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## Summary report on the evaluation of the country strategic plan for Afghanistan (2018-2022)

### Disclaimer

This evaluation covers the Afghanistan country strategic plan for 2018–2022, based on the data collected in April and May 2021. The findings, conclusions and recommendations were developed before the Taliban consolidated control over Afghanistan in August 2021. The recommendations are therefore expected to be implemented in a flexible manner, depending on the evolution of the situation and taking into account prevailing restrictions on building national capacity and systems. The timeframe for addressing some of the recommendations will be revisited as needed. All references to “the Government” in the report relate to the Government that was in place until early August 2021.

### Executive summary

An evaluation of the country strategic plan for Afghanistan for 2018–2022 was conducted with the dual purpose of accountability and learning. Using a mixed-methods approach, the evaluation was originally timed to inform the development of the next country strategic plan. It focused on the activities undertaken under the plan from July 2018 to December 2020 and also considered previous WFP operations.

A low-income country and home to an estimated 38.9 million people, Afghanistan has not experienced peace since 1978. Food insecurity remains alarmingly high in a context of continuing

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

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conflict, widespread unemployment and price hikes, all exacerbated by the impacts of the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic.

The overarching goal of the country strategic plan is to help Afghanistan to achieve zero hunger by 2030 in a manner that contributes, wherever possible, to a broader, long-term transition to peace and development. Mainstreaming the cross-cutting issues of gender equality and women's empowerment, protection, accountability to affected populations and the triple nexus, the plan focused on six closely interrelated outcomes that span Sustainable Development Goals 2 and 17.

The country strategic plan was well aligned with the national peace and development framework and relevant sectoral policies and contributed to the achievements of the One United Nations objectives for Afghanistan for 2018–2021 and the humanitarian response plans for the country. It was also found to be relevant to the needs of the most vulnerable, addressing their emergency needs while also supporting resilience building, mainly through food for assets activities. WFP adapted relatively well to the increasing humanitarian needs thanks to its comparative advantages. However, there was no strong evidence that WFP had developed a comprehensive approach to resilience building that identified in a holistic manner how WFP activities, complemented by the work of its partners, would enable the most vulnerable people and communities to better absorb, adapt and transform in the face of shocks and stressors. WFP country capacity strengthening initiatives were not informed by a detailed assessment of national and subnational government capacity.

WFP substantially scaled up unconditional assistance and the treatment of moderate acute malnutrition in response to a 2018 drought and the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic under the plan's strategic outcomes 1 and 3. In most instances, strategic outcome 1 contributed to a short-term improvement or prevented a further deterioration in the food security situation of targeted households. Despite some pipeline breaks, the moderate acute malnutrition treatment programme (strategic outcome 3) was effective. Under strategic outcome 2 (resilience), WFP initially expanded asset creation activities and vocational training before being forced to scale down in 2020 due to funding shortfalls. Beneficiaries perceived strong and lasting positive effects. The quality of the assets created through food for training activities was good. Although such activities were carried out on a limited scale, participants' food consumption improved and their incomes increased. While there were positive outcomes at the individual level, there was no evidence that strategic outcome 2 contributed to long-term resilience at the community level. Under strategic outcome 4 the availability of nutritious food increased at the local level but the scale of the work was insufficient to make a significant change at the national level. Under strategic outcome 5 WFP contributed in various ways to the development of shock-responsive social safety nets and supported the establishment of the Afghanistan Food Security and Nutrition Agenda. However, progress towards the institutionalization of the Agenda was hindered by a lack of government funding and ownership. WFP corporate indicators did not allow the evaluation team to meaningfully assess the effectiveness of the range of country capacity strengthening activities. Under strategic outcome 6, WFP's supply chain and telecommunication support for the humanitarian community were highly appreciated, notably in the case of the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service facilitating access to hard-to-reach areas and providing an international airbridge during the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic.

The design of the country strategic plan considered protection and accountability to affected populations, humanitarian access and gender equality. At the implementation stage, WFP's efforts in those areas were well valued by many stakeholders, but there were opportunities for further enhancement. The likelihood of the continuation of benefits varied widely across the portfolio, with the clearest examples of sustainable community engagement found in asset creation (strategic outcome 2). WFP carefully managed the costs of programmes, supply chains and staffing.

The evaluation concluded that WFP broadly managed to respond to the growing needs of the most vulnerable people, despite a context of increasingly fragile governance and extreme insecurity. Some progress was made towards zero hunger through the various strategic outcomes, but WFP's contribution was significantly stronger with regard to crisis response than resilience or country capacity strengthening. This is not surprising considering the deterioration in the food security situation resulting from the increase in violence, the drought and the pandemic. WFP's contribution to strategic outcomes depended on deeper and longer lasting partnerships, but a number of challenges reduced the scope for expanding and strengthening these partnerships. WFP has been able to adapt its response to the pandemic, notwithstanding some unavoidable delays and pipeline breaks.

The evaluation made five recommendations for the WFP Afghanistan country office, including: that the next country strategic plan be designed based on robust context analyses providing the country office with flexibility to adapt its response to changing needs in a fluid context while maintaining the focus areas of crisis response, resilience and root causes; that a nutrition strategy be developed; that an in-depth gender analysis be conducted to inform a clearer articulation of WFP ambitions in relation to gender transformation and social inclusion; that the effectiveness and sustainability of resilience building be enhanced; and that collaboration with key partners be strengthened.

### **Draft decision\***

The Board takes note of the summary report on the evaluation of the country strategic plan for Afghanistan (2018–2022) (WFP/EB.2/2022/6-A) and management response (WFP/EB.2/2022/6-A/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.

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

## Introduction

### Evaluation features

1. The evaluation of the WFP country strategic plan (CSP) for Afghanistan for 2018–2022 covered the period from July 2018 to December 2020. In order to assess the extent of the expected strategic shifts, it also considered WFP operations from 2016 onwards. The evaluation assessed WFP's strategic positioning, contributions to the CSP strategic outcomes, efficiency and factors explaining WFP's performance. The evaluation served the dual purpose of accountability and learning and was originally timed to inform the development of the next CSP. The evaluation was conducted by an independent external team, with fieldwork undertaken from mid-April to early May 2021.
2. The evaluation used a gender-sensitive approach and mixed methods drawing on secondary data; 85 key informant interviews; 20 focus-group discussions, an e-survey and direct observation during site visits to Herat, Mazar, Kandahar and Samangan. The evaluators sought the perspectives of a wide range of stakeholders, including WFP staff in the field, the country office, the regional bureau and headquarters, cooperating partners (CPs), government counterparts, donors and approximately 450 beneficiaries. To mitigate the challenges resulting from travel restrictions imposed in response to the coronavirus 2019 disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the highly constraining security situation, a hybrid approach involving in-country and remote data collection was adopted. Information was triangulated across various sources to validate the findings presented in the report.

