	4

* <https://gender.manuals.wfp.org/en/gender-toolkit/gender-in-programming/gender-and-age-marker/>.

Executive summary

The Lao People's Democratic Republic has one of the fastest growing economies in the Asia and the Pacific region and is expected to graduate from least-developed country status in 2026. Poverty levels have dropped from 46.0 percent in 1993 to 18.3 percent in 2019,¹ but while food insecurity and malnutrition have also declined, stunting continues to affect one in three children and 20 percent of the population remains food-insecure. Anaemia rates also remain high, while wasting rates increased between 2011 and 2017. In addition, there is an increasing trend in obesity and overweight, presenting the threat of a triple burden of malnutrition. The quality of healthcare and education also faces significant challenges, with the vast majority of students not meeting minimum standards in reading, writing and math. The country is vulnerable to the effects of climate change, with natural disasters of increasing frequency and scale.

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

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While an early lockdown and other strict measures instituted by the Government protected the country from the significant health impacts of coronavirus disease 2019, the socioeconomic effects of the pandemic – including on economic growth, government revenues, employment and remittances – threaten to erase much of the progress made in recent years. Additional pressure on an already tight government budget also makes government investments and transition processes a challenge.

Through this country strategic plan, WFP will continue to gradually reduce its direct implementation of programmes while increasing national and local capacity strengthening initiatives, building on its strong relationships with the Government at all levels. The long-term vision is to enable the Government and communities to own, manage and implement food and nutrition security programmes by 2030. A nutrition- and gender-sensitive approach will be taken under all strategic outcomes. Increased focus will be directed to emergency preparedness and response in view of the country's exposure to natural hazards, and WFP will work with the Government on strengthening national preparedness and response capacities while implementing its own activities and responses. More emphasis will be placed on transition strategies for the handover of activities to the Government, and support for the Government's strategic and policy frameworks. Close collaboration with other United Nations entities, including the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the International Fund for Agricultural Development, will continue to be an important part of WFP's interventions.

WFP's support for the Government in achieving food and nutrition security will be based on four strategic outcomes:

- *Strategic outcome 1: Schoolchildren in vulnerable areas have improved food security, nutrition and learning results through a sustainable national school meals programme by 2026.* WFP will deliver an integrated package of support for schoolchildren in priority, disadvantaged districts, while providing technical assistance to strengthen the expanding national school meals programme.
- *Strategic outcome 2: Vulnerable people at risk of any form of malnutrition, in particular women and girls of reproductive age, children under 5 and school-age children, have improved nutrition outcomes in line with national targets, by 2026.* WFP will provide nutrition services focused on the prevention of malnutrition for targeted people, while also providing technical assistance, advocacy and evidence-based advice for the Government and other stakeholders, including in the private sector.
- *Strategic outcome 3: Vulnerable people in disaster-affected or at-risk areas have enhanced food and nutrition security all year round and increased capacity to mitigate and manage risks associated with climate and other shocks by 2026.* WFP will work with targeted communities and government entities in disaster and climate risk management to strengthen their capacity to reduce losses from shocks, while ensuring food and nutrition security for communities all year round.
- *Strategic outcome 4: Crisis-affected populations in the Lao People's Democratic Republic are able to meet their food, nutrition and other essential needs during and after disasters.* WFP will provide nutrition-sensitive food and cash-based assistance to help meet the essential needs of crisis-affected people when needs exceed the Government's capacity to respond.

The country strategic plan is fully aligned with priorities outlined in the Government's ninth national socioeconomic development plan, relevant sector plans and the United Nations sustainable development cooperation framework for 2022–2026 and is linked to Sustainable Development Goal 2 and related areas such as poverty alleviation, health, education, the environment and gender equality.

Draft decision*

The Board takes note of the summary report on the evaluation of the country strategic plan for the Lao People's Democratic Republic (2017–2021) (WFP/EB.2/2021/6-E/Rev.1) and management response (WFP/EB.2/2021/6-E/Add.1) and encourages further action on the recommendations set out in the report, taking into account the considerations raised by the Board during its discussion.

The Board approves the Lao People's Democratic country strategic plan (2022-2026) (WFP/EB.2/2021/7-A/2/Rev.1) at a total cost to WFP of USD 79,158,740.

* 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.

1. Country analysis

1.1 Country context

1. The Lao People's Democratic Republic is a land-locked country ranking 137th of 189 countries in the 2020 Human Development Index. While it continues to be categorized as a least-developed country, it will be considered for graduation from that category in 2026.²
2. The country's population is approximately 7.2 million people comprising 49 recognized ethnic groups classified into four ethnolinguistic families – Lao-Tai (62.5 percent), Mon-Khmer (23.7 percent), Hmong-Mien (9.7 percent) and Sino-Tibetan (2.9 percent) – with multiple subgroups. The country ranks 43rd of 153 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index 2020 and 2.77 percent of the population has a disability.
3. The Lao People's Democratic Republic is a harmonious, multi-ethnic country with a high degree of political stability, peace and social order. However, challenges related to high and increasing unemployment among young people, unsustainable debt levels, environmental degradation, significant rural-urban disparities, and inequalities within the population are risk factors that may affect peace and stability.³
4. Given its varied topography, climate characteristics, high reliance on natural resources and agriculture and limited adaptive capacity, the Lao People's Democratic Republic is highly vulnerable to climate-related disasters. Floods and droughts are the most common and significant threats.
5. The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has severely affected the country's previously robust economic growth, with gross domestic product (GDP) estimated to have declined by 0.6 percent in 2020. In 2020, unemployment reached 25 percent, with higher rates among women, and public debt was expected to increase to at least 69 percent of GDP.⁴
6. COVID-19 has also disrupted critical supply chains and negatively affected industries, especially manufacturing. Despite the pandemic, however, the agriculture sector has remained resilient and is expected to have grown by 2 percent in 2020.

1.2 Progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

7. The United Nations common country analysis recognized the Government's strong commitment to implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), noting that the Lao People's Democratic Republic was among the first countries to integrate the SDGs into the national development planning framework. The Government submitted a first voluntary national review of the SDG status in 2018 and a second is currently being prepared.
8. COVID-19 has disrupted efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda and achieve the SDGs. While the direct health impacts of the pandemic have been relatively limited, the Lao People's Democratic Republic faces an unprecedented challenge with the threat that health, economic and social crises may lead to the reversal of years of progress in poverty alleviation, food security, health and education.

² In accordance with the [Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014–2024](#), the Lao People's Democratic Republic will remain a priority landlocked developing country after graduation.

³ United Nations country team. Forthcoming. *Lao People's Democratic Republic common country analysis*.

⁴ World Bank. 2021. *Lao PDR Economic Monitor: Supporting Economic Recovery*.

1.3 Progress towards SDGs 2 and 17

Progress towards SDG 2 targets

9. *Access to food:* The country's score on the global hunger index improved from 47.7 to 25.7 over the past decade. However, in 2020, approximately 31.8 percent of households experienced mild, moderate or severe food insecurity, which affected 2.2 million people, of whom 1.08 million were women.⁵
10. The Government's early interventions in response to the threat of COVID-19 successfully limited the transmission of the virus, with only 49 confirmed cases and no deaths reported by March 2021.⁶ However, some measures inadvertently contributed to decreased availability and consumption of diverse and nutritious food and increased food prices for approximately 50 percent of households.⁷
11. *End malnutrition:* While stunting rates among children under 5 declined from 44 percent in 2012 to 33 percent in 2019,⁸ with slightly higher rates for boys, the COVID-19 pandemic is worsening and is expected to continue to worsen the country's nutrition and food security status, with serious implications for children and for human capital development. It is estimated that the global prevalence of moderate or severe wasting among children under 5 could increase by 14.3 percent owing to a predicted increase in COVID-19-related mortality rates.⁹
12. *Smallholder productivity and incomes:* In the Lao People's Democratic Republic, 76 percent of households rely on agricultural activities for their livelihoods. However, owing to its mountainous terrain, only 6 percent of the country's total area is arable, the smallest proportion of arable land of any country in Southeast Asia.¹⁰
13. Approximately 75 percent of households own farms, although women face restrictions on land ownership. At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic 92 percent of farms were able to continue to operate by absorbing workers laid off from other sectors,¹¹ thus avoiding sharp reductions in agricultural activities. Nonetheless, reduced sales of farmers' products and lower prices affected incomes.¹²
14. *Sustainable food systems:* Food systems are a top priority given the high prevalence of food insecurity and poor nutrition and the continued dependence on agriculture for livelihoods. Economic development and growth are primarily driven by agricultural development. More than 60 percent of labourers are employed in the agriculture sector, which contributes 16 percent of GDP.

⁵ WFP. 2020. *Rapid Assessment of Food Security and Agriculture in Lao PDR*. May 2020.

⁶ WHO. 2021. *Lao PDR. Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Situation Report #27*.

⁷ World Bank. 2021. *Monitoring COVID-19 Impacts on Households in Lao PDR*. Report No. 2, February–March 2021.

