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Summary report on the evaluation of the country strategic plan for Benin (2019–2023)

Executive summary

The evaluation of the Benin country strategic plan for the period from July 2019 to December 2023 was conducted between March 2022 and April 2023. It covered the implementation of the plan between July 2019 and June 2022 and also considered the transitional interim country strategic plan that was implemented from January 2018 to June 2019. The evaluation assessed WFP's strategic positioning, its effectiveness in contributing to the strategic outcomes of the plans, its efficiency and the factors explaining its performance. The evaluation sought to generate evidence and learning to inform the development of the next country strategic plan.

Aligned with the WFP strategic plan for 2017–2021, the country strategic plan for Benin defined three strategic outcomes and three activities focused on school feeding, nutrition and capacity strengthening. A fourth strategic outcome, on crisis response, was added through a budget revision in December 2019.

The evaluation found the plan to be evidence-based and reflective of the food security and nutrition needs of the population of Benin. WFP's support for the implementation of the national integrated school feeding programme was highly relevant, but in other programmatic areas the country strategic plan did not systematically set out opportunities for providing assistance based on needs and the comparative advantages of 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.

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The plan was based on a clear line of sight but underlying assumptions, such as the timely receipt of funding, were not always valid. The plan was also not systematically adjusted when circumstances changed. Capacity strengthening activities were not integrated coherently throughout the country strategic plan, and uneven levels of funding among strategic outcomes and activities exacerbated that lack of coherence.

WFP managed a massive scale-up of the national integrated school feeding programme, contributing significantly to the programme's success. Most of the expected results were achieved, but the closure of schools due to the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic in 2020 had negative impacts on school retention rates and levels of academic success. Owing to the strong focus on the implementation and scale-up of the programme, opportunities for strengthening government capacities were missed and progress towards a gradual transfer of responsibilities to the Government has not occurred under the country strategic plan.

The almost exclusive orientation towards school feeding created an imbalance in the country strategic plan. As a result, WFP's role in addressing the root causes of food and nutrition insecurity, which affect a significant and growing proportion of the population in Benin, was not adequately defined.

WFP has not made sufficient efforts to promote gender equality and has not managed to reduce the gender gap in school enrolment or to improve the situation of the many women who work as unpaid school cooks.

The emergency response to floods in 2019 encountered challenges related to targeting and delays in the delivery of assistance, which meant that achievements remained somewhat limited.

Overall, WFP has operated efficiently, particularly in terms of logistics and the timeliness of food deliveries to schools. A more sustainable procurement model based on local production and the introduction of alternative procurement modalities will be an essential element in the sustainability of the national school feeding programme.

The evaluation made five recommendations: ensure balance in WFP's strategic direction in Benin; strengthen the integration of cross-cutting issues; promote WFP's comparative advantages beyond those in school feeding; strengthen the sustainability of interventions and outcomes; and align human resources capacity with the strategic direction of the country strategic plan.

Draft decision*

The Board takes note of the summary report on the evaluation of the country strategic plan for Benin (2019–2023) (WFP/EB.2/2023/6-A/1) and management response (WFP/EB.2/2023/6-A/1/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 Benin country strategic plan (CSP) for the period from July 2019 to December 2023 was conducted between March 2022 and April 2023 and aimed to generate evidence and learning to inform the development of the next CSP.
2. The evaluation covered CSP implementation between July 2019 and June 2022 and also considered the implementation of the transitional interim CSP (T-ICSP) between January 2018 and June 2019. It examined the development of the CSP and the factors that informed its design, focus and shifts from previous country operations. The evaluation also assessed WFP's strategic positioning, its effectiveness in contributing to the strategic outcomes of the CSP and T-ICSP, its efficiency and the factors explaining its performance.
3. An independent external team conducted the evaluation using mixed methods and drawing on monitoring data, document reviews, field observations, consultations with 439 stakeholders through interviews and focus group discussions, and a survey of 40 schools.
4. The evaluation design incorporated gender considerations and adherence to the principles of inclusion, participation and non-discrimination was ensured during interviews, data collection and reporting. Ethical standards were applied in accordance with the ethics guidelines of the United Nations Evaluation Group. Preliminary evaluation results were discussed at two workshops with internal and external stakeholders in Cotonou in December 2022.
5. A joint evaluation of the national integrated school feeding programme,¹ carried out by WFP and the Government of Benin, was finalized in July 2022 and served as an important source of information and triangulation for this CSP evaluation. The CSP evaluation did not encounter major constraints but faced some challenges related to the limited comparability of WFP and government data on school feeding, the inaccessibility of two *départements* in the north of the country due to insecurity and the fact that data was collected over the school holidays, when schools were closed. Nevertheless, the evaluation team was able to meet directors, parent and student representatives and cooks in the schools it visited.

Context

6. Benin is a small West African country on the Gulf of Guinea with a population of 12.5 million people, of whom 49.9 percent are women and more than half are under 18 years of age. A small majority of Beninese (51 percent) live in rural areas and a significant share of the population (38.5 percent) live below the national poverty line (see table 1 for an overview of selected socioeconomic indicators).²

¹ Government of Benin and WFP. 2022. [Évaluation décentralisée conjointe finale du Programme National d'Alimentation Scolaire Intégré \(PNASI\) au Bénin – 2017 à 2021](#).

