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Evaluation reports

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Summary report on the evaluation of WFP's policy on country strategic plans

Executive summary

This evaluation assessed the quality and results of the WFP policy on country strategic plans and the factors that enabled or hindered progress. It is intended to support both accountability and learning and is expected to inform decisions regarding the revision of the policy.

Covering the period from 2017 to 2022, the evaluation employed a theory-based, participatory, mixed-methods approach drawing on primary and secondary data sources, including extensive desk reviews, an online global survey, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, thematic round table discussions and workshops with WFP country offices, regional bureaux and headquarters units.

The policy, approved by the WFP Executive Board at its 2016 second regular session, seeks to improve the quality and coherence of WFP assistance and marks a substantial shift in the organization's approach to programme planning, oversight and approval by establishing an integrated strategic and programmatic instrument that covers the entire portfolio of WFP work in a country for a period of up to five years. Country strategic plans are based on the promise of contributing to national development objectives and humanitarian needs and are centred on WFP's value proposition in relation to its partners in a given set of circumstances.

To fairly assess the results of the policy it is important to keep in mind the far-reaching scale of the change that it implied. The period covered by the evaluation saw WFP making significant progress in adjusting its strategic outlook, relationships with other actors and internal systems, all while keeping pace with dramatically growing need. Nevertheless, the changes that the policy and WFP

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.

Focal points:

Ms A.-C. Luzot
Director of Evaluation a.i.
email: anneclaire.luzot@wfp.org

Mr S. Lenci
Senior Evaluation Officer
email: sergio.lenci@wfp.org

strategic plans have set in motion will take more time to fully mature, and key adjustments are needed to ensure that the policy ambitions are achieved.

Overall, the areas where the greatest progress is being made relate to strategic positioning and, in particular, alignment with national priorities and harmonization within the United Nations. Some of the changes envisioned by the policy have resulted in improvements in programme quality, in particular in terms of WFP's role in work on the humanitarian–development–peace nexus and resilience, as well as selected dimensions of flexibility and adaptation. Progress in reducing transaction costs and making resource flows more flexible and predictable has been much more elusive, and various areas of management remain challenging, including the adequate equipping of country offices and the strong monitoring of performance.

Against this backdrop, the evaluation recommended that WFP simplify the country strategic plan approval and revision processes with a view to reducing transaction costs while maintaining the strategic oversight of the Board; strengthen support for country offices in country strategic plan design and implementation; strengthen and streamline accountability and learning for results-based management; strengthen its positioning through a clearer vision and understanding of its role in work at the humanitarian–development–peace nexus; and scale up the strategic workforce planning process, with continued investment in the development of WFP staff skills in line with the WFP people policy and evolving need.

Draft decision*

The Board takes note of the summary report on the evaluation of WFP's policy on country strategic plans (WFP/EB.A/2023/7-B) and management response (WFP/EB.A/2023/7-B/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.

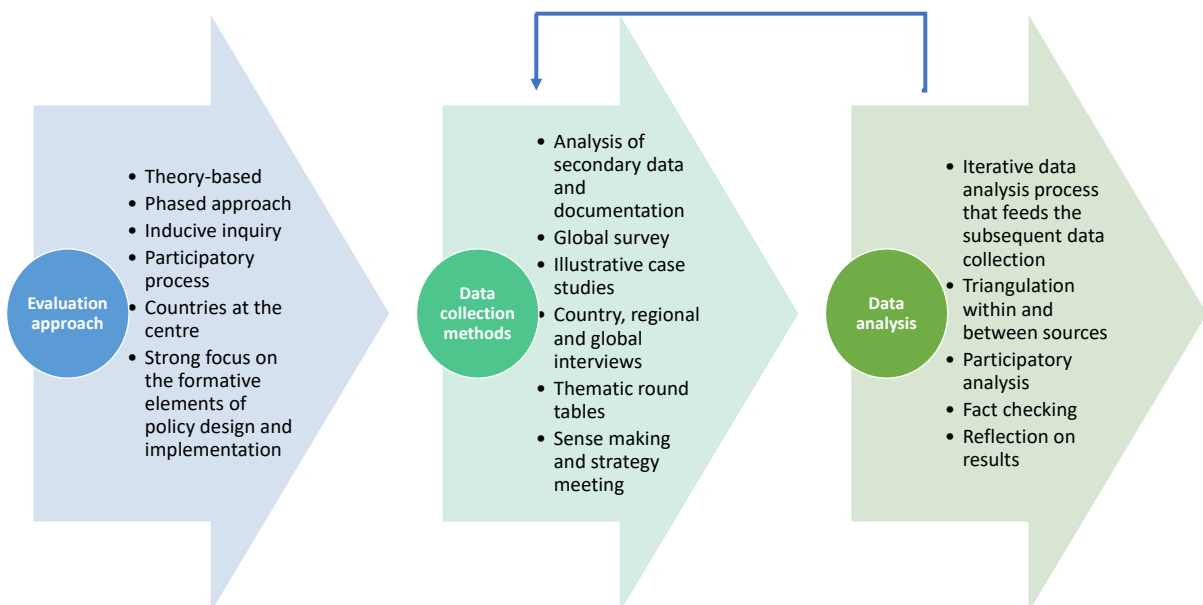
* This is a draft decision. For the final decision adopted by the Board, please refer to the decisions and recommendations document issued at the end of the session.

Introduction

Evaluation features

1. The evaluation of the WFP policy on country strategic plans (CSPs) assessed the quality and results of the policy, along with the factors that enabled or hindered progress. It is intended to support both accountability and learning and is expected to inform decisions regarding the revision of the policy.
2. The evaluation covered the period from 2017 to 2022 and employed a theory-based, participatory, mixed-methods approach drawing on primary and secondary data sources. It included extensive desk reviews, an online global survey, interviews, focus group discussions, thematic round table discussions and workshops with WFP country offices, regional bureaux and relevant headquarters units. This allowed the triangulation and validation of findings across methods and sources.

Figure 1: Evaluation approach, data collection and analysis



Source: Evaluation team.

3. The evaluation is intended to inform WFP senior management, Board members and stakeholders in programmatic and supporting divisions at headquarters, regional bureaux and country offices. The Programme – Humanitarian and Development Division at headquarters is the owner of the policy. External stakeholders, including United Nations country teams, national governments, donors and partners, may benefit from the evaluation.
4. Ethical considerations and safeguards were designed to ensure the informed consent, privacy, confidentiality and anonymity of participants, cultural sensitivity and fair representation (including for women and socially excluded groups) and that the evaluation results in no harm to participants.
5. Gender and diversity and other cross-cutting issues (protection and accountability to affected populations, nutrition integration and environmental sustainability) were incorporated into the design and implementation of the evaluation through a toolbox that included guides for interviews and recommended approaches to various consultative events. Thematically, the evaluation assessed the extent to which the implementation of the CSP policy advanced action on WFP's commitments to cross-cutting issues.