⁸ FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2020. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2020. Transforming Food Systems for Affordable Healthy Diets*.

⁹ Headey, D. et al. 2020. Impacts of COVID-19 on childhood malnutrition and nutrition-related mortality. *Lancet*, 396(10250): P519_521.

¹⁰ FAO. 2012. *Selected indicators of food and agricultural development in the Asia-Pacific region (2001–2011)*.

¹¹ World Bank. 2020. *Monitoring COVID-19 Impacts on Households in Lao PDR*. Report No. 1, June–July 2020.

¹² WFP. 2020. *Rapid Assessment of Food Security and Agriculture in Lao PDR*.

1.4 Hunger gaps and challenges

15. Approximately 20 percent of the population experienced moderate to severe food insecurity in 2018–2019, with disproportionately high rates in rural areas and among poor people and certain ethnicities.¹³ Lao People’s Democratic Republic ranked 87th of 117 countries in the 2019 Global Hunger Index, representing a “serious” situation.
16. The affordability of food affects households’ access to a nutritious diet, with 83.3 percent unable to afford a healthy diet compared with an average of 41.5 percent in the Asia and the Pacific region.¹⁴ Threats to food access and affordability include seasonal floods, droughts, land degradation, deforestation, relocation and migration.¹⁵
17. Market access is inconsistent for the large proportion of rural households that depend on roads and other infrastructure. Many villages, particularly in rural upland areas, lose access during the rainy season.
18. Most people, in particular those belonging to the Mon-Khmer and Hmong-Mien ethnolinguistic families, live in remote areas with limited integration into the national infrastructure for health and other essential services, while disaster-prone environments lead to severe reductions in food intake owing to harvest losses and households’ inability to purchase food. In addition, the country’s ethnic diversity and varying beliefs regarding appropriate dietary and care practices create challenges for efforts to address malnutrition.¹⁶
19. The triple burden of malnutrition remains a major challenge. One third of children under 5 are stunted – a very high proportion compared with the World Health Organization (WHO) benchmark¹⁷ – and the prevalence of wasting increased from 6 percent in 2012 to 9 percent in 2018. Concurrently, anaemia affects 44.1 percent of children under 5 and 39 percent of women and girls of reproductive age (15–49), making it a severe public health problem.¹⁸ Overweight and obesity are increasing, with 15.7 percent of children and adolescents age 5–19 classified as overweight.¹⁹
20. Children are often not fed adequate nutritious foods or frequently enough, and dietary diversity is extremely low, with only one in four children age 6–23 months receiving a minimum acceptable diet.²⁰ Only 44 percent of pregnant and lactating women and girls achieve the recommended minimum dietary diversity for women.²¹ These dietary behaviours are attributed to poor market access, limited availability of nutritious food and heavy reliance on staple foods (rice) and are linked to economic constraints, lack of time or knowledge among mothers and caregivers and inadequate access to and uptake of water, sanitation and hygiene services and practices.
21. Smallholder farmers face a range of challenges that include limited technical knowledge of climate-smart agriculture, the effects of climate change and extreme weather, limited access

¹³ Lao Statistics Bureau and World Bank. 2020. *Poverty Profile in Lao PDR: Poverty Report for the Lao Expenditure and Consumption Survey 2018–2019*.

¹⁴ FAO, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2021. *Asia and the Pacific Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition 2020: Maternal and Child Diets at the Heart of Improving Nutrition*.

¹⁵ WFP. 2017. *Fill the Nutrient Gap Lao PDR. Summary Report*.

¹⁶ Chaparro, C., Oot, L. and Sethuraman, K. 2014. *Laos Nutrition Profile*. Washington, DC, FHI 360/FANTA.

¹⁷ de Onis, M. *et al.* 2018. Prevalence thresholds for wasting, overweight and stunting in children under 5 years. *Public Health and Nutrition*, 22(1)_ 175–179.

¹⁸ de Benoist, B. and others. 2008. *Worldwide prevalence of anaemia 1993–2005*. WHO Global Database on Anaemia.

¹⁹ WHO. 2017. *Global Health Observatory data repository*.

²⁰ FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2020. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2020. Transforming Food Systems for Affordable Healthy Diets*.

²¹ Lao Statistics Bureau. 2016. *Lao PDR Food and Nutrition Security Survey, 2015*.

- to financial services and risk management tools, poor market access, inconsistent food quality, limited food processing, lack of access to market information and limited understanding of food safety.
22. Women face specific challenges related to access to food. These include cultural food restrictions for pregnant and lactating women and girls, work expectations that limit their ability to breastfeed or provide children with nutritious food, household labour expectations and partner violence, all of which result in inadequate access to food for women.²² In addition, 30 percent of Lao women are married and 19.4 percent have given birth before the age of 18,²³ risking the education and nutrition outcomes of adolescent girls and increasing the risk of poor child health outcomes for their children.²⁴
 23. The Lao People's Democratic Republic is vulnerable to climate and human-induced threats, with low adaptive capacity affecting communities' nutrition and food security. Protection systems are particularly lacking for poorer households, persons with disabilities and children. In 2018, a hydropower dam burst, causing severe flooding. Seasonal tropical storms continue to cause widespread flooding, affecting more than 764,000 people in 2019 and 92,773 in 2020. Northern regions were affected by a long-lasting drought in 2020 caused by a combination of precipitation deficits and a poor start to the 2020 monsoon season.
 24. Climate change and extreme weather events increase risks for households that rely on agriculture for their livelihoods and food. The Government prioritizes disaster response, and the national social protection strategy is an important step towards a universal social protection system that addresses food insecurity and the needs of vulnerable people. However, in the absence of an extensive public safety net, large-scale emergency response will require support from development partners.
 25. The Lao People's Democratic Republic is one of the most heavily bombed countries in the world; more than 2 million mt of ordnance has been dropped on it, and up to 30 percent of it failed to detonate.²⁵ Unexploded ordnance continues to kill and injure people every year. It hampers socioeconomic development by preventing access to and development of agricultural land and increasing the costs of rural development projects. Given the significant challenge, the country launched a local SDG 18 "Lives safe from unexploded ordnance", which has the aim of reducing the impact of unexploded ordnance.

2 Strategic implications for WFP

2.1 Achievements, lessons learned and strategic changes for WFP

Achievements

26. WFP has made positive contributions to the Government's efforts to enhance food security and nutrition. Stunting among children under 5 has decreased and dietary diversity improved in supported villages compared with control villages, with 87.6 percent of women consuming foods from at least five of the ten food groups.²⁶
27. After WFP's home-grown school feeding cash-based pilot was taken over by the Government as the basis for a national school meals programme in 2012, WFP supported the scale-up of the programme to 821 schools. Over the past decade, WFP's role has been shifting from

²² National Commission for the Advancement of Women. 2015. *Lao National Survey on Women's Health and Life Experiences 2014. A study on Violence against Women*.

²³ World Vision. 2021. *Gender Analysis: Key findings*.

²⁴ Sychareun, V. et al. 2018. *Determinants of adolescent pregnancy and access to reproductive and sexual health services for married and unmarried adolescents in rural Lao PDR*. *BMC Pregnancy Childbirth*, 18(1) 219 (2018).

²⁵ www.nra.gov.la visited on 28 March 2021.

²⁶ IFAD. Forthcoming. *Annual survey, Agriculture for Nutrition Project*.

direct implementation of activities to the provision of technical assistance that builds on its extensive experience in delivering locally produced and community-owned school feeding programmes in the country.

28. WFP has been successful in raising funds for the country strategic plan (CSP) for 2017–2021, which was 75 percent funded, and has diversified its donor base with the number of donors increasing from four in 2017 to ten in 2020. The healthy resourcing situation has allowed WFP to implement the main components of the CSP as planned.
29. The evaluation of the CSP for 2017–2021 recognized its close alignment with the eighth national socioeconomic development plan (NSEDP) and WFP's success in reaching vulnerable people. The evaluation also noted that emergency response activities were successful, generating positive feedback from the Government. Although supporting the Government in responding to emergencies was not a specific strategic outcome of the CSP, WFP was requested to provide support following the 2018 and 2019 floods and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lessons learned

30. After almost 20 years of receiving direct support from WFP, the Government is on a path towards a sustainable national school meals programme. WFP will continue to provide technical assistance aimed at ensuring the programme's sustainability, particularly in the light of constraints on the Government's fiscal space, which have been exacerbated by COVID-19. The need to enhance handover strategies has been highlighted in the CSP evaluation.²⁷
31. Availability of disaggregated data has been identified as a key challenge to implementation of the 2030 Agenda,²⁸ hampering evidence-based policymaking, monitoring of progress towards the SDGs, and the design of WFP's activities. WFP therefore aims to enhance its support for the gathering and analysis of data, including on gender dimensions and persons with disabilities.
32. Partnerships will be made more strategic and inclusive of donors that support CSP activities.²⁹

Shifts in strategic focus

33. The CSP for 2022–2026 defines WFP's continued pathway in delivering on the 2030 Agenda, shifting from direct implementation to support for community-run and government-financed programmes. In accordance with a theory of change approach, all strategic outcomes are interlinked, thereby strengthening the impact of CSP activities. Capacity strengthening for the Government is integrated into work under all strategic outcomes. The school feeding programme is expanded into a multisectoral approach with a focus on handover to the Government. The scope of nutrition programmes is also expanded, with the related strategic outcome now covering all forms of malnutrition. A new strategic outcome has been added to accommodate the Government's requests for support for its emergency response efforts.