² World Bank. 2022. [Benin country page](#); National Institute of Statistics and Economic Analysis. 2019. [Bénin – Enquête Démographique et de Santé 2017-2018](#).

TABLE 1: SOCIOECONOMIC INDICATORS			
	Indicator	Value	Year
	Prevalence of wasting in children under 5 (%) (1)	5	2020
	Prevalence of stunting in children under 5 (%) (1)	31.3	2020
	Prevalence of low birthweight (%) (1)	16.9	2015
	Gender Inequality Index ranking (2)	148 of 162	2019

Sources: (1) Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and others. 2021. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2021*. (2) United Nations Development Programme. *Gender Inequality Index*.

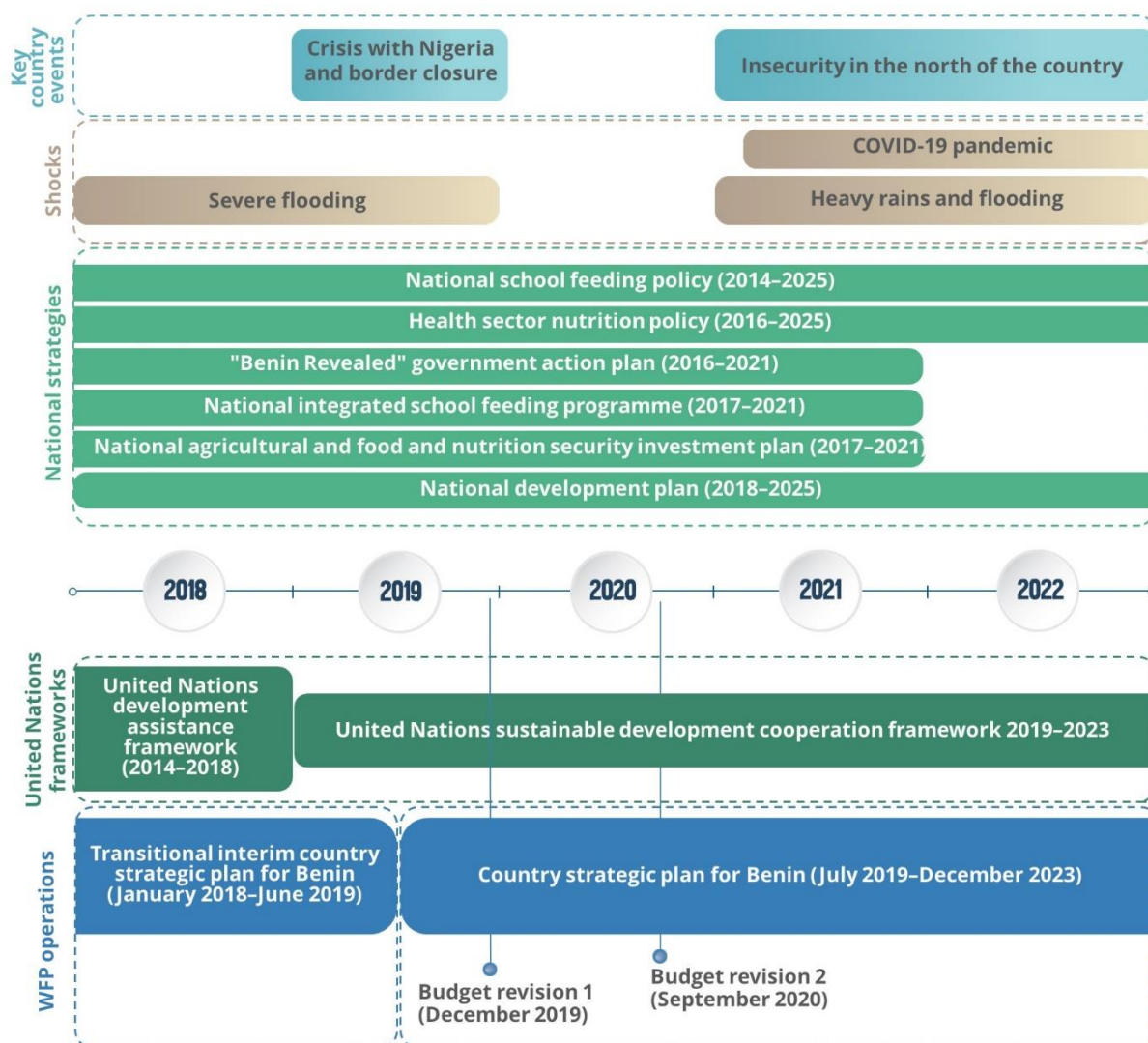
7. Over the past ten years, Benin has invested more than 3.5 percent of its gross domestic product in education. Despite improvements, however, the overall literacy rate reached only 42.4 percent in 2018 and was even lower for women and girls, at 31.1 percent.³ The net enrolment rate in primary education is high, at 97.2 percent in 2018, but net enrolment in secondary education was only 46.6 percent in 2015. Enrolment rates are lower for girls than boys, and the gender parity ratio is 0.91 in primary schools and 0.78 in secondary education.⁴ Despite high enrolment rates, retention rates are low and educational outcomes remain limited.
8. Benin ranks 82 of 116 countries in the 2021 Global Hunger Index, placing it in the “serious hunger conditions” category. In 2017, a national food security vulnerability analysis found that 42.9 percent of the population had borderline levels of food security and 9.6 percent were food insecure, with 14.1 percent of households recording inadequate food consumption.
9. Climate projections predict changes in rainfall patterns and rising temperatures. Such trends – combined with greater seasonal variability, increases in the frequency and intensity of droughts, floods and storms, and sea level rise – pose serious risks for agriculture, forestry and tourism.