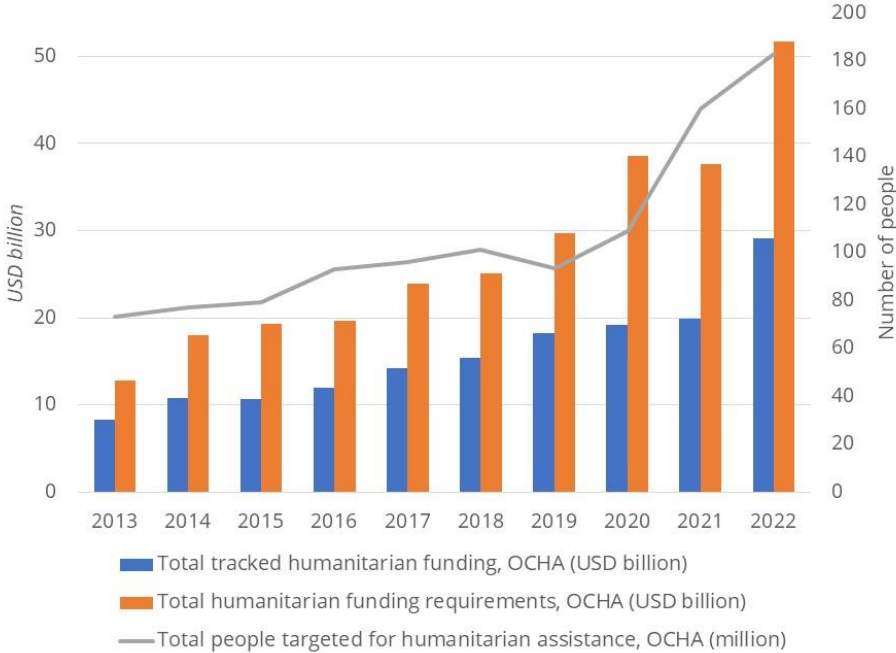
6. The limitations of the evaluation included some challenges to stakeholder involvement at various stages, which were mitigated through adaptive management by the evaluation team and the Office of Evaluation. The limited comparability of data pertaining to the periods before and after the introduction of the CSP was mitigated through increased triangulation of findings and a selective approach that favoured the areas most relevant to the analysis. Difficult attribution of the changes brought about by the CSP policy rather than other factors was mitigated through the triangulation of data across qualitative and quantitative sources. Cases where data were not reported or collected are specified in the report.

Context

7. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015, provides a framework for action and a long-term planning horizon for governments and their partners. In the same year, the World Humanitarian Summit committed to increasing the cooperation between humanitarian and development actors, multi-year funding, the localization of interventions and greater participation by – and accountability to – affected populations. At the country level, United Nations development system reform emphasized the need for greater coherence, stressing the importance of partnership and accountability and introducing changes in planning and reporting requirements. In mid-2019, the United Nations development assistance framework was replaced by the United Nations sustainable development cooperation framework (UNSDCF), with which the country programmes and results frameworks of all United Nations entities are expected to align.

8. The settings in which WFP operates have become increasingly challenging as a result of increasingly complex and protracted crises and events such as the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. The current global food crisis is exacerbated by conflicts and the worsening effects of climate change on people’s lives. Figure 2 illustrates global humanitarian need since 2013.

Figure 2: Trends in global humanitarian funding and people targeted for assistance, 2013–2022



Sources: Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Services. 2022. [Humanitarian InSight](#) (accessed March 2023).

9. Since the CSP policy was introduced, WFP has had two strategic plans, covering the periods from 2017 to 2021 and from 2022 to 2025 and both aligning with the 2030 Agenda, in particular Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2 “end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture” and 17 “strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development”. The focus on SDG 17 was intended to emphasize WFP’s roles as an enabler as well as an implementer.
10. A range of policies, some of which were approved after the CSP policy, are captured in the WFP compendium of policies relevant to the strategic plan and provide more detailed guidance on specific aspects of WFP’s work in the context of CSP implementation in various thematic and supporting areas.¹

Subject

11. The CSP policy² was approved by the Board in November 2016 as part of the Integrated Road Map, which also included the strategic plan for 2017–2021³, the financial framework review⁴ and the corporate results framework for 2017–2021.⁵
12. The policy seeks to improve the quality and coherence of WFP’s assistance and marks a substantial shift in the organization’s approach to programme planning, oversight and approval by establishing an integrated strategic and programmatic instrument that covers the entire portfolio of WFP’s work within a country for a period of up to five years. CSPs are based on the promise of contributing to national development objectives and humanitarian needs and are centred on WFP’s value proposition in a particular setting in relation to its partners. Eight interconnected areas of projected impact were identified in the policy, as shown in figure 3.

Figure 3: Country strategic plan policy, projected impacts



Source: “Policy on Country Strategic Plans” (WFP/EB.2/2016/4-C/1/Rev.1).

¹ “Compendium of policies relating to the strategic plan” (WFP/EB.2/2022/4-A), which also includes the “Country capacity strengthening policy update” (WFP/EB.A/2022/5-A).

² “Policy on Country Strategic Plans” (WFP/EB.2/2016/4-C/1/Rev.1).

³ “WFP Strategic Plan (2017–2021)” (WFP/EB.2/2016/4-A/1/Rev.2).

⁴ “Financial Framework Review” (WFP/EB.2/2016/5-B/1/Rev.1).

⁵ “Corporate Results Framework (2017–2021)” (WFP/EB.2/2016/4-B/1/Rev.1).

13. Since 2022, every WFP country operation has been part of a CSP, an interim CSP or a limited emergency operation, and 40 percent (those in 36 countries) are under, or soon will be under, a second-generation CSP. Of the first-generation CSPs, 68 percent have been or are currently being evaluated. It is projected that by 2025 87 percent of CSPs will be in alignment with UNSDCF cycles.

Evaluation findings

How good is the policy?

Timeliness, appropriateness and relevance

14. The CSP policy was relevant and timely in the light of global developments and commitments articulated in the 2030 Agenda and the United Nations development system reform process, which emphasized the critical importance of country ownership and partnerships. The scale of organizational change that accompanied the introduction of CSPs was significant and unprecedented, with implications for processes, staffing and resourcing. The replacement of activity-based country portfolios with strategic country programming was appropriate, brought WFP into line with its peer United Nations organizations and contributed to the positioning of WFP as a key actor at the humanitarian–development–peace nexus.

Coherence with WFP strategic plans and policies

15. When approved the CSP policy was coherent with the existing WFP policy framework. Over time, as the policy framework evolved, WFP sought to align it with the CSP policy, recognizing the policy's existence and role in country planning and providing (in some cases) specific guidance on priorities. The strategic plan for 2022–2025 has incorporated lessons from the rollout of the CSP policy. Guidance on cross-cutting issues was broadly relegated to other policies and guidance, some of which emerged after the CSP policy. At the country level, CSP "lines of sight" ensure that CSP outcomes are explicitly linked to the corporate strategic outcomes in the relevant strategic plans.

Guiding WFP's scope of work and prioritization

16. The CSP policy presents a clear rationale for, and a comprehensive set of anticipated outcomes from, CSPs. It has been recognized as useful in providing general guidance, including through the introduction of a five-year planning horizon. However, it is insufficiently clear with regard to the role of WFP in peacebuilding and it does not strategically identify the comparative advantage of WFP, which negatively affects strategic prioritization.