2.2 Alignment with national development plans, the United Nations sustainable development cooperation framework and other frameworks

34. The ninth NSEDP serves as the country's overarching strategy for achieving the SDGs. In line with the 2030 Agenda, it aims to ensure that no one is left behind in the country's development process. It includes a strong focus on children, young people, gender issues,

²⁷ WFP. Forthcoming. *Evaluation of Lao People's Democratic Republic CSP (2017–2021)*.

²⁸ United Nations country team. Forthcoming. *Lao People's Democratic Republic common country analysis*.

²⁹ WFP. Forthcoming. *Evaluation of Lao People's Democratic Republic CSP (2017–2021)*.

persons with disabilities and other vulnerable people, informing the Government's policymaking in ways that promote sustainable and inclusive economic growth, human capital investment, infrastructure development and a smooth transition from least-developed country status. The CSP supports NSEDP priorities linked to SDG 2 and other related SDGs, such as those focused on poverty alleviation, health, education, the environment and gender equality, by addressing key gaps:

- *Outcome 2* prioritizes improved quality of human resources through, for example, more inclusive and better-quality healthcare services and nutrition (strategic outcome 2), including school feeding (strategic outcome 1).
- *Outcome 3* prioritizes the gradual enhancement of people's material and mental wellbeing related to food and income security, including through the development of rural and remote areas and improved livelihoods (strategic outcomes 1, 2 and 3).
- *Outcome 4* prioritizes environmental protection and reduction of natural disaster risks, including enhanced prevention and control and post-disaster recovery (strategic outcomes 3 and 4).

35. The United Nations sustainable development cooperation framework (UNSDCF) for 2022-2026 incorporates the Government's priorities as outlined in the ninth NSEDP and forms the basis for all United Nations activities in the country. The CSP is fully aligned with the UNSDCF, in particular through the following strategic priorities:

- *Strategic priority 1:* By 2026, people, especially the most vulnerable and marginalized, will have more equitable and inclusive access to and will benefit from better-quality health, nutrition, food, shelter, protection, water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), and education and learning, including during emergencies.
- *Strategic priority 2:* By 2026, people, especially the most vulnerable and marginalized, will benefit from more inclusive, resilient, transformative, and sustainable socioeconomic and demographic opportunities to reduce poverty and inequalities.
- *Strategic priority 4:* By 2026, people, especially the most vulnerable and marginalized, and institutions will be better able to sustainably access, manage, preserve, and benefit from natural resources and promote green growth that is risk-informed, disaster and climate-resilient.

36. The CSP is also informed by national strategies and plans aimed at ensuring that economic growth in the Lao People's Democratic Republic is accompanied by improvements in health, nutrition, education and human capital in line with progress towards the SDGs.

2.3 Engagement with key stakeholders

37. The UNSDCF is aligned with the Government's development priorities as defined in the ninth NSEDP. WFP contributed to the development of both the UNSDCF and the NSEDP through technical workshops and consultations with the United Nations country team, the Government and civil society.

38. Multiple technical and strategic consultations were convened with key stakeholders such as the Government, United Nations entities and development partners, including organizations for women and young people. WFP consulted the United Nations Resident Coordinator to ensure alignment with the UNSDCF.

3. WFP strategic portfolio

3.1 Direction, focus and intended impacts

39. The CSP continues WFP's gradual strategic shift from the direct provision of food assistance to the provision of enabling support for the development of national policy and capacity.

These efforts will facilitate a transition to food and nutrition security programmes managed and financed by the Government and communities in the medium term, with the Government and communities designing, implementing and managing their own programmes by 2030. WFP's focus on providing support to the Government through policy-level engagement and technical assistance aims to sustainably enhance government systems, institutions and programmes related to SDG 2. Research, generation of evidence, South-South and triangular cooperation and policy advice will be provided, leveraging WFP's experience and comparative advantages, including in work with remote communities.

40. WFP is committed to the integration of priority cross-cutting issues – such as gender, youth, disability, protection, accountability to affected populations, environment, nutrition, partnerships and capacity strengthening – into all of its programmes. Gender dimensions will be taken into account throughout the development, implementation and monitoring of the CSP with a view to ensuring gender-transformative programmes and policies for zero hunger. Targeting and prioritization of programmes under each strategic outcome will be based on relevant vulnerability indicators from assessments, surveys and analyses. WFP will ensure the collection of sex-, age- and disability-disaggregated data when possible; include gender analysis in assessments, research and monitoring; continue to mainstream gender throughout programmes, policies and capacity strengthening initiatives; and ensure the meaningful engagement of women, men, girls and boys in ways that foster gender equality and women's empowerment as critical pathways for strengthening food security and nutrition for all.
41. WFP will ensure the centrality of protection by focusing on a rights-based approach to programming, including analysis of the intersectionality of vulnerabilities and needs that leaves no one behind. WFP will continue to mainstream disability inclusion into programmes, including through the specific targeting of persons with disabilities when feasible, and disaggregate data collection on disability in order to identify specific challenges. WFP will strengthen its focus on environmental and social risks and on improving two-way communications that maintain its effective and informed engagement with communities and their inclusion in programme design and implementation.

3.2 Strategic outcomes, focus areas, expected outputs and key activities

Strategic outcome 1: Schoolchildren in vulnerable areas have improved food security, nutrition and learning results through a sustainable national school meals programme by 2026

42. The Lao People's Democratic Republic is grappling with education challenges including a learning crisis, with only 2 percent of children in grade 5 meeting standards for reading and 8 percent for math – the lowest score among all Southeast Asian nations surveyed.³⁰ While health and nutrition data on school-age children in the country are sparse, there is evidence of malnutrition, including micronutrient deficiencies, particularly among adolescent girls.³¹ School meals contribute to improved intake of nutritious food, increased enrolment and attendance, reduced drop-out rates, increased learning capacity and improved overall learning outcomes. In the Lao People's Democratic Republic, children attending schools that provide meals spend an average of 6.1 percent more time in the classroom than other children.³² Investing in better nutrition and learning allows human capital development and enables schoolchildren to be more resilient and to achieve their full potential, and school feeding acts as a safety net for the most vulnerable communities during difficult times.

³⁰ UNICEF and Southeast Asian Ministers of Education. 2020. *SEA-PLM 2019 Main Regional Report, Children's Learning In 6 Southeast Asian countries*.

³¹ Government of Lao People's Democratic Republic. 2015. *National Nutrition Strategy to 2025 and Plan of Action 2016–2020*.

³² Ministry of Education, WFP and MasterCard. 2018. *Cost-benefit Analysis of the School Meals Programmes in Lao PDR*.

43. Building on relationships, lessons learned and investments since 2002, WFP will strengthen structures and systems in the Government and local communities for a sustainable transition of school feeding programmes to national ownership. WFP will follow a multisectoral approach in delivering an integrated package of school feeding interventions for the last 18 districts prioritized by the Ministry of Education and Sports for education that supports the Government's vision of ensuring that education services, including school feeding, reach all disadvantaged districts. Targeting within districts will be based on indicators of education, poverty, accessibility and remoteness.

Focus area

44. This strategic outcome focuses on root causes.

Alignment with national priorities

45. Strategic outcome 1 is aligned with outcome 2 of the ninth NSEDP and priorities 1 and 2 of the UNSDCF. It is also aligned with the national policy for promoting school lunch (2014), the decree for promotion of school lunch (2017), the education and sports sector development plan (2021–2025), the minister's directive on the restoration of agricultural production in education institutes (2019), the national nutrition strategy and plan of action, the national social protection strategy 2030 and the national gender equality strategy.

Expected outputs

46. Strategic outcome 1 will be achieved through the following four outputs:
- *Output 1.1:* Targeted schoolchildren benefit from nutritious meals that enhance their dietary intake throughout the school year.
 - *Output 1.2:* Targeted schoolchildren and communities have enhanced knowledge, attitudes and practices on recommended nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene, agriculture and literacy behaviours that improve healthy eating habits (Strategic Result 2) and learning (SDG 4).
 - *Output 1.3:* Rural communities and local food producers, in particular women, benefit from reliable and predictable food sales to home-grown school feeding initiatives that foster increased agricultural productivity of nutritious crops, improved income-earning opportunities and increased affordability of diverse diets.
 - *Output 1.4:* Schoolchildren in vulnerable areas benefit from the Government's strengthened capacity, improved institutions and adequate resources for leading and managing a sustainable national school meals programme that improves their nutrition and food security and contributes to improved educational outcomes (SDG 4).
47. These outputs contribute to SDGs 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6.