WFP country strategic plans

10. The Benin T-ICSP and CSP are aligned with the objectives of the WFP strategic plan for 2017–2021 and the policy on country strategic plans. They largely continued in the direction of the previous country programme in Benin. The CSP document approved in June 2019 defined three strategic outcomes and three activities focused on school feeding, nutrition and capacity strengthening. A fourth strategic outcome and activity, focused on crisis response, were added through a budget revision in December 2019, which was introduced in response to heavy flooding. A second budget revision in September 2020 expanded the emergency response component to allow WFP to address the needs caused by the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.

³ World Bank. 2022. [Benin country page](#).

⁴ National Institute of Statistics and Economic Analysis. 2019. *Bénin – Enquête Démographique et de Santé 2017-2018*.

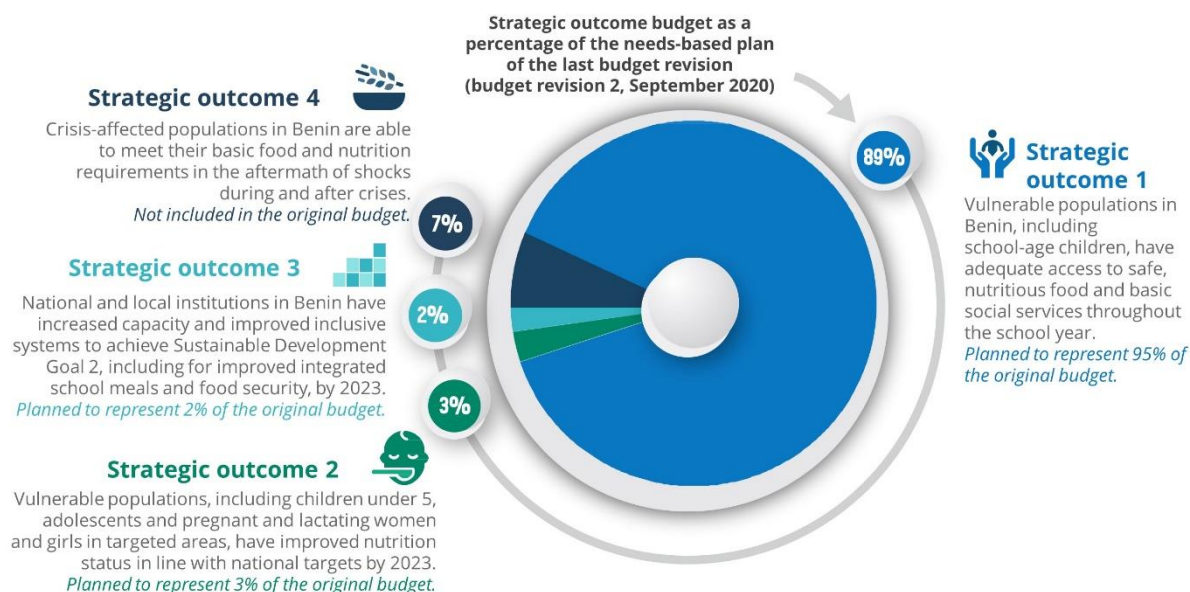
Figure 1: Country context and WFP operational overview, 2018–2022

Source: Office of Evaluation based on the full report on the evaluation of the T-ICSP and CSP.

11. The original CSP needs-based plan foresaw a budget of USD 129.5 million for assisting 980,000 beneficiaries over five years. Following budget revisions in 2019 and 2020, the budget increased to USD 138.7 million and the number of targeted beneficiaries increased to 1 million.⁵
12. Implementation of the CSP began in July 2019 and by June 2022, 71 percent of the overall needs-based plan was funded. School feeding under strategic outcome 1 received the majority of funds (see figure 2) while only minimal funding was received for strategic outcome 2, which was focused on nutrition. Funding for strategic outcome 3, focused on capacity strengthening to support the transfer of responsibilities for the national school feeding programme to the Government, was not received until 2022. The Government of Benin was the main donor to the T-ICSP and CSP, funding strategic outcome 1 and providing more than 77 percent of the resources mobilized for the CSP.

⁵ A third substantive budget revision approved in February 2023 foresaw adjustments to strategic outcomes 1, 2 and 4, but was outside the scope of the CSP evaluation.

Figure 2: Benin country strategic plan (2019–2023) strategic outcomes, budget, funding and expenditures for 2019–June 2022



* Percentages of allocated resources by strategic outcome do not add up to 100 percent because resources were also allocated to non-strategic outcome purposes as well as to direct support costs and indirect support costs.

Sources: Benin country strategic plan (2019–2023); Benin CSP revision 2; Annual country report 1 from WFP Integrated Road Map Analytics (data extracted on 27 July 2022).

Evaluation findings

To what extent is the country strategic plan evidence-based and strategically focused to address the needs of the most vulnerable?