### Context









3. In 2020 the Afghan population was estimated at 38.9 million.<sup>1</sup> The country has experienced rapid urbanization, fuelled in part by conflict and climate change. A low-income country, Afghanistan ranked 169<sup>th</sup> of 189 countries in the 2020 Human Development Index.<sup>2</sup>
4. Afghanistan is affected by a long legacy of conflict. The year 2014 was a pivotal one, marking the end of the United Nations authorized International Security Assistance Force operation and the start of the so-called "Transition Decade". The political, socioeconomic, and security landscape has shifted dramatically since 2020. Following the withdrawal of troops of the United States of America and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the most recent leadership transitions in the country are leading to very uncertain times.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> World Bank DataBank. 2020. [Population, total – Afghanistan](#).

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Development Programme. 2020. [Human Development Report 2020. The next frontier: Human development and the Anthropocene](#).

<sup>3</sup> Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. 2021. [Flash Appeal: Afghanistan Immediate Humanitarian Response Needs \(September–December 2021\)](#).

TABLE 1: SOCIOECONOMIC INDICATORS			
	Indicator	Value	Year
	Total population (million)	38.9	2020
	Gross domestic product per capita (current USD)	516.8	2020
	Share of agriculture in gross domestic product (%)	27.0	2020
	Human Development Index (score)	0.511	2019
	Multidimensional poverty headcount ratio (% of total population)	49.4	2020
	Height-for-age (stunting – moderate and severe) (% of children ages 0-4)	38.2	2018
	Gender Inequality Index (score)	0.655	2019
	Labour force participation rate, total (% of total population ages 15+) (modelled ILO estimate)	47.1	2020

Sources: World Bank Development Indicators, Human Development Report 2020, United Nations Children's Fund.

5. Food insecurity remains alarmingly high owing to continuing conflict, widespread unemployment and price hikes, all exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Women are hit the hardest,<sup>4</sup> with their already minimal purchasing power decreasing further and poor shelter leaving them unable to cope with harsh winters.
6. According to the 2020 Global Nutrition Report, 38.2 percent of Afghan children under 5 were stunted in 2018. An estimated 3.7 million children were out of school, of which from 60 percent to 75 percent were girls.
7. Social norms are highly gendered, leading to gender inequality in all spheres of society. The population is exposed to high protection risks, including a high level of violence.
8. Afghanistan continues to be one of the top countries of origin for refugees; most are hosted in Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran. The combination of internal displacement and large-scale return of Afghan refugees in recent years in the context of difficult economic and security conditions continues to pose risks for all affected, including host communities.

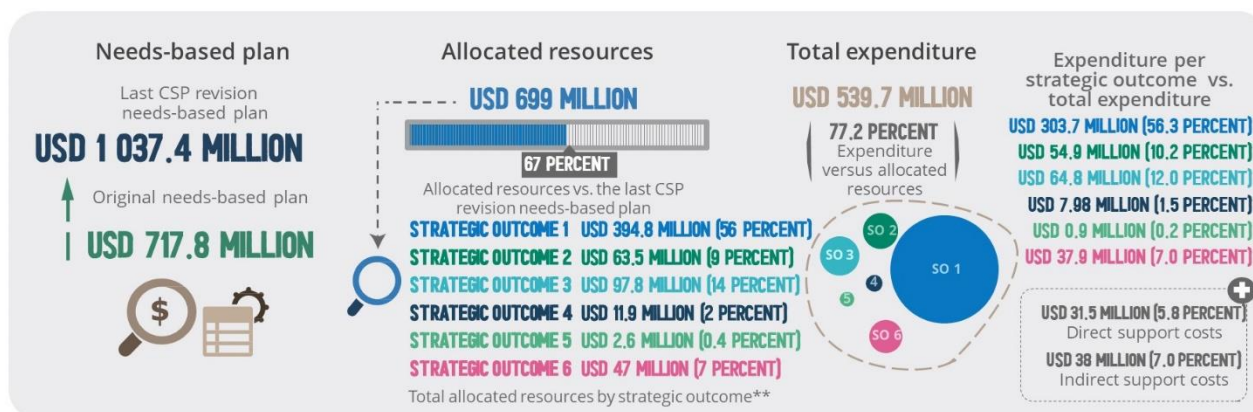
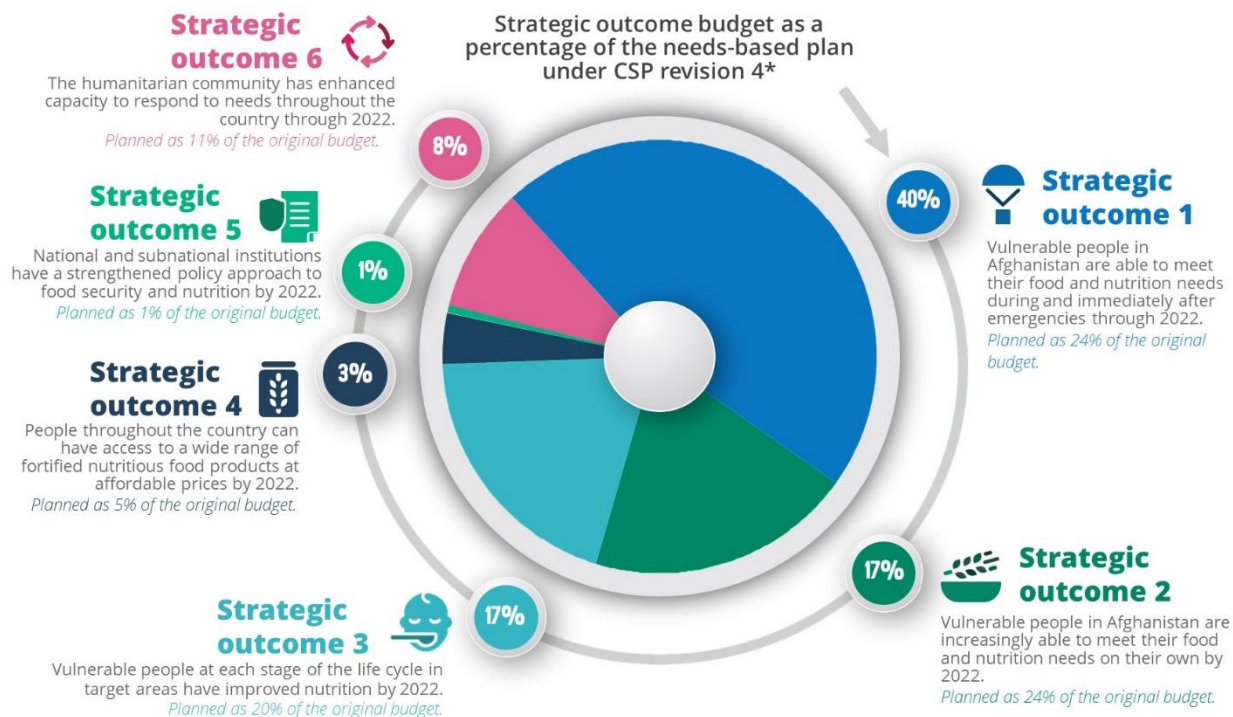
### WFP country strategic plan for Afghanistan

9. The goal of the CSP was to support Afghanistan in its efforts to achieve zero hunger by 2030 in a manner that contributes to a broader long-term transition to peace and development. Mainstreaming the cross-cutting issues of gender equality and women's empowerment and protection and accountability to affected populations (AAP), the CSP focused on six interrelated strategic outcomes (figure 1).