What are the results of the policy?

17. This section is guided by the underlying logic of the evaluation theory of change as set out and validated during the evaluation inception phase, which broke down the eight CSP policy impact areas into 12 areas⁶ organized around three dimensions of analysis with a view to better covering the essence of the policy and the questions in the evaluation terms of reference, as listed below and illustrated in figure 4. The three pillars are:
- A. strategic repositioning;
 - B. programming quality and results; and
 - C. management, governance and accountability.

⁶ The 12 areas made explicit reference to stronger, broader partnerships; a humanitarian–development–peace nexus and resilience approach; cross-cutting issues; and simpler, predictable funding.

Figure 4: Country strategic plan policy, projected impacts

Source: CSP policy adapted by the evaluation team.

18. This section of the report also covers a fourth dimension, which is not reflected in figure 4 and which accounts for the unintended positive and negative outcomes of the policy.

A. Strategic repositioning

Improved alignment with national policies and priorities, including national Sustainable Development Goal targets

19. The CSP approach has contributed substantially to increased alignment with national policies and priorities, reflecting national SDG targets, although the focus on SDGs 2 and 17 was restrictive and strategic guidance was unclear as to whether WFP's contribution to other SDGs should also be acknowledged. In this regard, the new WFP strategic plan represents a positive development. The conduct of zero hunger strategic reviews was approached as a holistic and consultative process and offered opportunities for WFP to engage with a broader range of partners and policy processes, facilitating evidence-based planning and the identification of new strategic priorities. However, the high-level engagement with partners initiated during the zero-hunger strategic review process has been difficult to sustain during CSP implementation and, contrary to expectations, CSPs did not draw sufficient attention to the conditions necessary for sustaining results and achieving a strong transition to full national ownership. In second-generation CSPs the zero-hunger strategic reviews have been replaced by common country analyses carried out in the context of the UNSDCF participation process. The nature of the dialogue with governments is changing, and WFP will need to reflect on how to continue that constructive relationship while fully engaging through United Nations processes.

Strengthened harmonization with other United Nations entities and processes

20. The CSP policy provided enough flexibility for country offices to adapt to the evolving United Nations development system reform agenda, and alignment with the United Nations country frameworks has progressively increased, although harmonization with planning cycles met implementation challenges during the first-generation CSPs. WFP's presence within United Nations country teams and its contribution to UNSDCF planning processes and related common country analyses is increasingly valued: CSPs are now "derived from" rather than "aligned with" common programming frameworks. The CSP approach has significantly helped WFP to clarify where it can contribute to and complement the work of other agencies and seize opportunities for joint programming. However, some stakeholders perceive WFP as stretching its mission beyond its original goals, and alignment between United Nations humanitarian and development frameworks still lacks clarity.

Stronger and broader partnerships

21. The CSP policy encouraged increased attention to partnerships at the country level, while corporate attention to partnerships was growing. This has led to a broadening of partnerships but has not necessarily translated into making them more strategic or sustainable. Overall, the CSP policy, and subsequent guidance, did not offer sufficient strategic guidance or support; nor did they set specific expectations for accelerating change in WFP's ways of working in partnership, and WFP's culture and systems limited the achievement of the envisioned results. Country offices were expected to prioritize partnerships with international financial institutions and private sector and civil society actors; they made progress in that area but suffered from a lack of clarity on how to embark on or improve the desired engagements. With the second generation of CSPs, WFP is proving to be better equipped with corporate guidance on planning and engaging strategically in partnerships.

Repositioning WFP through greater focus, improved visibility and communications

22. The CSP approach created a space for WFP to position itself in relation to both the "saving lives" and "changing lives" agendas, and it significantly improved WFP's ability to communicate about its programming strategy and added value beyond emergency response. Yet the CSP processes led WFP to position itself in areas for which boundaries were not well defined and where it did not consistently have the required expertise, as in the case of country capacity strengthening. The consultation and design process opened the door to many agendas, but WFP faced challenges in clearly focusing on, and prioritizing its interventions in the areas where it could add value.

B. Programming quality and results***Improved effectiveness and efficiency in emergencies and (protracted) crisis situations***

23. Overall, the CSP approach has demonstrated substantial advantages for effectiveness by creating a vision of how WFP's emergency activities contribute and connect to long-term objectives and other components of the WFP portfolio. WFP maintains a strong reputation for rapidly, flexibly and efficiently responding to new emergency needs, but the speed, flexibility and efficiency gains envisioned in the CSP policy are sometimes constrained by certain aspects of the CSP revision process, which is designed for medium-term planning and budgeting.

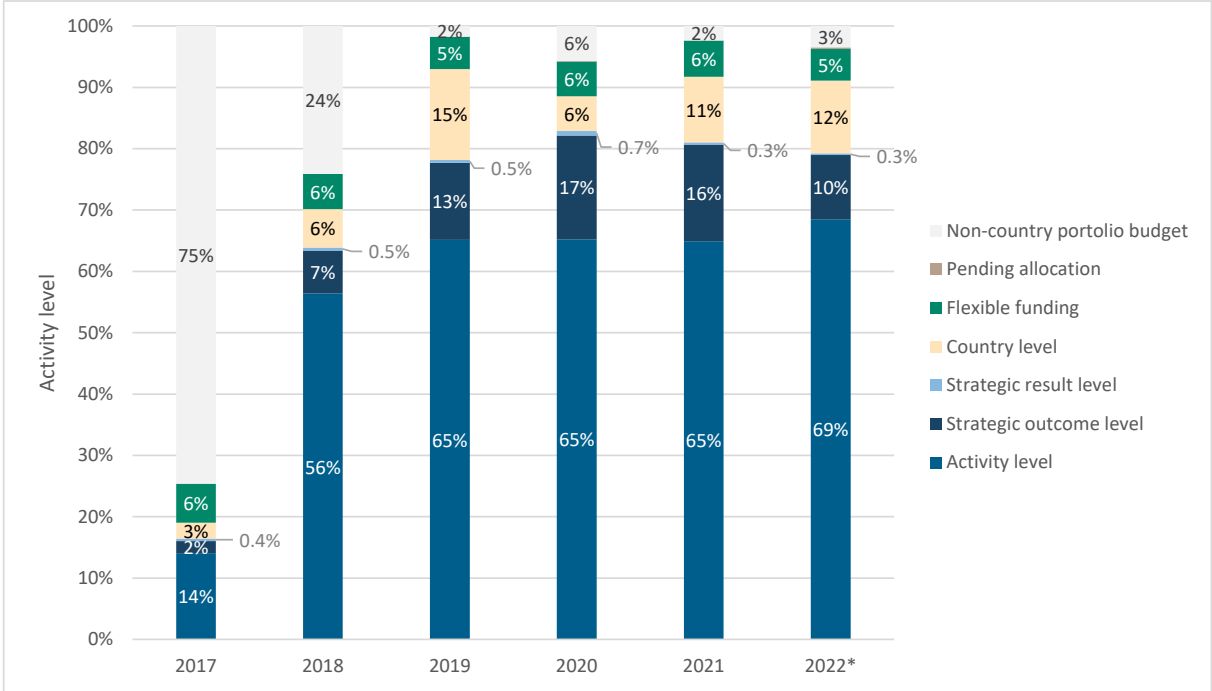
Better linking humanitarian, development and peacebuilding work and applying a resilience approach

24. The CSP policy has created strong momentum for better linking humanitarian and development work, including through a resilience approach in protracted situations. This has encouraged WFP to pilot or expand interventions in social protection, climate change adaptation and livelihoods, with a greater focus on national capacity strengthening. However, the peace dimension of the humanitarian–development–peace nexus has received less attention even though conflict is on the rise and WFP is present in many conflict settings. Guidance for country offices on how to bridge the nexus effectively and on the role of WFP in peacebuilding has remained fragmented. Country offices also face significant challenges in funding their ambitions for resilience and the development element of the nexus.