Relevance

- The evaluation found the CSP to be evidence-based and reflective of the food security and nutrition needs of the population. The strong orientation towards school feeding through the implementation of the national integrated school feeding programme is justified given the inadequate access to primary school, in particular for girls.

14. In other areas where the 2017 national vulnerability analysis and the 2018 zero hunger strategic review had identified gaps, the CSP did not foresee WFP's provision of assistance, despite the organization's potential comparative advantage in those areas. For example, the rationale for abandoning the provision of resilience building support for vulnerable people and communities, which was included in the T-ICSP, is unclear.
15. As the original CSP did not contain a strategic outcome focused on crisis response, it was necessary to introduce a budget revision to add a fourth strategic outcome when the Government requested WFP's support in response to flooding in October 2019.

Alignment with national strategies

16. CSP strategic outcomes 1, on school feeding, and 3, on capacity strengthening, are well aligned with national needs and priorities. However, the limited alignment of strategic outcome 2 with national nutrition programmes and the lack of clarity on the added value of WFP's engagement in that area call into question the relevance of WFP's approach to addressing chronic child malnutrition. Strategic outcome 4 was relevant to needs in Benin but an analysis of the related capacity strengthening requirements was lacking.

Coherence with United Nations strategies and plans

17. WFP contributed to the formulation of the 2019–2023 United Nations sustainable development cooperation framework. It signed partnership agreements for work on school feeding with the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Development Programme, the International Fund for Agricultural Development and the United Nations Population Fund. WFP's comparative advantages in implementing the national school feeding programme and coordinating emergency responses with the Government are recognized within the United Nations system.

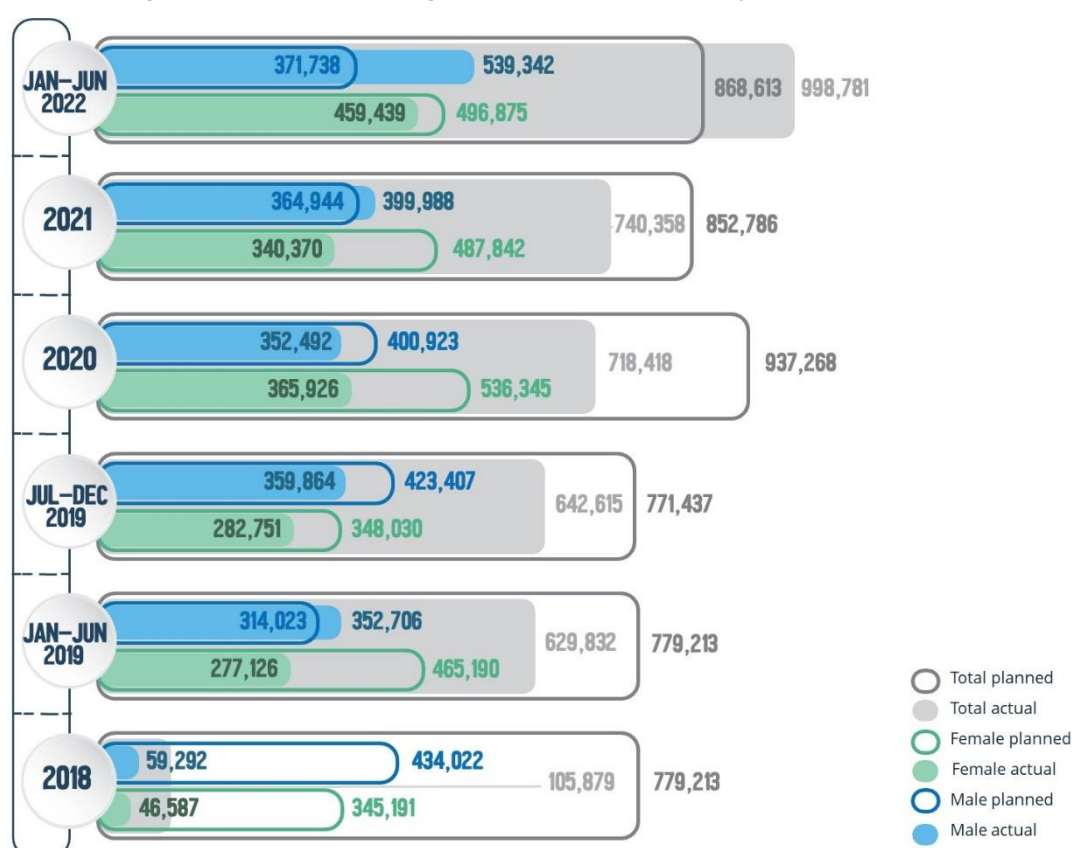
Internal coherence

18. The CSP was based on a clear and comprehensive line of sight and the addition of a strategic outcome on emergency response demonstrated its adaptability. However, WFP did not make adequate adjustments in response to the limited funding available for nutrition interventions or the low level of government preparedness to respond to emergencies.
19. Efforts to promote home-grown school feeding started late during CSP implementation. Capacity strengthening activities were not integrated coherently into the CSP and uneven levels of funding among strategic outcomes and activities exacerbated that lack of coherence. The late receipt of funding delayed the start of capacity strengthening activities designed to support the school feeding component of the CSP.