Key activities

Activity 1: Provide direct support and technical assistance to the Government to strengthen and complement the national school meals programme and to facilitate a sustainable handover of the programme to the Government

48. Following two successful rounds of handover in 2019 and 2021, with the Government taking over responsibility for the management and funding of existing programmes, WFP will provide direct support for expanding school feeding programmes into new districts, reaching approximately 70,000 pre-primary and primary schoolchildren per year. Support will include the provision of school meals, access to water, hygiene promotion, community mobilization, investments in school feeding-related infrastructure, education in and support for agriculture, and social and behaviour change communication (SBCC) on health and

nutrition. Some schools will also receive literacy support, particularly for children from ethnic minority groups who do not speak Lao as their mother tongue.

49. WFP will support farmers, in particular women, in the production of nutritious and diverse crops to ensure their availability for meals under the cash-based national school meals programme. This will yield multiple benefits including enhanced sustainability, the availability of nutritious food at the community level (linked to strategic outcome 2) and improved livelihoods for local farmers and food producers (linked to strategic outcome 3).
50. For the transition to a sustainable national school meals programme, WFP will provide support for national legislation and guidelines, the technical capacity of government staff at all levels and the targeting, monitoring and financing of the programme. WFP will explore the use of technical assistance in information technology that enables the Government to further digitize data collection and monitoring. WFP will also explore quality improvements in the national school meals programme, including with regard to energy efficiency. WFP will support community capacity strengthening through advocacy, training and knowledge exchange.

Partnerships

51. WFP will work closely with the Ministry of Education and Sports as the ministry responsible for school feeding and will ensure cross-ministerial support by engaging with other ministries, including those responsible for planning and investment, agriculture and forestry and health.
52. To ensure a coordinated approach, WFP will work closely with Catholic Relief Services, the other main non-governmental actor in school feeding in the Lao People's Democratic Republic. WFP will engage closely with the education sector on addressing the gaps in education, including in disability inclusion. WFP will continue to engage with current and new United Nations and non-governmental organization (NGO) partners, including the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), with a view to enhancing the multisectoral approach. WFP will also explore opportunities to engage private sector entities, including through the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) business network.

Assumptions

53. The achievement of a sustainable national school meals programme requires adequate capacity and resources for the Government and communities, assuming that the Government will secure adequate funding in the Ministry of Education and Sports budget or through external sources and that communities will continue to contribute fresh produce, cash and management of the programme at the village level. Gender equality is contingent on the continued emphasis on the educational needs of both girls and boys in national policy.

Transition/handover strategy

54. The transition to the Government of responsibility for schools supported with meals from WFP is laid down in a school feeding handover plan signed in May 2018. The first 515 schools were handed over in July 2019, and an additional 918 are scheduled for handover in mid-2021. By 2026, WFP aims to have completed the transition to a nationally owned sustainable school feeding programme, with WFP providing technical assistance and support for continued improvement and expansion of the programme. To assess whether a community is ready to manage the programme and identify gaps and needs for the transition, WFP has developed a community capacity assessment tool in collaboration with the Government.

55. With the Government, WFP will develop a long-term transition plan that includes government and community capacity strengthening, support for the development of legislation, budget allocations and innovative financing, and evidence generation. Lessons learned from the transition will be gathered, analysed and shared with core stakeholders to ensure their commitment to and ownership of the national school meals programme. The Ministry of Education and Sports has budgeted for school meals in the ninth NSEDP.

Strategic outcome 2: Vulnerable people at risk of any form of malnutrition, in particular women and girls of reproductive age, children under 5 and school-age children, have improved nutrition outcomes in line with national targets by 2026

56. In response to the high prevalence of stunting, persistent micronutrient deficiencies and increasing overnutrition, WFP aims to reduce all forms of malnutrition among vulnerable groups in rural areas through a package of nutrition services. Activities under this strategic outcome will also serve the population overall through strengthened government capacity to design, implement and partner for multisectoral nutrition programmes that contribute to the achievement of national targets by 2026.
57. Capitalizing on its expertise and strengths, including its strong field presence, WFP will continue to work at the community level. Targeting will be based on malnutrition trends and areas where WFP is already present so as to ensure synergies and sustainability, with clear links to strategic outcome 1 through nutrition activities focused on schoolchildren and strategic outcome 3 through nutrition-sensitive livelihood interventions. In addition, as other development partners are engaged in the treatment of malnutrition, WFP will enhance its partnerships and focus its interventions on the prevention of all forms of malnutrition, taking into consideration and tailoring activities to nutritionally vulnerable groups and addressing discriminatory gender roles and feeding practices.

Focus area

58. This strategic outcome focuses on root causes.

Alignment with national priorities

59. Strategic outcome 2 is aligned with outcome 2 of the ninth NSEDP, priority 1 of the UNSDCF, the national nutrition strategy and plan of action, the national SBCC for nutrition strategy and the national gender equality strategy.

Expected outputs

60. Strategic outcome 2 will be achieved through the following two outputs:
- *Output 2.1:* Vulnerable groups, in particular women and girls of reproductive age, children under 5 and school-age children, receive an integrated package of assistance, including SBCC, to improve diets.
 - *Output 2.2:* Vulnerable groups benefit from strengthened capacity of the Government and partners, including in the private sector, to design, implement and partner for multisectoral nutrition programmes to prevent malnutrition.
61. These two outputs contribute to SDGs 2 and 5.

Key activities

Activity 2: Provide universally accessible nutrition support services for targeted populations and nutrition-related technical assistance, advocacy and evidence-based advice to the Government and other stakeholders, including in the private sector

62. Nutrition support services will focus on utilizing SBCC strategies and education to raise awareness and influence behaviour related to nutrition and focused on enhancing dietary diversity and infant and young child feeding practices, health and agriculture. This will be

combined with cash-based interventions in the form of home garden and livestock cash grants to enhance the ability of beneficiaries to grow, purchase, prepare and consume nutritious and diverse foods.

63. Together with partners, WFP will support key initiatives aimed at strengthening the capacity of the Government and the private sector to improve nutrition in line with the national nutrition strategy and plan of action. WFP will support monitoring and research, including on causes of malnutrition and barriers to access to health and nutrition services, to inform government responses and track progress towards national targets. The use of digital innovations will be explored.
64. WFP will continue to facilitate the SUN business network and forge private-public partnerships that enhance the availability, accessibility and consumption of nutritious and diverse foods, in particular fortified rice, by providing technical support for the development of a national fortification roadmap and establishing guidelines, standards and regulations.

Partnerships

65. WFP will work closely with UNICEF, FAO, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the World Bank, the Government, in particular the ministries responsible for planning and investment and health, the National Nutrition Centre and communities. WFP will also seek new partnerships with NGOs and community-based organizations.
66. WFP acknowledges the importance of private sector engagement, and where relevant will utilize platforms such as the SUN business network to enhance the availability of, affordability of and demand for nutritious and diverse food, including fortified foods, which are closely linked to strategic outcome 1.

Assumptions

67. The achievement of strategic outcome 2 is based on the assumptions that the Government will continue to provide a supportive operating environment, that national and provincial government counterparts are engaged, that technical collaboration with the Government continues to be strong, and that development partners are committed, contribute adequately to national nutrition initiatives and collaborate effectively to avoid the duplication of nutrition initiatives and the inefficient use of resources.

Transition/handover strategy

68. WFP will engage in policy dialogue and provide technical assistance for enhancing analytical capacity so that high-quality information is available to the Government for analyses and policy formulation. Close collaboration between WFP and research institutions will be established for studies on the factors in and underlying causes of food insecurity and malnutrition. In the long term, this collaboration will help to prepare the Government and communities to manage food and nutrition security programmes independently. Concurrently, WFP will advocate that the government provide adequate resources for such programmes.

Strategic outcome 3: Vulnerable people in disaster-affected or at-risk areas have enhanced food and nutrition security all year round and increased capacity to mitigate and manage risks associated with climate and other shocks by 2026

69. Given their heavy reliance on natural resources and rainfed agriculture, and their limited adaptive capacity, communities are highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and other shocks. In particular, frequent floods and droughts significantly affect the livelihoods, food and nutrition security of vulnerable communities in disaster-prone areas.
70. Through an integrated and gender-responsive risk management approach that identifies and addresses barriers and gender-based inequalities, and using assessments and mapping

tools for targeting, WFP will work with the most vulnerable people and communities to enhance their resilience and livelihoods by improving coping mechanisms and reducing losses.

71. WFP will work closely with national and local government entities to build the necessary capacity in identifying and managing risks and setting up an effective and sustainable operational environment, including national systems, policies and plans.