Flexibility to plan and respond in dynamic operational settings

25. The CSP approach has provided WFP with a planning mechanism that can be flexible and adaptable to changes in operating environments. However, the CSP structure, as defined in the line of sight, plays a significant role in flexibility and adaptability given its emphasis on activities as the most visible planning and budgeting component of CSPs, for which donor funding tends to be earmarked. As illustrated in figure 5, and contrary to the hopes and intentions underlying the CSP policy, high levels of earmarking persist and remain a barrier to flexibility. The CSP revision process provides a mechanism for further adapting CSPs and country portfolio budgets but the level of effort required to process revisions can create a disincentive to adaptation and can negatively affect the timeliness of responses to evolving needs and priorities.

Figure 5: Contributions to WFP by level of earmarking, 2017–2022



Source: Evaluation team’s analysis of WFP distribution and contribution forecast statistics as of 4 December 2022.

Note: The proportion of funding earmarked at the strategic result level is consistently below 1 percent.

* 2022 data are preliminary, up to October 2022.

Strengthened approach to gender equality and other cross-cutting issues

26. The CSP policy has provided an opening for the enhanced integration of cross-cutting issues, and subsequent improvements have been seen in the related policy and strategic frameworks, corporate guidance and dedicated human and financial resources. However, many country offices still find the operationalization of commitments to cross-cutting issues in the CSPs challenging because of persistent gaps in resourcing and a lack of systems for effectively tracking funding and spending.

C. Management, governance and accountability***Increased strategic guidance and reduced transaction costs***

27. Overall, the intended reduction in the volume of separate project documents with different timeframes has been achieved. The Board has gained increased oversight and, in some cases, has offered strategic guidance. Yet operational efficiency related to the reduction of process management burdens has not been fully realized because the system has become more complex, with increasingly redundant layers of review for planning and budgeting documents. Although some steps in the programme review and approval process have been eliminated or streamlined since the policy was adopted, and the length of time from submission to approval for a CSP or a revision has decreased, the various steps in the programme review and approval process often generate comments – ranging from the strategic to the highly technical in nature – that have been submitted, discussed and addressed by the country office and the regional bureau at earlier stages in the process and in dialogue with national governments. As a comparison, it should be noted that the management and authorization processes of other United Nations entities are significantly more decentralized. The country programme documents of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) are endorsed by regional directors on the advice of regional chiefs of planning and monitoring and are approved by the UNICEF Executive Board on a no-objection basis. The processes of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) are likewise significantly more decentralized than those of WFP.

Simpler and more predictable resource allocation

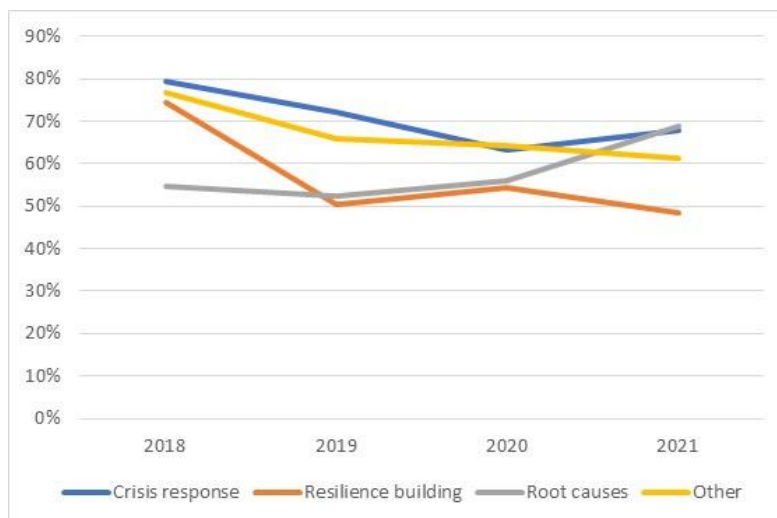
28. Between 2015 and 2021 contributions to WFP increased by 92 percent⁷ compared with 62 percent for UNICEF⁸ and 38 percent for UNHCR.⁹ Total need, however, continued to exceed funding by a significant margin. Between 2017 and 2021 the gap between WFP's aggregated needs-based plans and the allocated programmable budget fluctuated, with an average funding gap of 33 percent and variations among focus areas, as illustrated in figure 6. Notably, the average funding gaps for resilience building and addressing root causes were 43 and 42 percent respectively, compared with 21 percent for crisis response.

⁷ WFP. 2016–2022. [Annual performance reports for 2015–2021](#).

⁸ United Nations Children's Fund. 2019–2022. [Funding compendiums for 2018–2021](#).

⁹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. 2016–2021. [Update on budgets and funding \(2020/2021\)](#); [Update on budgets and funding \(2019, 2020-2021\)](#); [Update on budgets and funding for 2018 and reporting on 2017](#); and [Update on budgets and funding for 2017 and reporting on 2016](#).

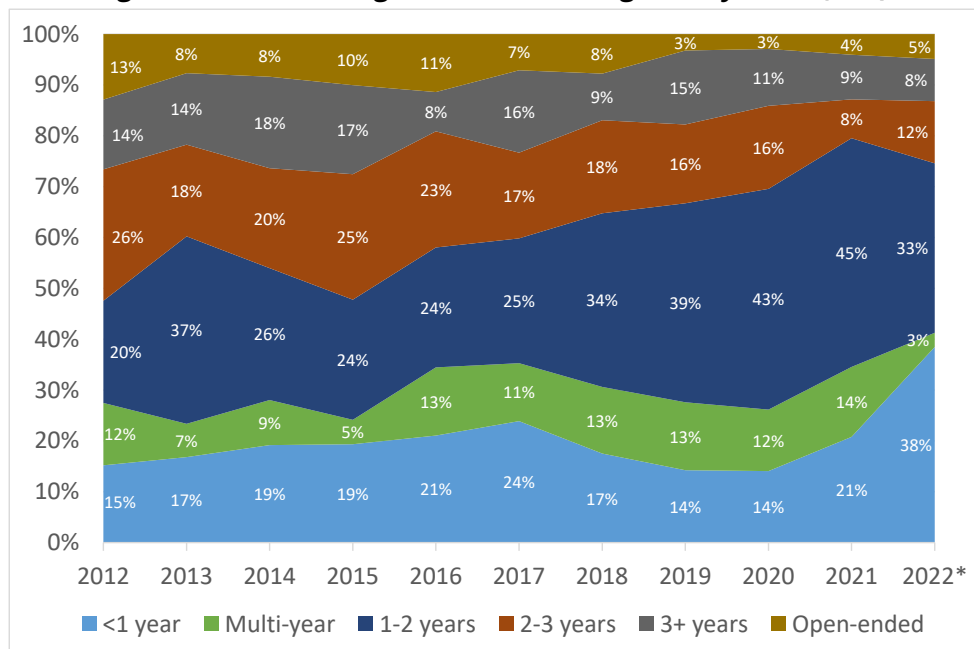
Figure 6: Percentage of needs-based plans funded by allocated programmable budget, 2018–2021



Source: WFP country portfolio budget resources overview.