<sup>4</sup> REACH Initiative. 2020. *Whole of Afghanistan Assessment (WoAA) 2020: Multisectoral and Sectoral Factsheet Booklet – August–September 2020*.

10. The CSP envisaged three strategic shifts: sustainable solutions in strategic areas, emphasizing emergency response and resilient livelihoods and complementing the treatment of malnutrition with prevention; transformational links in strategic results; and comprehensive nationally led framing of all strategic results.<sup>5</sup>

**Figure 1: WFP Afghanistan CSP strategic outcomes and financial resources (as of May 2021)**



\* The needs-based plan budget percentages by strategic outcome have been calculated at the total budget level (USD 1,037. million), including direct and indirect support costs. Direct support costs represented 8 percent of the needs-based plan of the fourth CSP revision and 9 percent of the original needs-based plan. Indirect support costs accounted for 6 percent of the needs-based plan of the fourth CSP revision and 6 percent of the original needs-based plan.

\*\* Allocated resources by strategic outcome total less than USD 699 million because they do not include direct support costs (USD 40.9 million), indirect support costs (USD 37.96 million) nor resources allocated to operational costs but not to a specific strategic outcome or activity (USD 2.6 million).

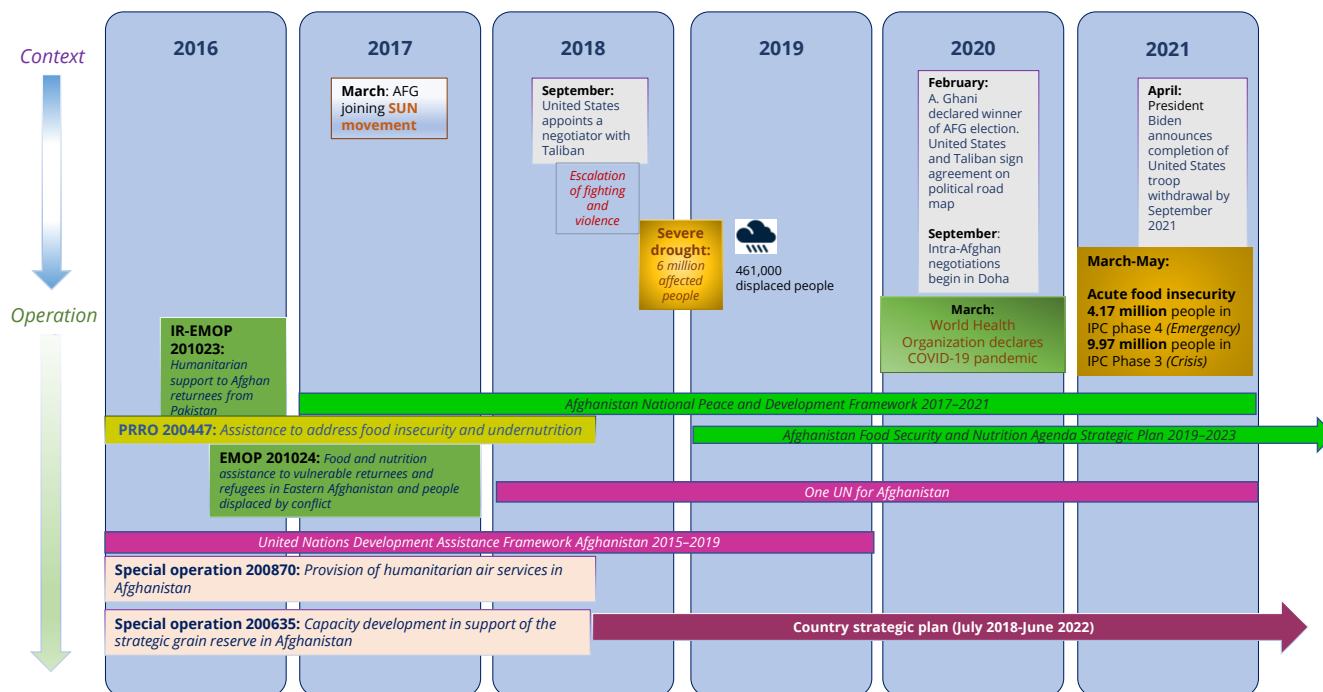
11. The CSP had an original budget of USD 717.8 million, which increased to over USD 1.037 billion following four CSP revisions. As of May 2021, the CSP was 67 percent funded, with a funding shortfall of USD 338 million.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> "Afghanistan country strategic plan (2018-2022)" (WFP/EB.A/2018/8-A/1).

<sup>6</sup> Two subsequent CSP revisions were approved in late 2021 and January 2022 to extend the CSP until December 2023 and increase the budget to USD 1.6 billion to address the acute food security crisis. See *Afghanistan Country Strategic Plan (2018-2023)*

12. The CSP was implemented in extremely challenging circumstances marked by severe drought, escalating conflict and violence leading to increased displacement, and the COVID-19 pandemic (see figure 2).

**Figure 2: Timeline of Afghanistan country context and significant WFP interventions**



Source: Particip GmbH (June 2021).

Abbreviations: EMOP = emergency operation; IR-EMOP = immediate-response emergency operation; PRRO = protracted relief and recovery operation; SUN = Scaling Up Nutrition.

## Evaluation findings

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

### **Relevance and strategic positioning**

13. Using the zero hunger strategic review for Afghanistan as a basis for consultations with the Government and other key stakeholders, WFP developed a CSP well aligned with the country's national peace and development framework for 2017–2021. WFP support was also aligned with relevant sector-specific policies, notably the Afghanistan Food Security and Nutrition (AFSeN) Agenda Strategic Plan for 2019–2023. WFP sought to uphold the principles of national ownership and country-led initiatives, in particular through its support for the AFSeN Agenda, an interministerial body established to lead national efforts to address hunger and malnutrition.

### **Addressing the needs of the most vulnerable people and communities**

14. Informed by comprehensive needs analyses and stakeholder consultations, the CSP design was relevant to the needs of the most vulnerable, addressing emergency needs while supporting resilience building. Stakeholders recognized that nutrition and school feeding activities were highly relevant. Assessments conducted jointly with the Office of the United

Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)<sup>7</sup> revealed that there was a need to tailor WFP support to the specific needs of refugees in order to strengthen their self-reliance.

15. Vulnerability and food security assessments, including Integrated Food Security Phase Classification analyses carried out regularly with stakeholders, were found to be reliable. Targeting was done at the provincial, community, household and individual levels based on specific vulnerability criteria tailored for each strategic outcome and activity.

### **Adaptation**

16. WFP adapted relatively well to changing needs caused by conflict, displacement, natural disasters and COVID-19. In the face of growing needs, however, prioritization of the most vulnerable in the most vulnerable areas became extremely difficult for WFP, as well as for CPs, the Government and community leaders.
17. Through its strong capacity in emergency response, reliable supply chain, extensive presence on the ground and ability to negotiate access, WFP was strategically well positioned to respond fast and at scale to increasing humanitarian needs, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.
18. Food assistance for assets (FFA) activities were relevant to the most vulnerable people, but there was no strong evidence of a comprehensive resilience building approach identifying how those activities would enable not only the most vulnerable individuals but also communities to better absorb, adapt to and transform in the face of shocks and stressors. Furthermore, there was no evidence that WFP activities were conceived in complementarity with resilience programmes of other actors. WFP's resilience building efforts were further hindered by limited donor interest in supporting its ambition and by pervasive conflict and increasing fragility.
19. The CSP country capacity strengthening (CCS) activities for each strategic outcome, including one strategic outcome dedicated to the subject, were not informed by a detailed assessment of national and subnational government capacity. This hindered WFP's ability to strategically prioritize areas of engagement and to articulate a phased approach to CCS including clearly defined and achievable goals.