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

Contribution to strategic outcomes

20. The following paragraphs present an overview of the main achievements under each strategic outcome and figure 3 provides an overview of the numbers of beneficiaries reached.

Figure 3: Actual versus planned beneficiaries by sex, 2018–2022

Sources: WFP country office tool for managing effectively system. Actual data for 2022 covers the period up to June 2022 only and was provided by the country office. However, the beneficiary numbers at the end of the year are not expected to be significantly higher than the mid-year figures because, other than the addition of newly enrolled schoolchildren, the same children will continue to be assisted in the new school year and will not be counted in beneficiary lists again, in accordance with WFP's beneficiary counting guidelines.

21. Under **strategic outcome 1** WFP aimed to ensure that vulnerable people and communities in Benin, including school-age children, have adequate access to safe, nutritious food and basic social services throughout the school year.
22. Over the course of CSP implementation, WFP managed a massive scale-up of the national integrated school feeding programme, thereby contributing significantly to the success of the programme which, by mid-2022, reached almost 1 million children, or more than half of the children attending public schools in Benin (see figure 3). Nevertheless, the actual tonnage of commodities distributed over the years reached an average of only 61 percent of the planned amounts. The quality of the meals provided and the levels of hygiene during their preparation conformed with minimum standards, but storage facilities in schools were often inadequate. Most of the expected results were achieved, with improvements in enrolment and attendance rates and in levels of academic success. Achievements under other indicators were less positive, however: the closure of schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, despite being relatively short, affected retention rates and academic success in 2021, and the overall gender ratio has not improved. An additional benefit of the school feeding programme was the indirect transfer of income to students' households through savings on household food expenditure.
23. WFP has systematically promoted the participation of communities in the school feeding programme and communities have often found suitable solutions for the proper functioning of school canteens. However, some aspects of community mobilization remain problematic, particularly regarding the financial contributions that children's parents or caregivers are expected to make.

24. Other objectives of the school feeding programme related to boosting agricultural production and supporting the local economy were only partially achieved. Despite favourable conditions and the commencement of some initiatives, few direct purchases from small producers have been made so far and producers complained about WFP's rigid and slow procurement procedures. A model for direct local procurement has yet to be elaborated and tested.
25. The potential for using schools as an entry point for other development initiatives – related to school gardens or fields, infrastructure, water supply, health, nutrition education, etc. – has not been sufficiently exploited by WFP and the integration of complementary services into school feeding activities has been very limited so far.
26. **Strategic outcome 2** was focused on improving the nutrition status of vulnerable population groups including children under 5, adolescents, and pregnant and breastfeeding women and girls.
27. Owing to a lack of funding, which resulted in very limited implementation of activities, WFP was unable to contribute significantly to improving the nutrition status of vulnerable population groups.
28. Under **strategic outcome 3**, WFP aimed to ensure that national and local institutions in Benin have increased capacity and better, more inclusive systems for the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 2, including through improved integrated school feeding and food security activities, by 2023.
29. Given the late confirmation of funding, an implementation strategy for strategic outcome 3 was not defined until January 2022 and the capacity strengthening needs analysis carried out was not sufficiently comprehensive. With activities at an early stage of implementation, only very limited results can be expected under this strategic outcome. Although WFP is providing support for canteen management through local non-governmental organizations, capacity strengthening activities related to the implementation of decentralized services had not yet begun during the evaluation period and the delay will limit the extent to which responsibilities can be transferred to the local level.
30. **Strategic outcome 4** was aimed at enabling crisis-affected people and communities to meet their basic food and nutrition needs during and in the aftermath of shocks.
31. Under this strategic outcome, WFP was not sufficiently prepared to provide an adequate and timely emergency response. While the assistance provided to flood-affected people and communities in 2020 contributed to temporary improvements in food security, internal constraints (see paragraph 44) meant that it arrived too late to meet immediate needs. As a result, households had to rely on other coping strategies such as the migration of household members in search of work. Household targeting criteria were also not well understood in the assisted communities.
32. WFP helped to strengthen the capacities of the national social protection agency, but capacity for crisis response continues to represent a bottleneck at the municipal level. The planned support for strengthening health services was not funded.

Contributions to cross-cutting objectives

33. **Gender equality and inclusiveness.** While the CSP is strongly oriented towards the achievement of gender equality and inclusiveness, those intentions have not been fully translated into concrete action, leading to disappointing results. For example, there have been no improvements in the gender balance in school attendance or in the equal involvement of men and women in providing community support to school canteens, which currently rely heavily on women. The targeting of emergency assistance at the household level meant that it was often men who received the assistance in the first instance, rather