29. Despite WFP’s significant financial growth, the predictability of WFP funding has not substantially improved and funding continues to be relatively short term. The total value of grants with a duration of between one and two years has increased the most, from 20 percent of contributions in 2012 to 45 percent in 2021. Grants with a duration of less than one year and “multi-year” grants (which indicate likely renewal but have a contract duration of only one year)¹⁰ have increased slightly (figure 7).

Figure 7: Duration of grants to WFP, weighted by value (USD)



Source: Evaluation team’s analysis of distribution and contribution forecast statistics.

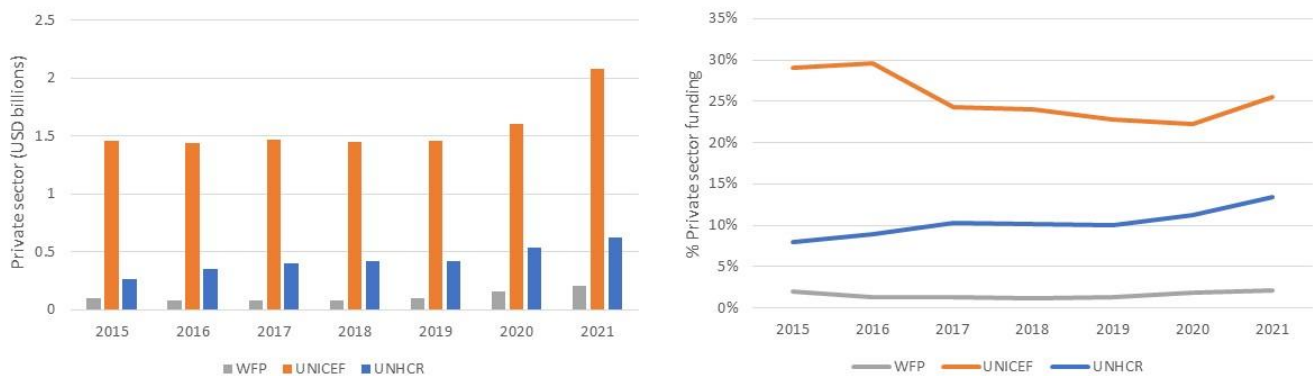
Note: Grant duration calculated for positive contributions only.

* 2022 data are preliminary, up to October 2022.

¹⁰ WFP. 2020. *Strategic Evaluation of Funding WFP’s Work*, footnote 77. “WFP makes a distinction between multi-year funding and long duration grants. The WFP definition of multi-year contributions are funds committed on a certain date which WFP can predictably count on in the following years. They are intended to provide support over more than one year but are registered within the WFP systems as separate grants – one for each year of the agreement. Long duration contracts are more flexible in that they could theoretically be spent in the first year if needed.”

30. As illustrated in figure 8, WFP funding from the private sector remains much lower than that of peers, although the adoption of the 2019 private sector strategy and a critical corporate initiative are beginning to yield results.

Figure 8: Amount and percentage of total contributions from private sector sources, WFP, UNICEF and UNHCR, 2015–2021



Sources: WFP Information Network and Global System and annual performance reports, UNICEF funding compendiums and UNHCR global reports.

Equipping WFP country offices

31. Ensuring that country offices have the necessary staff to meet the ambitions of CSPs has been challenging. Workforce planning has been insufficiently adapted to needs, and the skills of staff are not optimally aligned with WFP's ambition to play a catalytic and more upstream role. Although WFP's 2021 people policy is guiding a more strategic approach to workforce planning, staff turnover and challenges to the stability of national-level staffing persist, reducing the capacity to retain talent, although improvements have been made in the type and duration of contracts.

Enhanced performance management, reporting and accountability

32. Since 2017, progress towards the CSP policy goal of enhancing monitoring for results-based management has been limited and incremental, with the corporate results framework and its indicators falling short of enabling country offices to effectively measure, analyse and report on progress in the full spectrum of their activities. Limitations in the validity of indicators for measuring expected changes, particularly in capacity strengthening and resilience building, have influenced the utility of monitoring data for strategic decision-making and adaptive management during CSP implementation, as well as WFP's ability to tell the full story of its contributions at the humanitarian–development–peace nexus. The mid-term reviews are intended to contribute to filling that gap. To address the requirements of the CSP policy, the Office of Evaluation has significantly expanded its capacity to manage CSP evaluations and, in line with the 2015 evaluation policy, has invested in providing country offices with support for decentralized evaluations. The value of CSP evaluations is recognized, but there are concerns about the “one-size-fits-all” coverage requirements, cost and timeliness. Overall, the combination of monitoring, reporting and evaluation requirements has led to challenges in the sequencing, timing and absorptive capacity needed to make use of the evidence being generated. Regional bureaux and headquarters have initiated efforts to support the integration of evidence into programming.

Unintended outcomes

33. Three main areas of unintended outcomes were identified by the evaluation:
- i) In certain instances, the zero-hunger strategic review took on a broader role and function than was originally envisioned and contributed to furthering national policy agendas and priorities.
 - ii) The line of sight requirements introduced during the implementation of the CSP policy included vertical links among activities, outputs, outcomes and focus areas. Although intended to clarify causality along the results chain, in practice the introduction of those requirements contributed to a degree of fragmentation in CSP design. Moreover, the corresponding management structure in country offices, with separate outcome and activity managers, contributed to a “siloeing” effect during CSP implementation.
 - iii) The CSP architecture enhanced the visibility of WFP’s development work and has allowed for more long-term planning in all areas of work. Conversely, emergency response and supply chain-related work, while continuing to represent the main budget and funding component of CSPs and the greatest WFP asset and comparative advantage in many settings, has become less visible in the CSP narrative.

What has enabled or hindered the achievement of results from the CSP policy?