### **Partnerships**

20. WFP contributed to the objectives of the One UN plan for Afghanistan for 2018-2021<sup>8</sup> that support the national peace and development framework for 2017–2021.<sup>9</sup> More specifically, WFP co-led the Food Security, Nutrition and Livelihoods thematic area of the One UN plan with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). It collaborated most closely with FAO, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and UNHCR in creating and supporting the AFSeN Agenda, and it collaborated with the World Bank and FAO on social protection and resilience systems. WFP also contributed to the Afghanistan humanitarian response plans. WFP and UNICEF were the crisis first responders with the largest responses, and WFP's strong position in terms of access was recognized. Finally, WFP contributed to the achievement of the One UN objectives through the management of the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS). While collaboration worked well for joint reporting processes, it was scant on joint programming.

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<sup>7</sup> 2017 UNHCR/WFP Joint Refugee Survey and August 2018 Joint Assessment Mission. (Unpublished report.)

<sup>8</sup> Government of Afghanistan and United Nations. 2018. [One UN for Afghanistan: 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2021](#).

<sup>9</sup> Government of Afghanistan. 2017. [Afghanistan National Peace And Development Framework \(ANPDF\): 2017 to 2021](#).

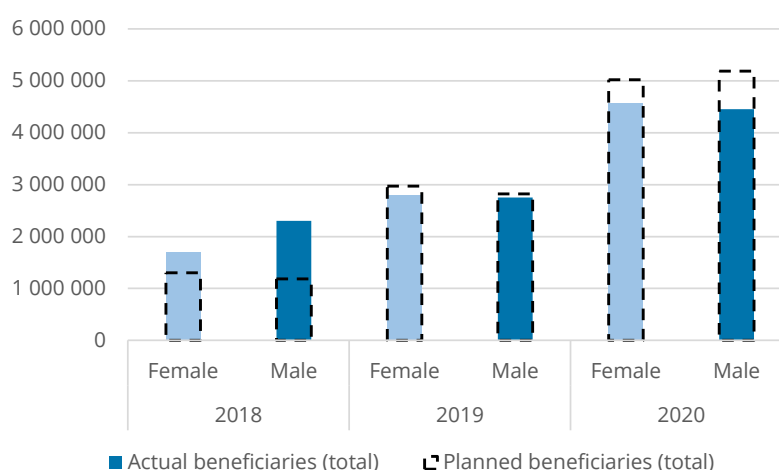


## What are the extent and quality of WFP's contributions to country strategic plan outcomes in Afghanistan?

### *Delivery of outputs and contribution to outcomes*

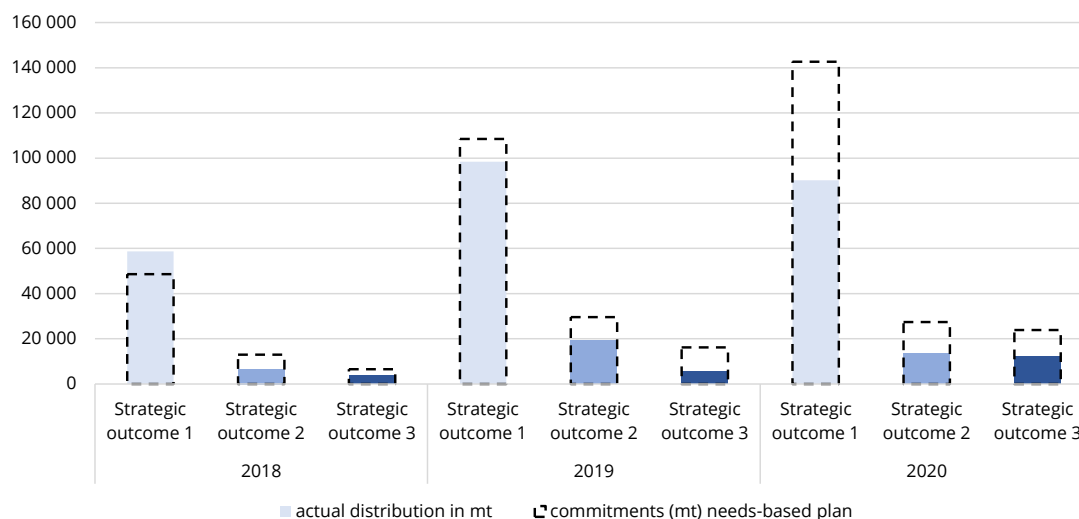
21. WFP substantially scaled up its activities in response to the growing needs resulting from the 2018 drought and COVID-19. From 4 million people supported in 2018, there were over 9 million people in 2020, 51 percent female (see figure 3). The vast majority of beneficiaries were residents, followed by internally displaced persons, refugees and returnees. Yet, funding constraints prevented WFP from reaching the beneficiary target in 2019–2020. It distributed 75 percent of the planned in-kind food transfers and 50 percent of planned cash transfers (see figure 4). Food rations were reduced in 2020 due to oil and pulses shortages. Cash was used wherever possible, particularly in urban and peri-urban areas (see figure 5). Delayed and insufficient funding and donor earmarking also forced WFP to prioritize emergency response (strategic outcome 1).

**Figure 3: CSP beneficiaries (planned and actual) by year and sex (July 2018–December 2020)**



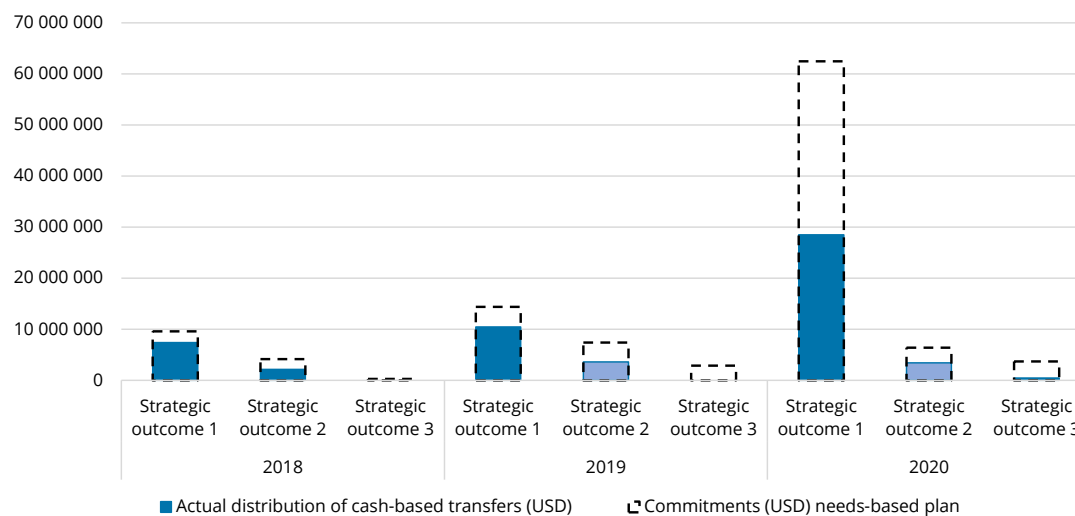
Source: Particip GmbH based on the country office tool for managing effectively (COMET) report CM-R020, data extracted in May 2021.