- than women. WFP and its partners continue to have only a limited understanding of the causes of inequality.
34. Similarly, the evaluation found no evidence of specific activities aimed at ensuring that children with disabilities (who were not prioritized in the CSP) or those from the poorest, often single-headed, households were included.
 35. **Accountability to affected populations.** No systems were in place to ensure accountability to affected populations, with only informal feedback mechanisms available to beneficiaries under school feeding activities and none during emergency assistance activities. In particular, there were no recourse mechanisms to signal targeting errors, while some community members felt targeting criteria were unclear.
 36. **Humanitarian principles.** The CSP document does not make explicit reference to humanitarian principles and so far, the security situation in Benin has not required WFP to focus on the protection of people placed at risk by humanitarian crises. However, a deterioration in security conditions in the north of the country could trigger a need for humanitarian assistance.
 37. The evaluation found that the targeting of WFP assistance was not fully independent of the priorities of the Government and donors. Specifically, the fact that school feeding is funded almost exclusively by the Government puts WFP's operational independence in implementing the CSP at risk. This perceived conflict of interest for WFP's strategic orientation is mitigated by regular meetings where WFP, non-governmental organizations and the Government agree on the principles to be applied during the implementation of school feeding. The geographic targeting of emergency response activities in 2021 and 2022 was heavily influenced by donors' preferences rather than objective criteria based on food insecurity.
 38. WFP adheres to the principle of humanity in its focus on the needs of the most vulnerable people. However, there were some gaps in that adherence. Examples included the monitoring of academic performance rather than nutrition status as a determining factor for shaping the provision of assistance to schools, which limited WFP's ability to support the most vulnerable children. In addition, in certain schools, children who had not paid the small voluntary daily contribution introduced by the Government to support the running of the school canteen were not allowed to eat until after the other children – a discriminatory practice that persists despite WFP's advocacy with stakeholders for its discontinuation.
 39. **Environmental protection and adaptation to climate change.** The CSP identifies environmental factors as underlying causes of food insecurity in Benin, but environmental protection and adaptation to climate change were not integrated into all activities. The crisis response component of the CSP did not include efforts to mitigate the effects of climate change, and work on building resilience to climate change among rural households under the T-ICSP was discontinued under the CSP.
 40. **Sustainability.** WFP is seeking to ensure the sustainability of achievements under strategic outcomes 1 and 3 of the CSP by strengthening institutional capacity for school feeding. However, the current school feeding model requires adaptation to be sustainable including through capacity strengthening for national and local institutions and the provision of support to schools to ensure canteens continue to function. The sustainability of achievements under strategic outcome 4 is less plausible, given the gaps in national capacity.
 41. The extension of the Government's funding for the period 2022–2026 is a sign of a strong commitment to school feeding. Several other partners have provided technical and financial support to the national programme. Stakeholder ownership is generally significant but not at the decentralized government level, which is the most critical level for the future handover of the school feeding programme.

42. **Integration of development and resilience building activities.** The integration of development and resilience building activities under the CSP is currently weak. Procurement from local farmers and home-grown school feeding activities are still in their early days but have important potential. The integration of resilience building into activities under strategic outcome 4 for populations affected by shocks has been insufficient.

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

43. **Efficiency.** Between 2019 and 2021, WFP managed the logistics of the extensive school feeding programme efficiently, regularly delivering food to 3,850 public schools across the country. Food deliveries were generally carried out within the intended timeframe, with only a few short delays about which schools were informed in advance.
44. **Timeliness.** The provision of assistance for flood-affected populations was not timely. Slow targeting procedures, logistics problems and a lack of emergency response expertise in the country office led to a five-month delay before the assistance was received.
45. **Coverage.** The school feeding programme aims to achieve universal coverage of children attending public schools by 2025 and therefore to reach the majority of households in Benin. However, insufficient effort was made to improve access to the programme in areas with low enrolment or high food insecurity rates, or for less privileged groups such as adolescent girls or children with disabilities. The modest coverage of nutrition interventions under strategic outcomes 2 and 4 meant that the CSP's contributions to food security and nutrition were limited and indirect, via school feeding.
46. **Cost-effectiveness.** A cost-benefit analysis carried out by WFP showed that the expected benefits of school feeding exceeded the costs by a factor of 5:2. Costs per metric ton of food distributed were consistent over the CSP period. Logistics activities were cost-efficient, and this continued to improve over time. In-kind food assistance was provided, reflecting beneficiary preferences, despite the absence of major constraints to the introduction of cash-based modalities.

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

47. **Resource mobilization.** Even though WFP's resource mobilization strategy targeted diverse funding sources, the bulk of resources for the T-ICSP and the CSP were provided by the Government of Benin for school feeding, although other donors have expressed an interest in engaging in Benin. Donors showed little interest in supporting work under strategic outcomes 2, on nutrition, and 3, on capacity strengthening, and strategic outcome 4, on emergency response, received only half of the funding it required. WFP's flexibility in responding to emerging needs or cross-subsidizing underfunded activities was limited, given the heavy earmarking of donor contributions.
48. **Partnerships.** WFP's partnerships in school feeding complement the organization's own activities very effectively and have contributed to improvements in school infrastructure. However, the number of schools covered by complementary partners has remained very low, with limited prospects for expansion. In addition, the Government's limited coordination of complementary partnerships allows each partner to target its activities according to its own criteria and approach.
49. **Human resources.** To manage the massive expansion of the school feeding operation, WFP's workforce in Benin has doubled since the start of the CSP in 2019, with an increase in the proportion of women and the establishment of additional field offices in 2022. However, gender and disability-inclusive programming and new activities, such as local procurement and emergency response, have suffered from a lack of expertise, particularly in field offices.

50. **Monitoring.** Improvements were made to the school feeding monitoring system over the course of the CSP. However, the government monitoring system, on which WFP relies, does not track the effects of the complementary activities integrated into WFP's school feeding operations such as their transformative effects on gender equality, nutrition and market access. Despite improvements, concerns also persist regarding the operational monitoring of the school feeding programme. The monitoring of activities under strategic outcome 4 uncovered weaknesses in targeting that gave rise to recommendations for improvement.
51. **Other factors.** CSP implementation benefited from a strong national political will to create conducive conditions for the school feeding programme and the interest of technical and financial partners in supporting the programme. However, the lack of a dedicated central entity and assigned responsibilities for the national school feeding programme impedes the transfer of skills to the central and decentralized levels of the Government.

Conclusions

52. **Overall performance.** WFP successfully implemented the national integrated school feeding programme, reaching nearly 1 million children by mid-2022. In doing so, it contributed to the Government's human development objectives and indirectly supported the country's food and nutrition security while also helping households to save on food expenditure. However, the objectives of the T-ICSP linked to boosting local agricultural production and supporting the local economy were only partially realized. The strong focus on the implementation and scale-up of the school feeding programme meant that opportunities for strengthening government capacities were missed, and progress towards a gradual transfer of responsibilities has not been made under the CSP, putting the sustainability of the programme at risk.
53. The CSP's contributions to improving food and nutrition security were modest given the rising needs and because of the almost exclusive focus on school feeding. A more direct impact on food security was achieved through the emergency response component of the CSP. However, challenges related to targeting and delays in the delivery of assistance meant that achievements were somewhat limited. WFP's contribution to strengthening the Government's capacity in emergency response was limited to the supply of equipment.
54. In the absence of donor funding WFP was unable to implement effective nutrition programming. As a result, it has not been able to help reduce chronic malnutrition or strengthen the Government's capacity in nutrition education and social and behaviour change communication.
55. **Partnerships.** The CSP has helped WFP to build a close relationship with the Government based on mutual trust and a clear understanding of their respective roles in the rollout of the national school feeding programme, as demonstrated by the Government's funding of the WFP-implemented programme. Collaboration on school feeding with other United Nations entities under the umbrella of the United Nations sustainable development cooperation framework has gradually intensified.
56. **Strategic balance.** The almost exclusive orientation of the CSP towards school feeding has created an imbalance. WFP has devoted most of its efforts to implementing the national school feeding programme, which is seen as its main area of comparative advantage by partners in Benin. Conversely, its role in addressing the root causes of food and nutrition insecurity, which affects a significant and growing proportion of the population in Benin, has been insufficiently defined, which is likely to have undermined WFP's ability to attract funding for other programmatic areas of the CSP.

57. **Internal coherence.** WFP's capacity strengthening strategy was not sufficiently articulated in the CSP. The structure of the CSP did not facilitate the adoption of an integrated approach to implementation and this was exacerbated by the uneven levels of funding received for the various strategic outcomes. In particular, the decision to place the capacity strengthening activities linked to the school feeding programme under a separate strategic outcome – which did not receive government funding and for which donor funding was not attracted until three years after the start of CSP implementation – has delayed the start of activities in that area.
58. **Cross-cutting issues.** The lack of a clear strategy for addressing cross-cutting issues led to insufficient consideration of those issues during CSP implementation. WFP has not made sufficient efforts to promote gender equality and has therefore not managed to reduce the gender gap in school enrolment or improve the situation of the many women who work as unpaid cooks in school canteens. A system for ensuring accountability, the reporting of complaints and the follow-up on those complaints has not been developed. In designing the CSP, WFP did not consistently integrate the consideration of environmental risks or identify opportunities for their mitigation.
59. Overall, WFP adhered to the humanitarian principles that were relevant to the situation in Benin, but there were challenges related to operational independence and gaps in the full application of the principle of humanity. There is a risk that WFP is, to a certain extent, dependent on the preferences of the Government and donors when determining the geographic targeting of its assistance.
60. **Efficiency and sustainability.** Overall, the CSP was implemented efficiently, particularly in terms of logistics and the timeliness of food deliveries to schools. A more sustainable procurement model based on the use of local production and the introduction of alternative procurement modalities will support the sustainability of the school feeding programme going forward, but so far WFP has made limited efforts to explore alternative modalities for distribution.
61. **Human resources.** Weaknesses in human resources capacity in certain areas of technical expertise have compromised the ability of the country office to formulate relevant strategies, hampered the implementation of activities and negatively affected results. Areas where such gaps in expertise occurred included gender issues, emergency response, resilience building, climate change adaptation, farmers' organizations and agricultural marketing. The country office's staffing structure is currently being decentralized to the sub-office level, but the delegation of tasks other than those under the school feeding programme remains limited. This means that WFP has not had adequate human resources, especially in the field, to address all CSP priorities – an issue that will need to be addressed in the future.

Recommendations

62. The evaluation led to five recommendations, three strategic and two operational, related to the design and implementation of the next CSP for Benin. To a certain extent, the recommendations build on those derived from the joint evaluation of the Government's school feeding programme. They also take into account the inputs and comments received in discussions with the country office, the Regional Bureau for Western Africa and external partners at two stakeholder workshops held in Cotonou in November 2022.