Internal enabling factors

34. *Leadership of the change process.* Senior management engagement and staff commitment at all levels of WFP pushed the CSP policy agenda internally. This created a sense of purpose and urgency from the initial stages of CSP rollout. Over time, however, the coherence of the oversight of the organizational change processes has diminished. To some extent, the role of the Integrated Road Map team, which provided the initial push for the change, has been taken up by the Programme – Humanitarian and Development Division and embedded in the second-generation CSP working group. However, there is insufficient authority at that level to address some of the key challenges to flexibility and efficiency that significantly affect a number of the expected impacts of the CSP policy.
35. *Country director commitment and persistence.* Country office leadership has required a combination of vision, significant time, creativity, willingness to take risks and skills to navigate around some of the cumbersome elements of the change process. For some country directors the change has not been easy or evident, as the steering of the change process has required expertise that is substantially different from what might have been needed for the management of a portfolio of humanitarian project engagements. While significant efforts were made to engage with country office leadership and provide support at the CSP pilot stage, over time the CSP rollout became more standardized and country offices were left to manage their own processes.
36. *WFP staff enthusiasm and commitment.* While the speed of change was challenging to the organization and its staff, wide engagement and the deep commitment of staff – supported by workshops, guidance and training – have benefited the understanding and rollout of CSP processes. Dedicated teams from headquarters supported the pilot phase and were involved in the subsequent expansion. Regional bureau staff have played a critical role in supporting country offices and translating the implications of the CSP policy and the guidance provided into country planning and implementation processes, thereby serving as a conduit for learning over time.

37. *Financial resources for specific priorities.* Where the rollout of the CSP policy has been accompanied by the allocation of specific funding success has been facilitated and enabled. Dedicated resources for innovation and seed funding have allowed countries to make real progress in some of the change areas envisioned in the policy, such as positioning at the humanitarian–development–peace nexus. However, such resources were not available for other important areas such as upfront funding for staffing for new types of engagement and areas of work (such as policy advocacy), CSP preparation, gender mainstreaming and engagement with the common country analysis and UNSDCF processes.

Internal hindering factors

38. *Frequent changes to critical frameworks, tools and guidance.* Staff absorption capacity was severely tested by the volume of conceptual and procedural changes and guidance introduced by the policy, some of which emerged with significant delays and underwent frequent revisions. Staff familiarity and comfort working within the system have improved over time and with experience in implementing the CSP approach. However, some of the solutions adopted represent “work-arounds” for processes that continue to be cumbersome. Not all areas of guidance and tools for CSP policy implementation have stabilized, for example the corporate results framework.
39. *A variety of country office circumstances and operating environments.* The change process that came with the introduction of CSPs was significant for all country offices. However, the weight of the processes and requirements has been significantly greater for small country offices than for large ones, given the more limited budgets, smaller staff contingencies and (in some cases) external circumstances of smaller offices. The CSP policy and subsequent guidance took insufficient account of those differences.
40. *WFP’s statutory required reliance on voluntary contributions has reduced the capacity of the organization to achieve the ambitions of its CSPs.* Country portfolio budgets continue to reflect funding opportunities that are not optimally aligned with the ambitions of CSPs. Funding realities (including the limited flexibility of donor contributions) have reduced the capacity to invest upfront in relationships, programme design and experimentation and partnerships. They have also affected the staffing of country offices.
41. *Staff recruitment remains a function of the availability of resources.* Staff realignment exercises have created clarity, highlighting where there are gaps, but the realities of funding continue to limit the degree to which WFP country office staff have the required expertise. As a result, in most settings, and in particular in underfunded countries and small operations, it has not been possible to find staff with optimal skills. This has reduced the capacity of WFP to respond to opportunities to consolidate specific areas of its work and has limited the possibility of further building the case for its added value.
42. *Knowledge management systems inadequately support results-based management.* Weaknesses in results frameworks and compliance-driven internal reporting have limited the utility of monitoring data for the strategic management of CSP implementation, and the corporate results framework still fails to adequately capture key dimensions of WFP’s work, including in supply chain-related activities and country capacity strengthening. The use of evidence remains weak, with significant fragmentation among divisions at all levels of the organization.
43. *Insufficient clarity and corporate steering with regard to WFP’s comparative advantages.* Both the CSP policy and the accompanying guidance provided country offices with insufficient help in prioritizing and identifying the specific added value of WFP in each context. Combined with the realities of the WFP funding model this has continued to drive the organization to move into a range of areas, sometimes with capacity and funding that are not sufficient to ensure success.

External enabling factors

44. *Endorsement and ownership by national governments* is critical for effectiveness and sustainability.
45. *Growing demand for WFP services and support for service provision* has brought new opportunities for strategic engagement and positioning, as well as additional funding.

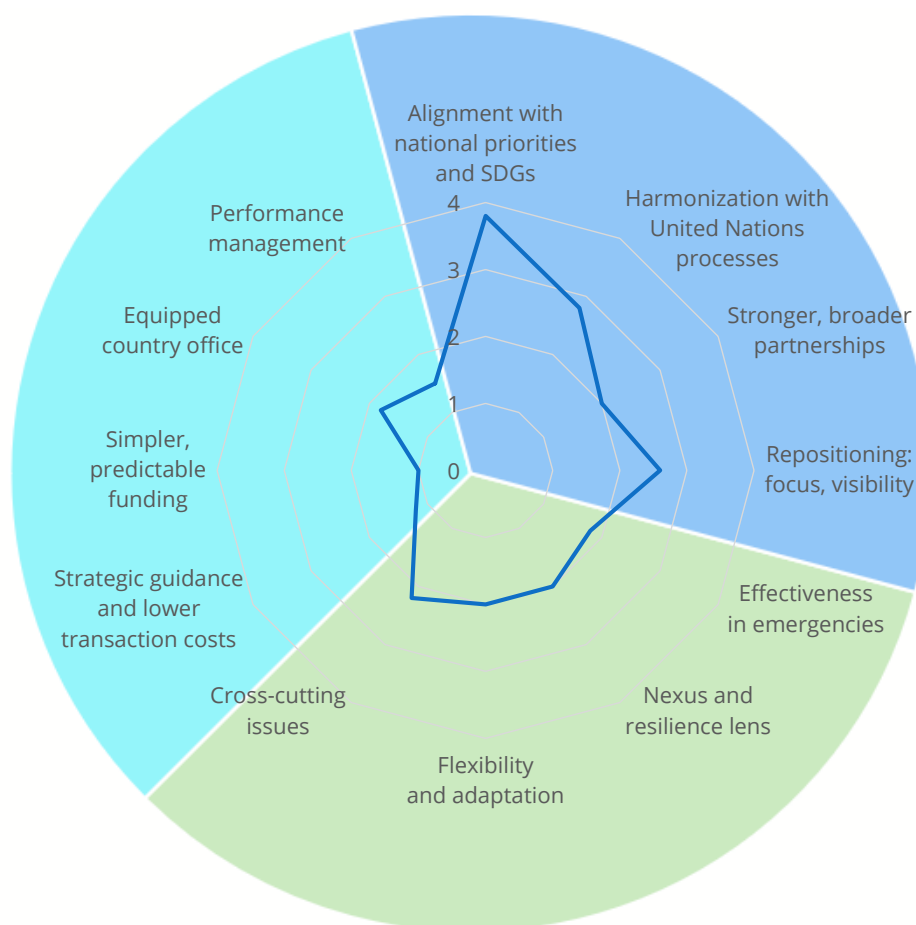
External hindering factors

46. *Donor priorities and earmarking continued to determine funding flows and limit flexibility.* In addition, the escalation of humanitarian need over the period covered by the evaluation reinforced the views of some donors regarding WFP as primarily a humanitarian actor and increased the pressure and scrutiny on scarce resources, working against the envisioned change to more flexible and long-term funding.
47. *Changes in global circumstances during CSP policy implementation* have been more radical and far-reaching than could be anticipated, including the COVID-19 pandemic, conflicts and the global food crisis.