**Figure 4: Quantities of food distributed (planned and actual) by year and strategic outcome (July 2018–December 2020)**



Source: Particip GmbH based on COMET report CM-R014, data extracted in May 2021.

**Figure 5: Amount of cash-based transfers by year and strategic outcome (July 2018–December 2020)**



Source: Particip GmbH based on COMET report CM-R014, data extracted in May 2021.

22. **Strategic outcome 1: Emergency response** – Under the largest strategic outcome, accounting for 56 percent of CSP expenditures, WFP effectively responded to drought and COVID-19 and supported emergency response capacity. WFP provided unconditional food and cash-based transfers to internally displaced persons, communities affected by conflict and natural disasters, returnees, refugees and seasonally food-insecure households. An initial drought response benefitting 500,000 people in five provinces in the summer of 2018 was followed by a major response covering 2.8 million people in 22 provinces. As part of the COVID-19 response, WFP reached 1.2 million people affected by reduced livelihoods, increased food prices and decreased purchasing power in urban areas. Strategic outcome 1 activities contributed to short-term improvement and prevented a further deterioration in the food security situation of targeted households. In addition, WFP supported the development of the national emergency response capacity of the Government.
23. **Strategic outcome 2: Resilience** – Strategic outcome 2 is aimed at building the resilience of vulnerable food-insecure households through asset creation and vocational training. WFP expanded its resilience programme as planned in 2018 and 2019 but had to scale it down by 24 percent (in terms of expenditures) in 2020 because available resources were allocated to strategic outcome 1 given the deteriorating food security situation. COVID-19 also resulted in the suspension of most FFA and food assistance for training (FFT) activities in March–May 2020. As a result, fewer beneficiaries than planned were reached in 2020.
24. Asset creation and vocational training beneficiaries perceived strong and lasting positive effects. More specifically, FFA activities contributed to the rehabilitation or construction of assets selected by communities, including feeder roads, flood prevention structures, irrigation works and stabilized hillsides. FFA beneficiaries reported an improved asset base and better protection from natural disasters. FFT primarily targeted women and focused on developing new skills. Although FFT interventions were carried out on a limited scale, FFT participants' food consumption improved and their incomes increased. However, in the absence of systematic monitoring of long-term effects, there was no evidence that strategic outcome 2 contributed to resilience beyond the beneficiary level. Under activity 2 efforts were made to target women in order to overcome the effect of social and religious norms preventing them from participating in economic activities, but there was no evidence that gender-transformative livelihoods supported vulnerable people as hoped.

25. **Strategic outcome 3: Nutrition** – In the light of continuing high levels of global acute malnutrition and the magnitude of other aggravating factors, WFP successfully expanded the treatment of moderate acute malnutrition (MAM) from 6 provinces in 2018 to 30 in 2020. The programme targeted malnourished pregnant and lactating women and children age 6–59 months and was complemented by preventive emergency blanket supplementary feeding. Although pipeline breaks affected the availability of nutrition products, MAM treatment was effective in terms of recovery, mortality and non-response rates.
26. Funding constraints did not allow WFP to scale up the stunting prevention programme as originally planned. Nevertheless, WFP initiated the development of a social and behaviour change communication (SBCC) strategy and campaign under the school feeding and MAM treatment programmes. This contributed to improving nutrition behaviour and gender equality and women's empowerment. However, insufficient funding and limited government commitment to the AFSeN Agenda prevented WFP from fully rolling out SBCC activities. A small-scale school feeding programme in Nangarhar and Kandahar provinces showed improvement in school attendance along with a reduction in dropout rates among both girls and boys. However, it remained unclear to what extent school feeding had contributed to this, in the absence of data allowing a comparison with non-assisted schools.
27. **Strategic outcome 4: Food fortification** – WFP's support for wheat flour fortification was successful in terms of production by mills. In addition, WFP support for smallholder farmers in the production of soy flour through training, the provision of agricultural inputs and post-harvest storage and processing, along with its work on consumer awareness and market development, were reported as positive by CPs and government representatives. The activities were generally successful at achieving the strategic outcome 4 goal of increasing the availability of nutritious food and contributing to enhanced food security at the local level, although their scale was insufficient to induce significant change at the national level.
28. **Strategic outcome 5: Capacity strengthening** – WFP supported the establishment of the AFSeN Agenda, a multi-stakeholder mechanism aiming at raising awareness among government and other stakeholders and fostering policy coherence on food security and nutrition. Through WFP's policy engagement, zero hunger was made a development priority under the national peace and development framework for 2021–2025. Other examples of work include research to inform the development of a strategic framework on social protection that would prioritize zero hunger in sectoral policies, support for joint approaches to shock-responsive social safety nets, the roll-out of a social safety net pilot in Badghis province and evidence generation regarding WFP's peace contribution. As mentioned earlier, WFP supported the establishment of the AFSeN-Agenda. However, progress towards its institutionalization as a permanent structure was hindered by a lack of government funding and ownership. WFP corporate indicators do not allow a meaningful measurement of the effectiveness of the range of CCS activities embedded in other strategic outcomes.
29. **Strategic outcome 6: WFP support for the humanitarian community** through UNHAS was highly appreciated as a unique and much needed service. WFP introduced an international airbridge during the COVID-19 pandemic when no commercial services were operating. WFP also expanded access to WFP's digital beneficiary information and transfer management platform (SCOPE) to selected United Nations and non-governmental organization (NGO) partners, thus contributing to data harmonization with due consideration for data protection. It also provided digital mobile radio and supply chain services for humanitarian and development partners.

### ***Contribution to cross-cutting aims***

30. ***Protection and AAP:*** Key protection considerations were included in the CSP design, and WFP's engagement in protection and AAP increased over time. WFP developed and rolled out the "Right Way Guidelines", a set of checklists tailored to each strategic outcome to enable WFP staff, CPs and third-party monitors to ensure protection, AAP, protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) and gender-based violence. WFP established complaint and feedback mechanisms; calls were prioritized to ensure timely responses. WFP has also been actively involved in inter-agency AAP initiatives, notably to raise awareness on COVID-19. Other steps include the establishment of friendly spaces, distribution of hygiene kits and management of distribution sites with special care to preserve the safety and dignity of beneficiaries. Some areas for improvement were highlighted, notably ensuring that complaint and feedback mechanisms are fully functional and accessible to all, including people with disabilities, youth and women, as well as exploring options for tracking and addressing PSEA and gender-based violence. Perceptions on the role of WFP in the protection cluster and the AAP working group varied from those seeing WFP as a strong partner to those expecting WFP to do more in line with its growing commitment to and recognition of the centrality of protection.
31. ***Humanitarian access:*** There was great recognition by partners of WFP's appropriate management of access issues. WFP was actively engaged in the field with CPs, community leaders and other actors to ensure the delivery of food assistance, including in hard-to-reach areas.
32. ***Gender equality and women's empowerment:*** Significant effort was made to mainstream gender into programming, although this varied across strategic outcomes. Vulnerability criteria were applied to ensure appropriate targeting of women. WFP also developed a gender action plan and put in place gender-sensitive measures such as separate waiting areas. Yet the extent to which activities may have contributed to the empowerment of women was limited. Although specific gender analyses were undertaken, there was no comprehensive gender analysis preceding the design of the CSP.