Focus area

72. This strategic outcome focuses on resilience building.

Alignment with national priorities

73. Strategic outcome 3 is aligned with outcomes 3 and 4 of the ninth NSEDP, priorities 2 and 4 of the UNSDCF, the national climate change strategy, the Climate Change Action Plan (2013-2020), the nationally determined contribution under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the National Strategy on Disaster Risk Reduction (2021-2030), the National Green Growth Strategy of the LAO People's Democratic Republic till 2030, the Agricultural Development Strategy to 2025 and Vision to the year 2030, the national social protection strategy, and the national gender equality strategy.

Expected outputs

74. Strategic outcome 3 will be achieved through the following two outputs:
 - *Output 3.1:* Vulnerable communities benefit from assistance for asset creation and other sustainable livelihood support interventions that meet their food and nutrition needs and improve their resilience to climate-related and other shocks.
 - *Output 3.2:* Vulnerable communities benefit from the operationalization of local and national strategies and programmes to effectively anticipate, prepare for, manage and mitigate the risks to food and nutrition security associated with the impact of climate or other shocks.
75. These outputs contribute to the achievement of SDGs 1, 2, 5 and 13 and to the country-specific SDG 18 – lives safe from unexploded ordnance.

Key activities

Activity 3: Provide assistance and technical support to targeted communities and government entities to build communities' resilience to climate and other shocks through strengthened capacity in disaster and climate risk management and social protection

76. WFP and partners will work with vulnerable communities to build their resilience through the provision of food and cash-based transfers (CBTs) for the establishment of productive community and household assets and livelihood opportunities. The assets to be created will be selected through the inclusive and equitable participation of women and men in decision making, with equal opportunities for access, management, control and ownership. Livelihood opportunities will include support for increased production and diversification of crops and livelihoods for smallholder farmers, which links this activity to strategic outcome 1.
77. Risk management activities will focus on climate change adaptation and interventions that reduce exposure to disasters. Seasonal and weather forecasts tailored to the needs of local people and communities will be used to provide credible climate information that facilitates decision making and forecast-based anticipatory action.
78. Given the current gaps in district-level risk profiling, hazard forecasting and data management, WFP will enhance the Government's capacity in disaster and climate data and information management and analysis, building on national systems and innovative WFP

technologies in order to foster an understanding of the links and potential impacts of climate change and disasters on food security. WFP will also enhance Government and community capacities in emergency preparedness and response, including early warning systems, logistics preparedness (including through the field-based preparedness project) and anticipatory actions. WFP will work with the Government to improve governance systems with a view to shifting the paradigm from disaster response and relief to disaster prevention, anticipation, early response, management and resilience. In addition, WFP will explore climate and disaster risk financing and insurance opportunities to support anticipatory action and early responses following disaster events, which could minimize the financial impacts of extreme events.

79. In close collaboration with other United Nations entities and partners, WFP will support the integration of climate risk financing solutions into national social protection systems to enhance the systems' shock-responsiveness and ensure that they are gender- and nutrition-sensitive. WFP will continue to lead on CBT preparedness, providing guidance and support to the Government and the Lao People's Democratic Republic cash working group on country-level standardization and harmonization of CBTs. WFP will explore information technology technical assistance that supports digital and data-based initiatives for shock-responsive social protection.

Partnerships

80. To ensure that its activities are part of a coordinated, multi-faceted and multi-year approach, WFP will build on its existing partnerships with the Government, including the ministries responsible for planning and investment, agriculture and forestry, and natural resources and environment, and the National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute. It will also work with United Nations partners including FAO, IFAD, the International Labour Organization, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UNICEF, multilateral development banks including the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank, NGOs, civil society organizations including the Lao Red Cross Society and academic institutions.

Assumptions

81. Achievement of strategic outcome 3 is based on the assumption that the Government will continue to support an operational environment that promotes local and national ownership and leadership towards the achievement of national and local targets and international commitments. Local communities, including the most vulnerable people, are assumed to take an active interest in WFP's interventions and to remain committed to contributing their time and labour.

Transition/handover strategy

82. WFP's transition strategy for sustainable resilience incorporates three main elements. First, WFP will focus on enhancing the capacity of communities and government and institutional systems to support national and community adaptation and management of climate risks based on reliable climate forecasts and information. Second, WFP will invest in resilience-building activities aimed at enhancing adaptive capacities, reducing disaster risk and supporting the development of government-led gender- and nutrition-sensitive social protection systems and safety nets that are aligned with national and local development strategies and supported by sustainable and innovative climate and disaster finance mechanisms. Third, WFP will build on lessons learned to foster emergency preparedness, including through anticipatory action, early response, risk transfer and direct response (through activities under strategic outcome 4) that saves lives, protects livelihoods and enables recovery. Clear governance and monitoring systems will be put in place to enhance sustainability.

Strategic outcome 4: Crisis-affected populations in the Lao People's Democratic Republic are able to meet their food, nutrition and other essential needs during and after disasters

83. The Lao People's Democratic Republic is exposed to climate, geologic and human-induced disasters including floods, droughts, tropical storms, landslides, earthquakes and epidemics that affect the lives, livelihoods and food and nutrition security of vulnerable individuals and groups. Disasters such as floods and droughts are increasing in frequency and intensity because of climate change.³³
84. Upon request by the Government, WFP will provide humanitarian assistance to meet the essential needs of affected people.

Focus area

85. This strategic outcome focuses on crisis response.

Alignment with national priorities

86. Strategic outcome 4 is aligned with outcome 4 of the ninth NSEDP, priority 1 of the UNSDCF, the national strategy on disaster risk reduction and the national emergency preparedness and response plan.

Expected outputs

87. Strategic outcome 4 will be achieved through the following output:
- *Output 4.1:* Targeted girls, boys, women and men affected by natural hazards or human-induced shocks and disruptions receive food and/or cash-based assistance that helps to meet their essential needs.
88. This output will contribute to SDGs 1, 2 and 17.

Key activities

Activity 4: Provide nutrition-sensitive cash-based transfers or food assistance to help meet the essential needs of crisis-affected people

89. When requested by the Government, WFP will provide assistance, ensuring equal benefits for women and men, people with disabilities and different ethnic groups. WFP will support the coordination of emergency food and nutrition response activities, including logistics assistance services and gender-sensitive and protection-informed emergency needs assessment that identifies essential needs. WFP will explore the use of corporate digital solutions for providing cash-based or quality food assistance and for rapid needs assessment.

Partnerships

90. The main Government partner for this activity is the National Disaster Management Office under the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare. WFP will ensure coordination with the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry – the co-chair of the food and nutrition cluster – and will work closely with other United Nations agencies and NGOs through the interagency contingency clusters, seeking strategic partnerships with the Lao Red Cross Society, the Lao Front for National Development, the Lao women's and youth unions and NGOs. WFP will also seek partnerships with regional technical partners supporting disaster response, including the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center, the Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and the Pacific Disaster Center.

³³ IPCC. 2012. *Managing the Risks of Extreme Events and Disasters to Advance Climate Change Adaptation*.

Assumptions

91. WFP will implement activities under this strategic outcome only in the case of an emergency and when requested by the Government. WFP assumes that the Government will continue to request its aid and to support the collection and evaluation of sex-, age- and disability-disaggregated data that allow the identification of and response to specific needs of vulnerable people.

Transition/handover strategy

92. The transition strategy for strategic outcome 4 is incorporated into strategic outcome 3. WFP will provide the Government with capacity strengthening in emergency response with a view to gradually reducing the need for WFP's direct support in emergencies and enhancing community resilience in absorbing and adapting to disasters. WFP acknowledges that owing to climate change, the frequency and intensity of natural disasters are expected to increase, which may affect the time required for the Government to be ready to respond independently to an emergency. WFP will advocate the inclusion of gender tools in emergency strategies for sustained food security and nutrition.

4. Implementation arrangements**4.1 Beneficiary analysis**

93. Direct beneficiaries under strategic outcome 1 will include an estimated 70,000 pre-primary and primary schoolchildren per year in 18 of the Ministry of Education and Sports' priority districts who will receive school meals and ancillary services. Strategic outcome 1 will also directly benefit volunteer cooks and storekeepers and villagers who participate in asset creation activities, and their households. WFP's direct implementation under strategic outcome 2 will target pregnant and lactating women and girls and the caregivers of children under 5 for SBCC and/or CBTs in districts with a high prevalence of malnutrition. Under strategic outcome 3, direct beneficiaries include participants of asset creation activities and their households in communities in areas that are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Under strategic outcome 4, WFP will provide unconditional food and/or CBT assistance to crisis-affected people.

TABLE 1: BENEFICIARIES BY STRATEGIC OUTCOME AND ACTIVITY

Strategic outcome	Output	Activity	Beneficiary group	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total	
1	1.1	1	Girls	34 300	34 300	34 300	34 300	9 800	56 840	
			Boys	35 700	35 700	35 700	35 700	10 200	59 160	
			Women	1 393	1 393	1 393	1 393	350	1 393	
			Men	597	597	597	597	150	597	
			Total	71 990	71 990	71 990	71 990	20 500	117 990	
	1.2		Women	2 145	2 127	2 132	2 133	2 098	2 303	
			Men	1 038	918	924	922	898	1 215	
			Total	3 183	3 045	3 056	3 055	2 996	3 518	
	1.3		Girls	862	862	862	862	862	862	
			Boys	878	878	878	878	878	878	
			Women	1 388	1 388	1 388	1 388	1 388	1 388	
			Men	1 372	1 372	1 372	1 372	1 372	1 372	
			Total	4 500	4 500	4 500	4 500	4 500	4 500	
				Total (without overlap)	75 402	75 264	75 275	75 274	25 215	121 737
	2		2.1	2	Girls	2 000	2 000	2 000	2 000	-
Boys		-			-	-	-	-	0	
Women		6 000			6 000	6 000	6 000	-	37 392	
Men		-			-	-	-	-	1 008	
Total (without overlap)		8 000			8 000	8 000	8 000	-	32 000	
3	3.1	3	Girls	23 963	23 963	19 170	9 585	9 585	43 133	
			Boys	24 413	24 413	19 530	9 765	9 765	43 943	
			Women	38 538	38 538	30 830	15 415	15 415	69 368	
			Men	38 088	38 088	30 470	15 235	15 235	68 558	
			Total (without overlap)	125 002	125 002	100 000	50 000	50 000	225 002	
4	4.1	4	Girls	5 751	5 751	1 917	1 917	1 917	17 253	
			Boys	5 859	5 859	1 953	1 953	1 953	17 577	
			Women	9 249	9 249	3 083	3 083	3 083	27 747	
			Men	9 141	9 141	3 047	3 047	3 047	27 423	
			Total (without overlap)	30 000	30 000	10 000	10 000	10 000	90 000	
Total (without overlap)				238 404	238 266	193 275	143 274	85 215	468 739	

4.2 Transfers

Food and cash-based transfers

	Strategic outcome 1		Strategic outcome 2*	Strategic outcome 3	Strategic outcome 4
	Activity 1		Activity 2	Activity 3	Activity 4
Beneficiary type	Schoolchildren	Participants	Pregnant and lactating women and girls	Participants	Shock-affected people
Modality	Food	Cash-based transfers	Cash-based transfers	Food/cash-based transfers	Food/cash-based transfers
Cereals	100	-	-	400	400
Pulses	35	-	-	-	-
Oil	10	-	-	30	35
Fish (canned)	30	-	-	-	80
Total kcal/day	633.2	-	-	1.705	1.842
% kcal from protein	23.4	-	-	-	-
Cash-based transfers (USD/person/day)	-	5.35	110	5.35	1.07
Number of feeding days per year	175	24	1	90	90

* The CBTs value for strategic outcome 2 is a one-off payment.

Food type/cash-based transfer	Total (mt)	Total (USD)
Cereals and grains	10 161	6 086 643
Fish	1 082	752 191
Oils and fats	814	1 184 159
Pulses and vegetables	1 186	2 196 671
Total (food)	13 242	10 219 663
Cash-based transfers	-	9 490 600
Total (food and cash-based transfer value)	13 242	19 710 263

94. The food ration for school feeding will provide 33–42 percent of the daily calorie needs of primary-school-age children and 48 percent of the needs of pre-primary school-age children, while meeting or helping to meet daily needs for protein, fat and essential micronutrients. The CBT ration is based on the Government's daily minimum wage for unskilled labour given the nature of the CSP activities.
95. The CBT ration for activity 2 is in the form of a home garden and livestock cash grant of LAK 1 million (approximately USD 110), which covers the cost of establishing a home garden of about 10 m² or purchasing small livestock. This is a one-time distribution, delivered upon completion of the education package on nutrition, health and agriculture.
96. The food rations for activities 3 and 4 are based on the Government's guidance on rice rations, with additional commodities for a diet of approximately 2,100 kcal. The CBT ration for activity 3 is the same as for activity 1. The CBT ration for activity 4 is calculated using the daily minimum expenditure food basket for emergencies, which contains the minimum food required to provide 2,100 kcal.
97. Table 3 shows that approximately 44 percent of transfers will be in CBTs, with the proportion increasing over the course of the CSP. With the recent start of mobile money services in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, WFP will explore mobile solutions for the delivery of CBTs, which will increase accountability and the financial inclusion of vulnerable people, as currently only 29 percent of the total population uses banking services, with higher rates among women (32 percent).³⁴ Fortified rice will be introduced for the first time in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, with local procurement of fortified rice projected from 2023 onwards.

4.3 Country office capacity and profile

98. In line with the overall vision of increasing capacity strengthening activities, WFP will adapt the skillset available at the country office. While the role of senior national staff will increase, with enhanced gender parity and the provision of opportunities for staff with disabilities, international technical expertise will be attracted for national skills development in areas such as nutrition and monitoring, in line with a recommendation from the CSP evaluation.³⁵ WFP will conduct periodic reviews of the staffing structure to ensure continued alignment with programme shifts and the resource outlook.

4.4 Partnerships

99. WFP will leverage its long-term relationship as a trusted partner of the Government to achieve maximum impact towards the achievement of a shared vision for 2030, together with the ministries responsible for planning and investment, agriculture and forestry, education and sports, health, labour and social welfare, and natural resources and environment, and with the National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute. It will also engage with mass organizations, including the Lao Front for National Development and the Lao women's and youth unions, and local organizations of persons with disabilities with the aim of addressing their unique needs and enhancing inclusiveness and gender equality.
100. Joint programming with other United Nations entities will be prioritized and strategic partnerships with international financial institutions, such as the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank, will be pursued. WFP will contribute to the UNSDCF with all relevant partners, particularly FAO and IFAD under the Rome-based agencies' joint plan, UNDP and UNICEF.

³⁴ World Bank. 2018. *The Global Findex Database 2017: Measuring Financial Inclusion and the Fintech Revolution*.

³⁵ WFP. Forthcoming. *Evaluation of Lao People's Democratic Republic CSP (2017–2021)*.

101. WFP will continue to explore and expand collaboration with national and international civil society organizations and NGOs through knowledge sharing, the provision of expertise and direct or strategic partnerships.
102. Private sector entities are increasingly important partners for WFP in the Lao People's Democratic Republic. WFP will ensure the application of a strategic approach to partnering with the private sector, including through the SUN business network, and national and international research institutions.
103. WFP will work through its Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific to strengthen its partnership with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and enhance regional collaboration.

5. Performance management and evaluation

5.1 Monitoring and evaluation arrangements

104. Measurement of progress towards the four strategic outcomes will be based on a gender-responsive monitoring, review and evaluation plan and on the theories of change for the outcome areas that have been developed. Results will be used to inform programme adjustments and management's decision making. In collaboration with other United Nations agencies, WFP will enhance evidence generation. It will also employ innovative methods in all outcome areas, including the increased use of digital platforms, integrated into government systems where possible and relevant.
105. WFP will enhance the use of gender-responsive indicators and data analysis disaggregated by sex, age and disability status to enable the meaningful adaptation of its programmes and assessment of advancements in gender equality and women's empowerment. Monitoring and evaluation will be made gender- and disability-responsive³⁶ by ensuring equitable representation of women, men, boys and girls and their organizations and the deployment of women enumerators and speakers of ethnic languages. Mobile data collection will be complemented by face-to-face collection of qualitative data to address the unequal access to and control of information technology and communication tools.
106. An independent CSP evaluation will be carried out in 2025 to assess overall performance and inform future strategic orientation. Sectoral reviews and evidence generation, including on gender and overall food security, and a CSP mid-term review will facilitate programmatic adaptation during CSP implementation. Decentralized evaluations of school feeding are planned in 2022, 2023 and 2025, with special attention directed to the handover process.

5.2 Risk management

Strategic risks

107. The Government has been vigilant in its efforts to prevent COVID-19 from entering and spreading in the country. While the Lao People's Democratic Republic has had a small number of cases and no deaths so far, the social and economic impact of the pandemic may reverse years of progress in reducing poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition and may amplify existing inequality, including gender inequality. Progress towards outcomes defined in the CSP may also be constrained by the ongoing pandemic, with increased challenges for international procurement along with threats to the continuity of programmes in the event of an outbreak in the Lao People's Democratic Republic resulting in higher costs or delayed programmes. Working closely with the Government and the United Nations country team, WFP will continue to monitor the status and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, starting

³⁶ Through use of the Washington Group Questions. An explanation of the questions is available at <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/epidemiology-health-care/which-one-use-washington-group-questions-or-model-disability-survey-0>.

procurement processes earlier and considering alternative delivery modalities for activities in the case of COVID-19 outbreaks.