#	Recommendation	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
1.	Ensure that the strategic direction of the country strategic plan is balanced.	Strategic	Country office	Regional bureau	High	
1.1	In the school feeding component of the next country strategic plan, strengthen engagement with the partners on complementary activities in order to improve the nutrition status of schoolchildren and support the local economy. <i>(See also recommendation 5 of the joint evaluation of the national integrated school feeding programme.)</i>					June 2024
1.2	Integrate nutrition issues into the country strategic plan systematically and review the relevance and potential value of introducing a standalone nutrition component as part of an integrated approach to country strategic plan implementation. Consider formulating an approach that strengthens nutrition-sensitive food systems and value chains.					March 2024
1.3	Strengthen WFP's focus on building resilience to food and nutrition insecurity in rural communities. Contribute to the development of a strategic approach to improving household resilience based on agriculture and climate change adaptation, and determine the added value of WFP in the implementation of that approach.					June 2024
1.4	Prioritize the development of shock response interventions using an approach that is integrated with the social protection system. There should be a particular focus on supporting vulnerability and risk assessment and early warning mechanisms. Specific attention should be paid to the northern border areas of the country, which are at risk of being affected by conflict and humanitarian crises.					December 2024

#	Recommendation	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
2.	Strengthen the integration of cross-cutting issues into the country strategic plan.	Strategic	Country office	Regional bureau	High	
2.1	Integrate capacity strengthening activities into the relevant country strategic plan outcomes based on a comprehensive needs analysis including at the decentralized level, and a funding strategy, particularly for the school feeding programme.					June 2024
2.2	Together with partners, develop a balanced investment strategy based on the need for complementary services, such as those related to water, sanitation and health. Carry out nutrition education activities for schoolchildren and consider developing curricula to encourage long-term behavioural change. <i>(See also recommendation 5 of the joint evaluation of the national integrated school feeding programme.)</i>					March 2024
2.3	Strengthen the approach to inclusion and gender issues under the next country strategic plan based on in-depth analyses, with particular emphasis on promoting girls' enrolment and retention in schools and the use of mechanisms for ensuring accountability. <i>(See also recommendation 6 of the joint evaluation of the national integrated school feeding programme.)</i>					June 2024
2.4	Explain the method used to select the schools and geographical areas that will receive food assistance.					March 2024
2.5	Improve the system for monitoring progress on cross-cutting issues. <i>(See also recommendation 3 of the joint evaluation of the national integrated school feeding programme.)</i>					June 2024

#	Recommendation	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
3.	Promote WFP's comparative advantages beyond its support for the national integrated school feeding programme.	Strategic	Country office	Regional bureau	High	
3.1	Strengthen engagement in national strategic dialogue on food and nutrition insecurity, crisis preparedness and response, resilience and climate change.					June 2024
3.2	Strengthen dialogue with donors on these areas and clarify WFP's comparative advantages.					June 2024
3.3	Reinvigorate and expand strategic partnerships aimed at addressing the root causes of food and nutrition insecurity, including through climate resilience, nutrition-sensitive agriculture and the protection of soil fertility.					December 2024
4.	Strengthen sustainability of the achievements of the country strategic plan. <i>(See also recommendations 1, 2 and 4 of the joint evaluation of the national integrated school feeding programme.)</i>	Operational	Country office	Regional bureau	Medium	
4.1	Working with the relevant ministries, formulate and operationalize a strategy for the gradual transfer of responsibility for the implementation of the national school feeding programme to government bodies, based on a sustainable school feeding model.					December 2024
4.2	Transfer competences to the government bodies involved in the national school feeding programme at the national and decentralized levels, based on an analysis of local capacities.					June 2024
4.3	Accelerate the process of institutionalizing the national school feeding programme, based on identified capacity strengthening needs.					June 2024

#	Recommendation	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
4.4	Jointly with the Government, pilot the implementation of the national school feeding programme in urban areas with a view to accelerating the transfer of responsibility for the related activities.					December 2024
4.5	Support capacity strengthening for national agencies working in the areas of food security and social protection (national agency for civil protection (<i>Agence nationale pour la protection civile</i>), Scaling Up Nutrition government focal point/permanent secretary of the national food and nutrition council (<i>Conseil national de l'alimentation et de la nutrition</i>), the technical unit for monitoring and supporting food security management (<i>Cellule technique de suivi et d'appui à la gestion de la sécurité alimentaire</i>)) with a view to increasing their efficiency.					December 2024
4.6	Pilot methods, including financial management systems, that schools with canteens can use to source their supplies from smallholder producers and that ensure the accountability necessary for the proper functioning of the canteens.					June 2025

#	Recommendation	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
5.	Align the human resources capacity and organizational structure of the WFP country office in Benin with the strategic direction of the country strategic plan.	Operational	Country office	Regional bureau	Medium	
5.1	Consider delegating operational responsibilities to suboffices based on the competencies needed in order to improve the implementation of capacity strengthening, monitoring, coaching, local procurement support, emergency preparedness and other activities.					June 2024
5.2	Ensure that WFP has adequate capacity for advocacy and engage with partners in strengthening the capacities of decentralized government bodies and gradually transferring the responsibility for activities.					June 2024
5.3	Address capacity gaps – including in the areas of inclusion, gender issues, nutrition, local procurement, resilience, climate change, emergency preparedness and response – in order to reformulate and implement strategies and identify solutions.					March 2024

Acronyms

COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
CSP	country strategic plan
T-ICSP	transitional interim country strategic plan