### ***Sustainability of achievements***

33. The likelihood of benefits being continued varied widely across the portfolio. Strategic outcome 1, as short-term relief assistance, was by design not sustainable. The clearest examples of sustainable activities were FFA community engagement activities under strategic outcome 2 proposed by communities, endorsed by local governments and for which handover agreements were in place. The prospects for sustainability were also good for the SBCC element of the school feeding programme (strategic outcome 3). Under strategic outcome 4, further increases in fortified wheat flour production will depend on the enforcement of flour regulations by the Government. Similarly, the commercial future of soya flour remained unclear in the absence of a clear commercial value chain. The sustainability of CCS efforts under strategic outcome 5 depends on a long-term government commitment to providing the necessary resources.

### ***Strategic links between humanitarian, development and peace work***

34. WFP's commitment to the triple nexus was evident; however, increased insecurity, political uncertainty and donor earmarking have limited opportunities to operationalizing a nexus approach as envisioned in the CSP. In early 2020, WFP and the Institute of Development Studies conducted an analysis<sup>10</sup> to inform the common country assessment of drivers of vulnerability and common United Nations approaches to the nexus in preparation for the United Nations sustainable development cooperation framework. Greater coordination among WFP and other key partners is required to facilitate strategic links between humanitarian and development interventions and make progress on the nexus.

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

#### ***Timeliness and coverage***

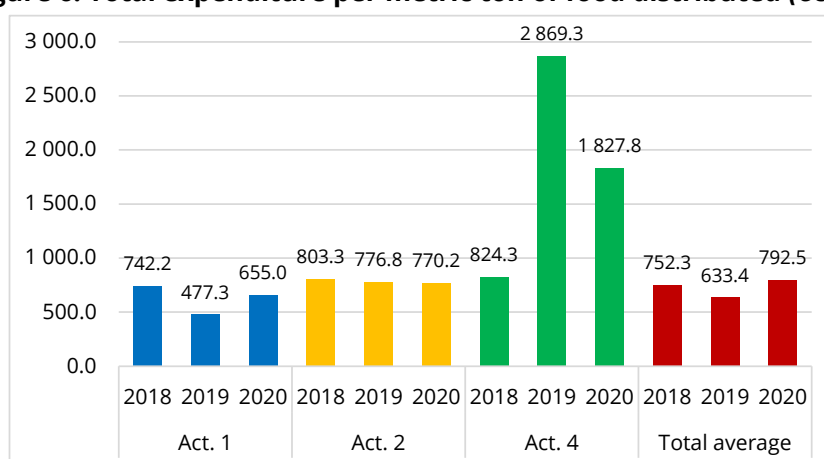
35. Overall, most activities were implemented on time, although delays occurred as a result of external (insecurity, access constraints, COVID-19, slow government processes, short-term funding) and internal factors (delays in planning, selecting new activities and establishing field-level agreements with CPs). Pipeline breaks caused by funding shortfalls and movement restrictions were particularly severe in 2020.
36. Since needs were vast and funding limited, WFP prioritized life-saving activities under strategic outcome 1. WFP's advance financing mechanisms allowed the country office to secure funding for the MAM treatment programme under strategic outcome 3 in 2021.
37. Individual targeting was reasonably appropriate, fair and transparent and involved WFP, CPs, third-party monitors and local authorities. Instances where local stakeholders attempted to influence targeting were reportedly addressed by WFP. The response to COVID-19 was widely seen as a good example of adaptation to changing emergency needs. SCOPE, which is used for cash transfers and where possible in-kind food distributions, improved the accuracy and transparency of targeting and was made available to other organizations whenever data privacy could be ensured.

#### ***Cost-efficiency in delivery of food assistance***

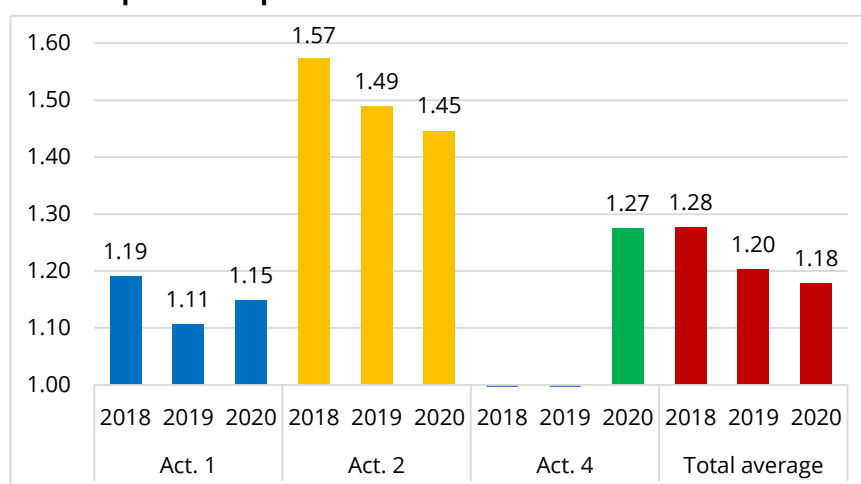
38. Although WFP did not apply corporate tools for measuring cost-efficiency, it carefully managed implementation costs. The introduction of competitive bidding by financial service providers resulted in the reduction of cash-based transfer overhead costs. The establishment of third-party monitors also contributed to cost savings, in addition to broadening monitoring coverage. At the start of the CSP, staffing costs were reduced by replacing international positions with national positions and recruiting highly qualified national staff. On the other hand, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in additional costs that were beyond WFP's control. Finally, security costs remained high, although some were shared with other organizations.
39. The total expenditure per metric ton of food distributed and total expenditure per value of cash transferred are shown below in Figures 6 and 7.

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<sup>10</sup> Adlparvar and others. 2020. *Political Economy Analysis of Areas Relevant to the Triple Nexus in Afghanistan*. (Unpublished report.)

**Figure 6: Total expenditure per metric ton of food distributed (USD)**

Source: CM-R014 for food transfer data, country portfolio budget plan vs actuals report from Integrated Road Map Analytics for transfer expenditure data.

**Figure 7: Total expenditure per one United States dollar of cash transferred (USD)**

Source: CM-R014 for cash transfer data, country portfolio budget plan vs actuals report from Integrated Road Map Analytics for transfer expenditure data.

### **Cost-effectiveness**

40. WFP adequately selected delivery modalities according to context, market feasibility and beneficiary preference. The progressive scale-up of cash-based transfers (figure 5) was hampered by weak financial markets and low-quality services. WFP and UNHCR initiated a discussion on the development of a self-reliance strategy for refugees, which would enhance cost-effectiveness.