Conclusions

48. To fairly assess the results of the CSP policy it is important to keep in mind the far-reaching scale of the change that the policy implied. The period covered by the evaluation saw WFP making significant progress in adjusting its strategic outlook, relationship to other actors and internal systems, all while keeping pace with dramatically growing need. Nevertheless, the changes that the policy and WFP strategic plans have set in motion will take more time to fully mature, and key adjustments are needed to ensure that the policy's ambitions are achieved.
49. Overall, as illustrated in figure 9, the areas where the greatest progress is being made relate to strategic repositioning and, in particular, alignment with national priorities, harmonization with other United Nations entities and general repositioning. Inroads have been made in the changes in selected programme quality dimensions envisioned in the CSP policy, in particular in WFP's positioning at the humanitarian-development-peace nexus and in resilience agendas, and in selected dimensions of flexibility and adaptation. Progress in achieving reductions in transaction costs and more predictable and flexible resource flows has been much more elusive, and various areas of management remain challenging, including the adequate equipping of country offices and strong performance management.

Figure 9: Evaluation team's assessment of the level of progress in key anticipated impact areas



Source: Evaluation team.

Note: The evaluation team based its assessment on the evaluation evidence and made judgements regarding the progress made in each of the areas to date. The numbering refers to the following categories: 0 = no/little change; 1 = emerging changes; 2 = positive progress, more needed; 3 = significant achievement; 4 = progress complete.

50. **Conclusion 1: The CSP policy and its rollout constituted a courageous, significant and highly relevant shift for WFP**, with CSPs now a firm feature of WFP programme cycles. The policy initiated a substantial departure from WFP's previous way of planning and operating. It was soundly based on the sustainable development agenda, United Nations development system reform and other changes in its operating environment, as well as on expectations within and outside WFP with regard to how the organization should improve. The change profoundly affected systems and processes, leading to considerable efforts at various levels of the organization, in particular the country offices, which have taken on board the change with significant courage and commitment against a backdrop of increasing external pressure and challenges.
51. **Conclusion 2: The CSP policy continues to be valid. It is not in need of immediate updating.** The policy has been important in facilitating the transition and organizational shift in WFP's work from implementer to enabler and has served that purpose well. The policy also served an important overarching purpose authorizing a major change in the practices, rules and regulations that shape the work of WFP at the country (and multi-country) level. More broadly, it enabled a move to the planning and articulation of visions of work in a country and to external engagement that brings partners on board. The focus should now be on ensuring that the instruments and resources that are needed for continued

implementation of the policy are fully supportive of WFP's efforts as encompassed in the policy (see next conclusion).

52. **Conclusion 3: With CSPs firmly a part of the WFP landscape, the central instruments of success of the CSP policy are now the suite of instruments, accompanying measures and staff capacity and technical skills that are essential to CSP planning and implementation. Those elements all need continued priority attention.** As country offices shift into their second-generation CSPs, the more important normative reference point for staff at all levels has shifted from the policy to the wide array of programme, planning, budgeting, performance management and reporting guidance that has been developed to support the implementation of the policy, which can more nimbly be adjusted based on learning, feedback and major changes in the WFP operating environment. The success of WFP's work will depend to a significant extent on the organization's ability to staff its CSP implementation with the expertise needed to realize CSP ambitions.
53. **Conclusion 4: The CSP policy is beginning to show dividends relating to programme quality enhancements and holistic planning, and a new generation of CSPs should allow WFP to build on this.** Lessons from the development and implementation of first-generation CSPs have been internalized by country offices, regional bureaux and headquarters and include an increasing focus on the development of programme theory and logic and the clarification of how WFP positions itself in the development sphere. There remains a lack of clarity on the priorities within CSPs, which has led WFP to engage in very broad agendas in many settings and has affected the achievement of results. At the same time, prioritization is insufficiently balanced with responsiveness to national circumstances, priorities and critical gaps. In areas such as work at the humanitarian–development–peace nexus, WFP is making progress, but there remains insufficient clarity as to where and how the organization can best add value while retaining a focus on its main areas of strength.
54. **Conclusion 5: The CSP policy has positively influenced WFP's engagement in and contribution to the external environment, but in many settings the CSP ambitions significantly outstrip the available financial and staff capacity and technical skills needed for implementation.** The external environment evolved alongside the evolution in United Nations country planning to the revised common country analysis and UNSDCF system. Those system-wide processes will now guide and frame the development aspects of CSPs and will require WFP to make further adjustments. CSPs have allowed WFP to align well with the priorities of countries and partners and to engage in new and innovative areas of work while deepening its experience in more established areas. This is reflected in WFP's improved positioning, more mature relationship with governments and better alignment within the United Nations system, all of which have resulted in new opportunities and areas of work. As a tool, CSPs have brought about a substantive shift to more strategic, long-term planning. Significant emphasis on the matching of staff and technical resources to country office ambitions (and vice versa) has been missing for much of the period evaluated.
55. **Conclusion 6: The internal management of CSPs has become less cohesive over time, with implications for the efficiency and effectiveness of CSP design and implementation.** Some elements of management have been overlooked or given insufficient attention, have simply moved too slowly or have not been responsive to feedback. Some CSP processes have worked in the direction of greater centralization and more bureaucracy, offsetting gains from the elimination of the previous fragmented project structure. Of particular concern are inefficiencies in the programme review and approval process and structural challenges stemming from the combined CSP, corporate results framework and budgeting procedures and guidance, which can negatively affect WFP's ability to respond quickly to emergency needs and coherently design integrated programming. "Siloed" approaches to implementation are evident, partly owing to external factors such as the nature of funding, but also the process management changes that

accompanied the CSP rollout, which have worked against the holistic and integrated planning aims of the policy.

56. **Conclusion 7: There is a need to simplify processes and procedures, delegate more responsibility, authority and accountability and build more robust planning capacity.** The focus should be on keeping what works well and making heavy processes significantly lighter, more streamlined and nimble. Continued positive alignment with United Nations planning and national priorities will require a more robust and decentralized planning support function and authorities. A strong focus on such internal reforms will reinforce the value of country planning and position WFP for the future.
57. **Conclusion 8: In spite of an enhanced focus on monitoring, reporting and evaluation, WFP's capacity to use information on programme implementation to inform its decisions remains weak.** Despite the significant expenditure of effort to collect data and generate learning, major weaknesses remain. Monitoring systems focus on how much happened, but certain indicators do not meaningfully measure progress towards the intended changes and do not produce information that is valuable to country offices or facilitate a better understanding of what worked. Despite being oriented towards corporate aggregation for accountability purposes, monitoring and reporting systems have not reduced the need for tailored donor reporting or led to major changes in the availability of flexible funding. Evaluations have produced valuable evidence and learning, decentralized evaluations in particular provide opportunities for contextually relevant evidence generation, and efforts to synthesize and summarize evaluative evidence improve the likelihood that evidence will be used. However, the combined evaluation coverage and other process requirements are not adequately differentiated in line with the varying sizes of country office portfolios and are too cumbersome and difficult to sequence to be sustained in their current form. Financial investments in monitoring and evaluation have been too limited, and organizational capacity still falls significantly short of what is needed in that area. The resulting situation is one of fragmentation of evidence generation and use, which needs to be addressed.