Operational risks

108. The main operational risks are related to limitations in the Government's ownership, capacity and staffing, which could have impacts on the effective implementation of WFP-supported projects and capacity strengthening initiatives; inadequate government funding which would hamper the handover of activities to the Government, in particular implementation of the national school meals programme; and limited availability of suitable cooperating partners.
109. To address these risks, WFP aims to undertake regular meetings with government counterparts and to establish agreements on desired partnership outcomes. Working with the Government, WFP will closely monitor and adapt the transition plan as required, providing capacity support including for financing, targeting, monitoring and advocacy. It will also explore the potential for collaboration and strategic partnerships with new cooperating partners while enhancing cooperation and building the capacity of existing partners.

Fiduciary risks

110. The security situation in the Lao People's Democratic Republic has been stable so far. Segregation of duties is ensured, particularly in WFP's support functions for finance, procurement and administration. Continued efforts will be made to ensure that appropriate internal controls and oversight are employed.

Financial risks

111. The COVID-19 pandemic may continue to affect the cost of imported goods, which may have an overall impact on the cost of living and the implementation of activities. Macroeconomic instability may be caused by weak foreign direct investment, a precarious domestic fiscal situation, a very low sovereign credit rating, extreme weather events and mismanaged fiscal expenditure. WFP aims to monitor these risks closely and adjust activities as required for mitigation.

5.3 Social and environmental safeguards

112. The Lao People's Democratic Republic continues to face environmental and social risks in the form of structural barriers that prevent the full realization of the human rights of people living in poverty and in rural areas, particularly women, persons with disabilities and ethnic minorities. People lack access to information and face restrictions on freedom of expression, challenges with language and literacy (particularly among rural and ethnic groups), limited access to telecommunications and the internet and exposure to unexploded ordnance in many priority areas of the country. The country's economic growth model may result in exploitation of the environment and degradation of ecosystems, involuntary resettlement, exposure to climate change and unsustainable land-use practices, loss of natural resources and significant regional and rural-urban disparities. WFP will consider these risks in order to avoid contributing to or amplifying them.
113. WFP will ensure the safety of all the activities, operations and assets that it manages by identifying and mitigating risks in line with the eight key areas of its environmental and social standards. Where necessary, WFP will seek expert guidance on risk mitigation actions, such as clearance of unexploded ordnance or climate change adaptation, and will ensure monitoring of the impact of such risks. Adherence to this precautionary approach, and the avoidance, minimization and mitigation of risks, will facilitate implementation of WFP's "do-no-harm" commitments at all levels.

114. WFP will mainstream gender, protection and accountability concerns into all its actions, taking into consideration the varying needs of women, men, girls and boys while anticipating factors such as disability, poverty and ethnicity. All staff will be trained in gender, protection and humanitarian principles. The community feedback mechanism will be continuously adapted to the evolving communication needs of communities.

6. Resources for results

6.1 Country portfolio budget

Strategic outcome	Activity	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total
		2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	
1	1	10 740 688	8 551 423	8 295 537	8 002 259	6 098 711	41 688 618
2	2	3 425 967	3 212 896	2 937 692	2 987 248	1 412 554	13 976 358
3	3	3 114 843	2 846 652	3 048 374	2 676 072	2 746 706	14 432 646
4	4	2 869 094	2 992 645	1 027 060	1 072 196	1 100 123	9 061 118
Total		20 150 592	17 603 616	15 308 664	14 737 775	11 358 093	79 158 740

115. The reduction in the budget over time reflects WFP's gradual shift towards a technical assistance role. However, as government capacity and social safety nets are still developing, there is a need for direct support in the short term. This need has been made more acute by the socioeconomic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, including its impact on government finances. There will also be a gradual shift from in-kind food assistance towards CBTs, primarily under strategic outcomes 3 and 4. At least 15 percent of funds have been allocated to activities that contribute to gender equality.

6.2 Resourcing outlook and strategy

116. WFP has a diverse base of traditional and new donors, with minimum resourcing levels for most of the strategic outcomes ensured according to confirmed multi-year contributions, historical trends, knowledge of upcoming donor priorities and specific projects and local discussions with donors. Strategic outcome 1 is expected to be well funded, with a large, confirmed source of multi-year funding complemented by expected funding from other donors and the private sector, based on historical trends. Strategic outcomes 2 and 3 have carry-over funding from multi-year contributions and additional contributions are under discussion with donors. Donors have also expressed clear interest in funding strategic outcome 4 in the event of disaster.

ANNEX I**LOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC COUNTRY STRATEGIC PLAN (JANUARY 2022–DECEMBER 2026)****Strategic Goal 1: Support countries to achieve zero hunger****Strategic Objective 1: End hunger by protecting access to food****Strategic Result 1: Everyone has access to food****Strategic outcome 1: Schoolchildren in vulnerable areas have improved food security, nutrition and learning results through a sustainable national school meals programme by 2026**

Outcome category: Maintained/enhanced individual and household access to adequate food

Nutrition-sensitive

Focus area: root causes

Assumptions:

The achievement of a sustainable national school meals programmes requires adequate capacity and resources for the Government and communities, assuming that the Government will secure adequate funding in the Ministry of Education and Sports budget or through external sources and that communities will continue to contribute fresh produce, cash and management of the programme at the village level. Gender equality is contingent on the continued emphasis on the educational needs of both girls and boys in national policy.

Outcome indicators

Attendance rate (new)

Enrolment rate

Number of national food security and nutrition policies, programmes and system components enhanced as a result of WFP capacity strengthening (new)

Number of national programmes enhanced as a result of WFP-facilitated South–South and triangular cooperation support (new)

Percentage of students who, by the end of two grades of primary schooling, demonstrate ability to read and understand grade level text (new)

Resources mobilized (USD value) for national food security and nutrition systems as a result of WFP capacity strengthening (new)

Retention rate/Drop-out rate (new)

SABER school feeding national capacity (new)

Activities and outputs

1. Provide direct support and technical assistance to the Government to strengthen and complement the national school meals programme and to facilitate a sustainable handover of the programme to the Government. (SMP: School meal activities)

- 1.1 Targeted schoolchildren benefit from nutritious meals that enhance their dietary intake throughout the school year. (A: Resources transferred)
- 1.1 Targeted schoolchildren benefit from nutritious meals that enhance their dietary intake throughout the school year. (B: Nutritious foods provided)
- 1.1 Targeted schoolchildren benefit from nutritious meals that enhance their dietary intake throughout the school year. (N*: School feeding provided)
- 1.2 Targeted schoolchildren and communities (tier 1 and 2) have enhanced knowledge, attitudes and practices on recommended nutrition, WASH, agriculture, and literacy behaviours that improve healthy eating habits (Strategic Result 2) and learning (SDG 4). (A: Resources transferred)
- 1.2 Targeted schoolchildren and communities (tier 1 and 2) have enhanced knowledge, attitudes and practices on recommended nutrition, WASH, agriculture, and literacy behaviours that improve healthy eating habits (Strategic Result 2) and learning (SDG 4). (E*: Social and behaviour change communication (SBCC) delivered)
- 1.3 Rural communities and local food producers, in particular women, benefit from reliable and predictable food sales to home-grown school-feeding initiatives that foster increased agricultural productivity of nutritious crops, improved income-earning opportunities, and increased affordability of diverse diets. (A: Resources transferred)
- 1.3 Rural communities and local food producers, in particular women, benefit from reliable and predictable food sales to home-grown school-feeding initiatives that foster increased agricultural productivity of nutritious crops, improved income-earning opportunities, and increased affordability of diverse diets. (D: Assets created)
- 1.3 Rural communities and local food producers, in particular women, benefit from reliable and predictable food sales to home-grown school-feeding initiatives that foster increased agricultural productivity of nutritious crops, improved income-earning opportunities, and increased affordability of diverse diets. (F: Purchases from smallholders completed)
- 1.4 Schoolchildren in vulnerable areas benefit from the Government's strengthened capacity, improved institutions, and adequate resources for leading and managing a sustainable NSMP that improves their nutrition and food security and contributes to improved educational outcomes (SDG 4). (C: Capacity development and technical support provided)
- 1.4 Schoolchildren in vulnerable areas benefit from the Government's strengthened capacity, improved institutions, and adequate resources for leading and managing a sustainable NSMP that improves their nutrition and food security and contributes to improved educational outcomes (SDG 4). (M: National coordination mechanisms supported)

Strategic outcome 4: Crisis-affected populations in Lao PDR are able to meet their food, nutrition, and other essential needs during and after disasters

Outcome category: maintained/enhanced individual and household access to adequate food Nutrition-sensitive

Focus area: crisis response

Assumptions:

WFP will implement activities under this strategic outcome only in the case of an emergency and when requested by the Government. WFP assumes that the Government will continue to request its aid and to support the collection and evaluation of sex-, age- and disability-disaggregated data that allow the identification of and response to specific needs of vulnerable people.

Outcome indicators

Consumption-based coping strategy index (average)

Economic capacity to meet essential needs (new)

Food consumption score

Food consumption score – nutrition

Livelihood-based coping strategy index (percentage of households using coping strategies)

Activities and outputs

4. Provide nutrition-sensitive cash-based transfers or food assistance to help meet the essential needs of crisis-affected people. (URT: Unconditional resource transfers to support access to food)

4.1 Targeted girls, boys, women and men (tier 1) affected by natural hazards or human-induced shocks and disruptions receive food and/or cash assistance that helps to meet their essential needs (A: Resources transferred)

4.1 Targeted girls, boys, women, and men (tier 1) affected by natural hazards or human-induced shocks and disruptions receive food and/or cash assistance that helps to meet their essential needs. (B: Nutritious foods provided)

4.1 Targeted girls, boys, women, and men (tier 1) affected by natural hazards or human-induced shocks and disruptions receive food and/or cash assistance that helps to meet their essential needs. (H: Shared services and platforms provided)

Strategic Objective 2: Improve nutrition**Strategic Result 2: No one suffers from malnutrition**

Strategic outcome 2: Vulnerable people at risk of any form of malnutrition, in particular women and girls of reproductive age, children under 5, and school-age children, have improved nutrition outcomes in line with national targets, by 2026

Outcome category: Improved consumption of high-quality, nutrient-dense foods among targeted individuals Nutrition-sensitive

Focus area: root causes

Assumptions:

The achievement of strategic outcome 2 is based on the assumptions that the Government will continue to provide a supportive operating environment, that national and provincial government counterparts are engaged, that technical collaboration with the Government continues to be strong, and that development partners are committed, contribute adequately to national nutrition initiatives and collaborate effectively to avoid the duplication of nutrition initiatives and the inefficient use of resources.

Outcome indicators

Minimum dietary diversity – women

Number of national food security and nutrition policies, programmes and system components enhanced as a result of WFP capacity strengthening (new)

Percentage increase in production of high-quality and nutrition-dense foods

Proportion of children 6–23 months of age who receive a minimum acceptable diet

Proportion of eligible population that participates in programme (coverage)

Proportion of target population that participates in an adequate number of distributions (adherence)

Activities and outputs

2. Provide universally accessible nutrition support services for targeted populations and nutrition-related technical assistance, advocacy, and evidence-based advice to the Government and other stakeholders, including the private sector. (NPA: Malnutrition prevention activities)

2.1 Vulnerable groups, in particular women and girls of reproductive age, children under 5, and school-aged children, receive an integrated package of assistance, including social and behaviour change communication, to improve diets. (A: Resources transferred)

2.1 Vulnerable groups, in particular women and girls of reproductive age, children under 5, and school-aged children, receive an integrated package of assistance, including social and behaviour change communication, to improve diets. (E*: Social and behaviour change communication (SBCC) delivered)

2.2 Vulnerable groups (tier 3) benefit from strengthened capacity of the Government and partners, including in the private sector, to design, implement, and partner for multisectoral nutrition programmes to prevent malnutrition. (C: Capacity development and technical support provided)

2.2 Vulnerable groups (tier 3) benefit from strengthened capacity of the Government and partners, including in the private sector, to design, implement, and partner for multisectoral nutrition programmes to prevent malnutrition. (K: Partnerships supported)

Strategic Objective 3: Achieve food security

Strategic Result 4: Food systems are sustainable

Strategic outcome 3: Vulnerable people in disaster-affected or at-risk areas have enhanced food and nutrition security all year round and increased capacity to mitigate and manage risks associated with climate and other shocks by 2026

Outcome category: improved household adaptation and resilience to climate and other shocks

Nutrition-sensitive

Focus area: resilience building

Assumptions:

Achievement of strategic outcome 3 is based on the assumption that the Government will continue to support an operational environment that promotes local and national ownership and leadership towards the achievement of national and local targets and international commitments. Local communities, including the most vulnerable people, are assumed to take an active interest in WFP's interventions and to remain committed to contributing their time and labour.

Outcome indicators

Consumption-based coping strategy index (average)

Emergency preparedness capacity index

Food consumption score

Food consumption score – nutrition

Livelihood-based coping strategy index (percentage of households using coping strategies)

Number of national food security and nutrition policies, programmes and system components enhanced as a result of WFP capacity strengthening (new)

Number of people assisted by WFP, integrated into national social protection systems as a result of WFP capacity strengthening (new)

Proportion of cash-based transfers channelled through national social protection systems as a result of WFP capacity strengthening support (new)

Proportion of targeted communities where there is evidence of improved capacity to manage climate shocks and risks

Proportion of the population in targeted communities reporting benefits from an enhanced livelihoods asset base

USD value of funds raised with a climate risk reduction objective (new)

Activities and outputs

3. Provide assistance and technical support to targeted communities and government entities to build communities' resilience to climate and other shocks through strengthened capacities in disaster and climate risk management and social protection. (CAR: Climate adaptation and risk management activities)

3.1 Vulnerable communities (tiers 1 and 2) benefit from assistance for asset creation and other sustainable livelihood support interventions that meet their food and nutrition needs and improve their resilience to climate-related and other shocks. (A: Resources transferred)

3.1 Vulnerable communities (tiers 1 and 2) benefit from assistance for asset creation and other sustainable livelihood support interventions that meet their food and nutrition needs and improve their resilience to climate-related and other shocks. (B: Nutritious foods provided)

3.1 Vulnerable communities (tiers 1 and 2) benefit from assistance for asset creation and other sustainable livelihood support interventions that meet their food and nutrition needs and improve their resilience to climate-related and other shocks. (D: Assets created)

3.1 Vulnerable communities (tiers 1 and 2) benefit from assistance for asset creation and other sustainable livelihood support interventions that meet their food and nutrition needs and improve their resilience to climate-related and other shocks. (G: Linkages to financial resources and insurance services facilitated)

3.2 Vulnerable communities (tier 3) benefit from the operationalization of local and national strategies and programmes to effectively anticipate, prepare for, manage and mitigate the risks to food and nutrition security associated with the impact of climate or other shocks. (C: Capacity development and technical support provided)

3.2 Vulnerable communities (tier 3) benefit from the operationalization of local and national strategies and programmes to effectively anticipate, prepare for, manage and mitigate the risks to food and nutrition security associated with the impact of climate or other shocks. (G: Linkages to financial resources and insurance services facilitated)

Goal 1: Support countries to achieve zero hunger

C.1. Affected populations are able to hold WFP and partners accountable for meeting their hunger needs in a manner that reflects their views and preferences

Cross-cutting indicators

C.1.1: Proportion of assisted people informed about the programme (who is included, what people will receive, length of assistance)

C.1.2: Proportion of project activities for which beneficiary feedback is documented, analysed and integrated into programme improvements

C.2. Affected populations are able to benefit from WFP programmes in a manner that ensures and promotes their safety, dignity and integrity

Cross-cutting indicators

C.2.2: Proportion of targeted people receiving assistance without safety challenges (new)

C.2.3: Proportion of targeted people who report that WFP programmes are dignified (new)

C.2.4: Proportion of targeted people having unhindered access to WFP programmes (new)

C.3. Improved gender equality and women's empowerment among WFP-assisted population

Cross-cutting indicators

C.3.1: Proportion of households where women, men, or both women and men make decisions on the use of food/cash/vouchers, disaggregated by transfer modality

C.3.2: Proportion of food assistance decision-making entity – committees, boards, teams, etc. – members who are women

C.3.3: Type of transfer (food, cash, voucher, no compensation) received by participants in WFP activities, disaggregated by sex and type of activity

C.4. Targeted communities benefit from WFP programmes in a manner that does not harm the environment

Cross-cutting indicators

C.4.1*: Proportion of FLAs/MOUs/CCs for CSP activities screened for environmental and social risk

ANNEX II

INDICATIVE COST BREAKDOWN BY STRATEGIC OUTCOME (USD)					
	Strategic Result 1/ SDG Target 2.1	Strategic Result 2/ SDG Target 2.2	Strategic Result 1/ SDG Target 2.1	Strategic Result 1/ SDG Target 2.1	Total
	Strategic outcome 1	Strategic outcome 2	Strategic outcome 3	Strategic outcome 4	
Focus area	Root causes	Root causes	Resilience building	Crisis response	
Transfers	29 430 889	10 427 047	10 262 989	6 889 031	
Implementation	5 312 950	1 238 568	1 724 513	718 000	8 994 031
Adjusted direct support costs	4 400 403	1 457 726	1 564 278	901 061	8 323 467
Subtotal	39 144 242	13 123 340	13 551 781	8 508 092	74 327 455
Indirect support costs (6.5 percent)	2 544 376	853 017	880 866	553 026	4 831 285
Total	41 688 618	13 976 358	14 432 646	9 061 118	79 158 740

Acronyms

CBT	cash-based transfer
COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
CSP	country strategic plan
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GDP	gross domestic product
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
NSMP	National School Meals Programme
NGO	non-governmental organization
NSEDP	national socioeconomic development plan
SBCC	social and behaviour change communication
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SUN	Scaling Up Nutrition
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNSDCF	United Nations sustainable development cooperation framework
WASH	Water, sanitation, and hygiene
WHO	World Health Organization