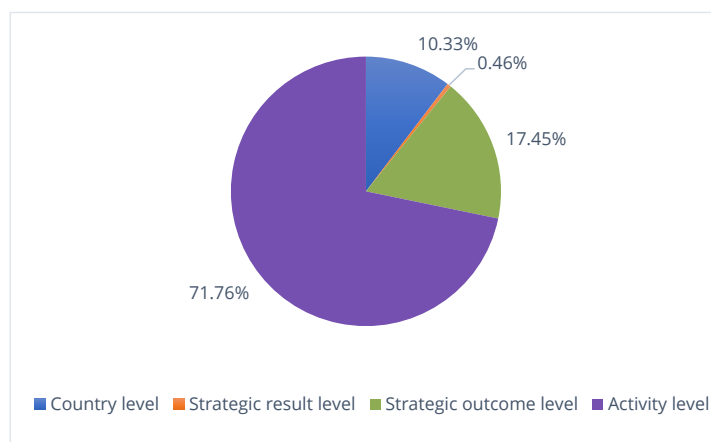
### **What factors explain WFP's performance and the extent to which it has made the strategic shift expected under the country strategic plan?**

#### **Resource mobilization**

41. Although WFP mobilized considerable resources, its ability to allocate funds according to the CSP priorities was significantly affected by donor earmarking and the limited predictability of funding (figure 8). This limited WFP's ability to integrate emergency response and resilience building activities despite the CSP being a useful instrument for supporting a holistic approach and addressing reduced prospects for sustainability. The confirmation of

some contributions only during the third and fourth quarters of a given year made it impossible for the country office to make full use of funds during that year.

**Figure 8: Afghanistan country portfolio budget (2018–2022) – directed multilateral contributions by earmarking level**



Source: WFP FACTory – June 2021.

### ***Partnerships and collaboration***

42. The CSP created an enabling environment for strategic partnerships. NGOs facilitated CSP implementation, notably through invaluable access that they were able to facilitate based on longstanding community relationships. Yet a minority of CPs said that there was a need for a national level overarching consultation mechanism to facilitate substantive dialogue with WFP on programme design.
43. WFP's partnership with the Government was affected by institutional turbulence and overall worsening political instability. Despite those constraints, partnerships with key ministries were generally found to be good.
44. Engagement with donors varied from those maintaining a very close relationship with WFP to those mainly providing funding; overall, donors interviewed were generally satisfied with WFP's performance.
45. Over time, WFP made a significant investment in partnerships within the United Nations system. Those with UNHCR, FAO and UNICEF are longstanding and therefore cannot be clearly attributed to the shift to a country portfolio approach.

### ***Flexibility in a dynamic operational context***

46. The CSP allowed for greater flexibility in adapting to evolving circumstances and responding to emergencies. Still, WFP's ability to adapt was affected by donor earmarking, limited multi-year funding and the structuring of the CSP around "focus areas". WFP international staffing levels varied widely in response to funding and surges in need. While funding shortfalls resulted in a reduction of international posts from 46 to 21 in 2016, 19 new positions were created in 2020 to support the response to COVID-19. WFP ensured its ability to continue operations during COVID-19 by creating appropriate healthcare facilities, a good example of adaptation to changing circumstances.

### ***Extent to which WFP has made the strategic shifts expected under the country strategic plan***

47. A few elements were found to pave the way towards the expected strategic shift to "more sustainable solutions in strategic result areas", including WFP's efforts to support resilience building and contribute to peace, but external contextual factors point towards an uncertain future undermining the prospects for sustainability. Regarding the expected shift towards "transformational linkages in strategic result areas", WFP staff reported a more coherent

programme approach, and the evaluation noted some synergies across strategic outcomes, for instance between strategic outcomes 1 and 3, with strategic outcome 1 supporting strategic outcome 3 beneficiaries with nutrition-sensitive food, or when wheat flour fortification under strategic outcome 4 resulted in sufficient quantities of fortified cereal to meet needs under strategic outcomes 1 and 2. A theory of change demonstrating strong mutual connection and reinforcement between strategic outcomes and activities would have supported a positive cycle towards transformational change. The expected shift towards "comprehensive national-led framing of all strategic result areas" (strategic outcomes 1–6) has not fully materialized for reasons beyond WFP's control.

## Conclusions

48. **WFP broadly responded to the growing and massive needs of the most vulnerable people by drawing on its comparative advantages despite increasingly fragile governance and extreme insecurity.**
49. At the design stage, the CSP's approach to responding to the emergency needs of the most vulnerable while addressing early recovery activities was fully relevant; some of the initial CSP ambitions became challenging to achieve, however, given the conflict, political instability and severe drought afflicting the country, which together with COVID-19 caused a dramatic increase in need that surpassed the combined response capacity of all humanitarian partners.
50. Operationalizing the triple nexus proved challenging. WFP walked a fine line between working to strengthen government systems while maintaining its operational independence and safeguarding humanitarian principles. Based on an analysis of risks and assumptions, the country office drafted theories of change for some strategic outcomes; they were never completed, however, and there is no evidence that the initial analysis was regularly updated. In-depth analyses are needed to understand conflict dynamics and set out pathways to the intended strategic outcomes and, where possible, to contribute to stability and peace outcomes.
51. **Some progress was made towards zero hunger through the various strategic outcomes, and WFP's contributions to the CSP strategic outcomes were the strongest in crisis response.**
52. WFP made a significant contribution to ending hunger (strategic outcome 1), enabling vulnerable people to meet their food and nutrition needs during and immediately after emergencies. WFP's comparative advantage in supply chain management and common services enabled a response at scale with far greater access than most other humanitarian actors (strategic outcome 6). This is where donors prioritized funding and were most satisfied with WFP's achievements.
53. In contrast, as crisis response activities expanded resilience building activities were scaled down. Where FFA activities were implemented beneficiaries reported strong and lasting positive effects. As no single activity can effectively build resilience at the community level, it is important for the country office to go beyond single activities and, based on a comprehensive resilience building approach, develop a package of activities that complement the work of other actors. Compared to other actors, WFP's capacity to support the resilience of the most vulnerable at scale and in a sustainable way appeared to be limited.
54. The MAM treatment programme (strategic outcome 3) was effective and substantially expanded. However, the intended stronger focus on stunting prevention to complement malnutrition treatment was constrained by high global acute malnutrition levels and limited resources. Positive results were achieved through SBCC activities under the school feeding