Recommendations

Recommendation	Priority	Action deadline
<p>Recommendation 1: Continued policy implementation should embrace a more strategic and leaner approach to the country strategic plan framework, while future revisions need to take account of further consolidated learning.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 1.1: Defer consideration of a country strategic plan policy update until learning from second-generation country strategic plans and the first generation of the United Nations sustainable development cooperation frameworks can be consolidated. ➤ 1.2: Continue to update planning, budgeting and resource management requirements and related guidance and tools, focusing on simplification, absorptive capacity for change, accessibility and utility. ➤ 1.3: Reconfigure country strategic plans as lighter and leaner strategic planning documents reflecting a high-level vision and strategy and including indicative needs-based budgets for Board approval. Relegate the details of implementation and resource mobilization arrangements to separate internal planning documents. 	High	June 2024
<p>Recommendation 2: Strengthen the support and resources dedicated to country strategic planning and the early stages of country strategic plan implementation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 2.1: Increase the support provided to country offices for country strategic plan development, quality assurance and learning. ➤ 2.2: Allocate adequate and dedicated budgetary resources at all levels in order to support country strategic planning and programme design, including through active engagement with common country analysis and the United Nations sustainable development cooperation framework processes. ➤ 2.3: Ensure that country offices are better equipped internally with the right expertise and capacity to engage in country strategic planning. ➤ 2.4: Provide country offices with dedicated on-demand support for the development of detailed country strategic plan implementation road maps based on approved country strategic plans. ➤ 2.5: Enhance guidance on the development of multi-annual needs-based budgets for resilience and root causes programming to ensure that they are based on realistic assessments of what WFP can do and what it can contribute to, taking into account available funding and implementation capacity. 	High	December 2023

Recommendation	Priority	Action deadline
<p>Recommendation 3: Further simplify and streamline procedures and processes for the review, revision and approval of the country strategic plan package with a view to enhancing efficiency and flexibility and reducing transaction costs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 3.1: Ensure that the intended focus and high-level priorities of country strategic plans, and the role that WFP will play, are discussed and agreed with the relevant regional bureaux and headquarters units at an early stage, in conjunction with consultations with key stakeholders at the country level and in alignment with the United Nations sustainable development cooperation framework process. ➤ 3.2: Further streamline the programme review and approval process to avoid unnecessary duplication of technical oversight (between the electronic programme review process and the strategic programme review process and between headquarters and the regional bureaux) and encourage discipline (self-restraint) in commenting on processes. ➤ 3.3: Further simplify the financial framework so as to lighten the associated workload for country office budget management and country strategic plan revisions. Request the Board to rationalize and simplify the delegations of authority for the approval of country strategic plans and related revisions once the results of ongoing governance and corporate change initiatives are clear (such as the ongoing Executive Board governance review). 	High	July 2024
<p>Recommendation 4: Strengthen and streamline accountability and learning for results-based management.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 4.1: Shift towards output- and outcome-based budgeting and staffing, in line with the requirements of ongoing United Nations development system reform processes within the context of the United Nations sustainable development cooperation frameworks. ➤ 4.2: Review the value proposition of tagging country strategic plan outcomes by focus area, including the effects on coherent, integrated, outcome-oriented programme design and resource mobilization. ➤ 4.3: Develop common information management systems that utilize WFP monitoring data, can provide country offices with real-time access to analytical information for adaptive programme management and ensure interoperability with evolving system-wide requirements (such as the United Nations sustainable development cooperation framework reporting and the UN INFO platform). ➤ 4.4: Revise guidance on country strategic plan mid-term review exercises to ensure that the reviews are light and carried out in-house and enhance their complementarity with the country strategic plan evaluation process by allowing them to focus on dimensions of continued relevance, coverage, output-level achievements, coherence and operational efficiency, which will be updated at the country strategic plan evaluation stage with an independent assessment that adds coverage of, among other elements, the dimensions of effectiveness and sustainability. ➤ 4.5: Revise the evaluation requirements for country strategic plans to allow more selective and more strategic, timely and cost-efficient evaluation coverage. ➤ 4.6: Further invest in country office monitoring and evaluation functions to expand capacity and ensure adequate dedicated budgets for monitoring and evaluation. 	Medium	July 2024

Recommendation	Priority	Action deadline
<p>Recommendation 5: Develop a clear shared understanding and vision of WFP's work at the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 5.1: Update the guidance on country strategic plan design and prioritization based on the results of ongoing policy evaluations that cover critical aspects of humanitarian-development-peace programming, related potential policy revisions and new policies. ➤ 5.2: Adopt five-year* theories of change for work at the humanitarian-development-peace nexus and on the “changing lives” components of all country strategic plans, in conjunction with a systemic logic that allows WFP to act or be ready to react in changing complex situations and that takes into account long-term visions of change beyond the five-year country strategic plan period. Develop a coherent corporate approach to theories of change that ensures realism in the setting of ambitions, clear prioritization and the layering of programmes, in coordination with other humanitarian, development and (as relevant) peace actors. ➤ 5.3: Significantly expand strategic investment funding for technical capacity and seed funding for country office work in critical and underfunded areas of the nexus. 	High	July 2023, with follow-up support as necessary
<p>Recommendation 6: Continue and further upscale the process of strategic workforce planning and further prioritize work on skills development in line with the WFP people policy and evolving needs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 6.1: Ensure that workforce planning and organizational alignment are optimally aligned with the country strategic plan planning cycle, with particular attention to ensuring that staff turnover among country directors, deputy country directors and heads of programme does not affect the consistency of the strategic focus and continuity of operational activities. ➤ 6.2: Develop tailored terms of reference for outcome and activity managers and conduct training aimed at strengthening organizational alignment with country strategic plan requirements. ➤ 6.3: Prioritize the strategic management of human resources to ensure talent retention, in particular in areas of the WFP portfolio where more expertise in leveraging international and domestic resources and playing an enabling role is required. ➤ 6.4: Ensure that employee development and support are aligned with country office and country strategic plan needs in priority areas such as the enabling policy environment, broader country capacity strengthening and the development and management of strategic partnerships. ➤ 6.5: Prioritize the retention of senior national (and sub-office) employees who fit with WFP's priority commitments, including by providing country offices with the requisite resources where particular technical skills are needed or should be enhanced. 	High	December 2025

* Or for shorter periods in cases where a CSP covers less than five years.

Acronyms

CSP	country strategic plans
COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNSDCF	United Nations sustainable development cooperation framework