- programme although they remained limited in scale. Broadening and rolling out the SBCC strategy, which was developed for the school feeding and MAM programmes, would have enhanced WFP's approach to nutrition sensitivity across its portfolio.
55. WFP's contribution to increased access to nutritious foods (strategic outcome 4) was mixed. Wheat fortification was steadily growing, and all WFP needs were sourced from Afghan wheat mills, but the development of the soya crop value chain was not so successful. Support for smallholder food production was valuable at the local level.
  56. In the absence of a comprehensive capacity gap assessment, WFP seized opportunities for engaging in CCS (strategic outcome 5) but was not in a position to identify strategic priorities in consultation with the Government. There is a need for a capacity gap assessment and the design of a CCS strategy that prioritizes strategically key areas of engagement and articulates WFP's expectation of success at the outcome level.
  57. WFP was on the right track with its demonstrated commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment, inclusion, protection and AAP. It also paved the way for other actors as the first to pursue access negotiations and as a promoter of community-based approaches. Through its presence on the ground, WFP fostered community trust, protection, accountability and ownership. Nonetheless, AAP and protection mechanisms put in place could be further enhanced, notably by ensuring that complaint and feedback mechanisms are fully functional and accessible to all population groups and by exploring options for tracking and addressing gender-based violence and PSEA.
  58. An in-depth gender analysis unpacking the diversity of gender relations and gender-based violence across the country and exploring the feasibility of moving from "gender-sensitive" to "gender-transformative programming" within the context of WFP interventions in Afghanistan is essential to inform WFP's ambitions in this area.
  59. **In increasingly challenging circumstances, WFP's contribution to strategic outcomes depended on deeper and more long-term partnerships.**
  60. The CSP aimed to pave the way for WFP to improve performance through collaboration, and in practice WFP has made significant investments in partnerships with the Government, donors and United Nations and NGO partners. However, various challenges reduced the scope for expanding and strengthening these partnerships, including that funding for multi-year activities was limited. Although challenging at a time of great uncertainty and instability, WFP's three-pronged approach and resilience context analysis would contribute to a deeper understanding of the opportunities for enhancing livelihoods and strengthening resilience capacities and provide a solid foundation for the design of synergistic multisectoral joint programmes.
  61. **WFP was able to adapt its response to COVID-19, notwithstanding some delays and pipeline breaks that were unavoidable.**
  62. WFP was perceived as effective and adaptive in responding to COVID-19. While many resilience activities were suspended, WFP massively scaled up its emergency support for 1.2 million vulnerable people in urban areas. Despite school closures, WFP managed to reach students with high-energy biscuits and cash assistance for girls (strategic outcome 3) and supported the launch of a social protection response. The continuation of UNHAS was seen as a lifeline by many stakeholders. The creation of specific health facilities also helped staff to remain optimally engaged.

## **Recommendations**

63. As data collection took place in April and May of 2021 and the findings, conclusions and recommendations were developed before the Taliban consolidated control over Afghanistan in August 2021, these recommendations are expected to be implemented in a flexible manner, depending on the evolution of the situation and taking into account prevailing restrictions on building national capacity and systems. The timeframe for addressing some of the recommendations will be revisited as needed.

## Recommendations

#	Recommendation	Level/nature	Responsibility	Other contributing entities	Priority	Action deadline
1	<p><b>Design the next country strategic plan based on robust context analyses that provide the country office flexibility to adapt its response to changing needs in fluid circumstances, maintaining the focus areas of crisis response, resilience and root causes.</b></p> <p>1.1 Develop a theory of change with risks and assumptions based on an in-depth context analysis, with realistic pathways and mutually reinforcing strategic outcomes for achieving zero hunger and contributing to the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.</p> <p>1.2 Invest in a capacity gap assessment as the basis for developing a country capacity strengthening strategy that cuts across strategic outcomes.</p> <p>1.3 Strengthen the monitoring system to measure progress against intended outcomes (including on country capacity strengthening) in continuously changing circumstances.</p>	Strategic	Country office	Regional bureau, Research, Assessment and Monitoring Division (RAM), Programme – Humanitarian and Development Division (PRO)	High	Country strategic plan design (fourth quarter 2022)
2	<p><b>Develop a nutrition strategy that takes into consideration the local context and allows for the scale up of malnutrition prevention.</b></p> <p>2.1 Support the collection of evidence on various forms of malnutrition.</p> <p>2.2 Advocate and contribute to the design of a joint nutrition strategy, informed by recent evidence and local context analysis, that encompasses moderate acute malnutrition treatment and malnutrition prevention.</p> <p>2.3 Advocate and mobilize resources for scaling up malnutrition prevention in collaboration with key nutrition partners.</p> <p>2.4 Finalize and operationalize the WFP social and behaviour change communication strategy across WFP activities, with support from the regional bureau.</p>	Strategic	Country office	Nutrition cluster, UNICEF, FAO, CPs, regional bureau, Nutrition Division	High	Country strategic plan design (first quarter 2023)

#	Recommendation	Level/nature	Responsibility	Other contributing entities	Priority	Action deadline
3	<p><b>Conduct in-depth gender analysis to inform a clearer articulation of WFP ambitions in relation to gender transformation and social inclusion, taking into consideration the highly constraining environment.</b></p>	Strategic	Country office	Regional bureau, Gender Office	High	Country strategic plan design (first quarter 2023)
4	<p><b>Enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of resilience building activities and continue to seize opportunities to expand them as conditions allow and where there is a medium-term perspective.</b></p> <p>4.1 Conduct a comprehensive participatory analytical and planning process such as the three-pronged approach bringing together WFP, partners and communities to inform the design of a comprehensive resilience building approach clearly articulating WFP's vision of resilience building in Afghanistan, identifying WFP's comparative strengths and promoting an integrated approach across the country strategic plan as well as with other partners.</p> <p>4.2 Ensure scalable resilience building in the face of limited forecast multi-year funding and the volatile circumstances and engage in resilience building only if there is a medium-term perspective.</p> <p>4.3 Engage with cooperating partners to improve the design, implementation and sustainability of projects.</p> <p>4.4 Develop and implement a strong monitoring and evaluation system to assess the technical quality of assets and value to the community and contribution to resilience in the long term.</p> <p>4.5 Use demonstrated results to advocate additional multi-year unearmarked funding and progressively scale up resilience building programmes.</p>	Strategic	Country office	Donors, CPs, regional bureau, headquarters (PRO, RAM, Public Partnerships and Resourcing Division)	High	Country strategic plan design and ongoing

#	Recommendation	Level/nature	Responsibility	Other contributing entities	Priority	Action deadline
5	<p><b>Strengthen collaboration and coordination with key partners</b></p> <p>5.1 Prioritize dialogue with cooperating partners already identified as strategic partners to develop joint advocacy and fundraising approaches in the face of shrinking development resources.</p> <p>5.2 Develop a realistic assessment of the conditions under which donors may be receptive to funding WFP development-oriented activities.</p> <p>5.3 Increase dialogue with development-oriented United Nations partners to deepen analysis of WFP's potential role and added value, notably in the areas of resilience building and social protection.</p> <p>5.4 Leverage and scale up existing partnerships for greater synergies and resource optimization and accelerate achievement of lasting outcomes.</p>	Strategic	Country office	Donors, development-oriented United Nations partners, CPs	High	2022/2023

## Acronyms

AAP	accountability to affected populations
AFSeN	Afghanistan Food Security and Nutrition Agenda strategic plan for 2019–2023
CCS	country capacity strengthening
COMET	country office tool for managing effectively
COVID-19	coronavirus 2019 disease
CP	cooperating partner
CSP	country strategic plan
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FFA	food assistance for assets
FFT	food assistance for training
MAM	moderate acute malnutrition
NGO	non-governmental organization
PSEA	protection from sexual exploitation and abuse
SBCC	social and behaviour change communication
SCOPE	WFP's digital beneficiary information and transfer management platform
UNHAS	United Nations Humanitarian Air Service
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund