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Summary report on the evaluation of the corporate emergency response in Myanmar (2018–2022)

Executive summary

The evaluation of WFP's corporate emergency response in Myanmar assessed WFP's work in Myanmar from September 2017 to December 2022. Although it focused on the corporate emergency response, it also covered WFP's work under the entire country strategic plan for the period 2018–2022.

The country strategic plan was designed around four strategic outcomes focused on crisis response, resilience building through asset creation and school feeding, nutrition support and the provision of humanitarian services. The plan foresaw an evolution in the focus of WFP's work from emergency response to the provision of longer-term development support, with a gradual handover of WFP interventions to state institutions. Since the military takeover in Myanmar in February 2021, government capacity strengthening activities have been halted, in accordance with United Nations guidance.

Throughout the period covered by the evaluation, WFP programming has been continually adapted in response to country-wide shocks, benefiting from decentralized decision-making, high-quality information and good preparedness. WFP successfully scaled up its emergency food assistance, including by adding 1.7 million new beneficiaries in peri-urban Yangon. While food consumption targets have largely been met, many beneficiaries continue to resort to negative coping strategies. School feeding, asset creation and nutrition activities have been heavily affected by the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic, the aftermath of the military takeover and funding shortfalls. WFP humanitarian supply chain services have been highly appreciated by partners.

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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Programming was gender-sensitive and inclusive. Cooperating partners played a central role in delivering assistance and benefited from considerable capacity strengthening efforts. Resilience building was operationalized mainly through asset creation and nutrition interventions and a more strategic approach at the community and food systems level was lacking. Activities were context- and conflict-sensitive but contributions to peace were not measured. WFP partnerships focused on the delivery of assistance have been extensive and diverse.

WFP has given priority to the humanitarian principles of humanity and “doing no harm” while remaining as impartial, independent and neutral as possible. It takes appropriate measures to mitigate protection risks, although the expansion of its programmes in Myanmar has outstripped its capacity to manage all protection risks. The community engagement mechanism has been continually expanded and will need further strengthening.

WFP secured satisfactory financial resources for its emergency response, but school feeding and asset creation activities were underfunded. Despite the highly challenging setting and serious access constraints in some areas, activities were generally implemented in a timely and cost-efficient manner. Risk management has been a strong feature and benefited from regional bureau support. There is a lack of clarity regarding WFP’s responsibilities in cases where risks are transferred to cooperating partners.

The evaluation concluded that WFP achieved a major scale-up in response to consecutive crises in Myanmar, using its growing role as a humanitarian agency prudently and effectively in coordination with United Nations partners. It has carefully managed risks and balanced tensions between the humanitarian principles, but the risks to cooperating partners need more attention. While the targeting of assistance is effective in areas with access, humanitarian needs in areas affected by conflict are likely to be underestimated, which could lead to significant gaps in the coverage of WFP programmes. Community engagement is expanding and several opportunities exist for building resilience at the institutional and food systems levels.

The evaluation recommended that WFP maintain and enhance its capacity to work at scale, paying special attention to financial resources, flexibility and staffing; maintain consistency in its decision-making processes regarding the humanitarian principles and risk management, ensuring adequate guidance and support, giving more consideration to the role of local partners and widening efforts to communicate its humanitarian positioning; enhance communications on its assistance in new intervention areas and make better use of qualitative and community-based data in decision-making; and test, and gradually integrate into all of its work, a wider resilience perspective aimed at addressing structural vulnerabilities, particularly those that affect communities and systems.

Draft decision*

The Board takes note of the summary report on the evaluation of the corporate emergency response in Myanmar (2018–2022) (WFP/EB.2/2023/6-B/Rev.1) and management response (WFP/EB.2/2023/6-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 corporate emergency response in Myanmar assessed WFP's work in the country from September 2017 to December 2022 to meet accountability requirements and identify learning to inform the design of a new interim country strategic plan (ICSP) for Myanmar and WFP's emergency response practice globally. While the focus of the evaluation was on the corporate emergency response to consecutive level 3 and level 2 crises in Myanmar,¹ it also covered WFP's work under the entire country strategic plan (CSP) for 2018–2022, with a special emphasis on the period from 2020 onwards.
2. The evaluation applied a theory-based, mixed-methods approach. As well as a document review, the evaluation team conducted more than 250 interviews with WFP employees and external stakeholders, structured group interviews, focus group discussions and site observations. A mobile phone survey of 380 beneficiaries was also conducted and additional questions were added to monitoring surveys. Findings, conclusions and recommendations were discussed at several stages of the evaluation process with the WFP country office and the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, which are the immediate users of the evaluation.

Context

3. Myanmar has an ethnically diverse population of 53.7 million people, 70 percent of whom live in rural areas.² An estimated 13 percent of the population live with a disability.³ Minority population groups face increasing challenges related to armed conflict, human rights violations and land rights.⁴
4. Since 2017, the country has faced four major shocks that have significantly affected WFP operations: the Rohingya crisis, which escalated in August 2017; the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, which started in March 2020; the military takeover of February 2021; and the ongoing economic crisis, which is characterized by a decline in food security and living standards due to an inflationary wave whose causes include the collapse of the exchange rate, economic sanctions, supply chain disruption and increasing security-related restrictions on movement.⁵
5. Myanmar has seen significant but uneven progress in poverty reduction, with the poverty rate halving between 2005 and 2017. In 2020, poverty affected 24.8 percent of the population,⁶ but by early 2022, the estimated poverty rate was 46.3 percent.⁷ Since February 2021, increasing price volatility and high transport costs and agricultural input prices have aggravated food insecurity, especially in conflict-affected areas.⁸ In 2023,

¹ The level 3 emergency response was activated in response to the Rohingya crisis on the Bangladesh–Myanmar border and lasted from September 2017 to February 2018. In March 2018, the emergency was downgraded to level 2. Level 3 emergencies are now called “corporate scale-up” operations and level 2 emergencies are “corporate attention” operations. See WFP. 2018. *Decision Memorandum: Extension of the WFP Level 3 Emergency Response for the Rohingya Crisis in Bangladesh and downgrade to a WFP Level 2 Emergency Response in Myanmar* (not available online).

² World Bank. 2021. [Population, total – Myanmar](#).

³ Myanmar Information Management Unit. 2019. [Disability in Myanmar 2014–2019](#) (accessed on 17 April 2023).

⁴ International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs. 2021. [Indigenous peoples in Myanmar](#) (accessed on 17 April 2023).

⁵ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and WFP. 2022. [Myanmar: DIEM – Data in Emergencies Monitoring brief, round 3. Results and recommendations, July 2022](#).









⁶ United Nations Development Programme. 2020. [Human Development Report 2020. The next frontier: Human development and the Anthropocene](#).

⁷ United Nations Development Programme. 2021. [Impact of the twin crises on human welfare in Myanmar](#) (accessed on 17 May 2023); World Bank. 2019. [The World Bank and Myanmar's Rakhine State](#).

⁸ WFP. 2021. [WFP Myanmar. Situation Report #5. October–November 2021](#).

15.2 million people are facing moderate or severe food insecurity, up from 13.2 million in 2022.⁹

6. While internal population displacements have continued for decades, there was a significant increase in incidents in 2021. In 2017, 635,000 people were reported to be internally displaced,¹⁰ increasing to 1.8 million in April 2023 – about 3 percent of the total population.¹¹ There are an estimated 630,000 Rohingya stateless persons in Rakhine State.¹²

TABLE 1: SOCIOECONOMIC INDICATORS			
	Indicator	Value	Year
	Total population (million) (1)	53.7	2021
	Population, female (% of total) (1)	50.2	2021
	Global Hunger Index (rank and score) (2)	71 of 121 15.6	2022
	Internally displaced persons (million) (3)	1.8	2023
	Population living in poverty (% of total population) (4)	46.3	2022
	Gender Inequality Index (rank and score) (5)	125 of 170 0.498	2021
	Literacy rate (% of population > 15 years) (6)	89.1	2019
	Prevalence of stunting (% of children of 0–5 years of age) (7)	25.2	2020

Sources: (1) World Bank. 2021. [World Development Indicators](#); (2) [Global Hunger Index – Myanmar](#); (3) Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. 2023. [Myanmar Emergency Update, as of 10 April 2023](#); (4) estimated in United Nations Development Programme. 2021. [Impact of the twin crises on human welfare in Myanmar](#); (5) United Nations Development Programme. [Human Development Report 2021-22. Uncertain Times, Unsettled Lives: Shaping our Future in a Transforming World](#); (6) United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Institute for Statistics. 2019. [Myanmar country page](#); (7) estimated in Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and others. 2022. [The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2022. Repurposing food and agricultural policies to make healthy diets more affordable](#).

7. In February 2021, the Central Bank of Myanmar imposed limits on cash withdrawals from banks, resulting in generalized cash shortages. In addition, limited access and growing insecurity have hampered data collection and humanitarian efforts across Myanmar.

⁹ Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. 2023. [Humanitarian Needs Overview – Myanmar](#) (accessed on 23 August 2023).

¹⁰ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. 2018. [Global Trends – Forced displacement in 2017](#).

¹¹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. 2023. [Myanmar Emergency Update, as of 10 April 2023](#) (accessed on 17 April 2023).

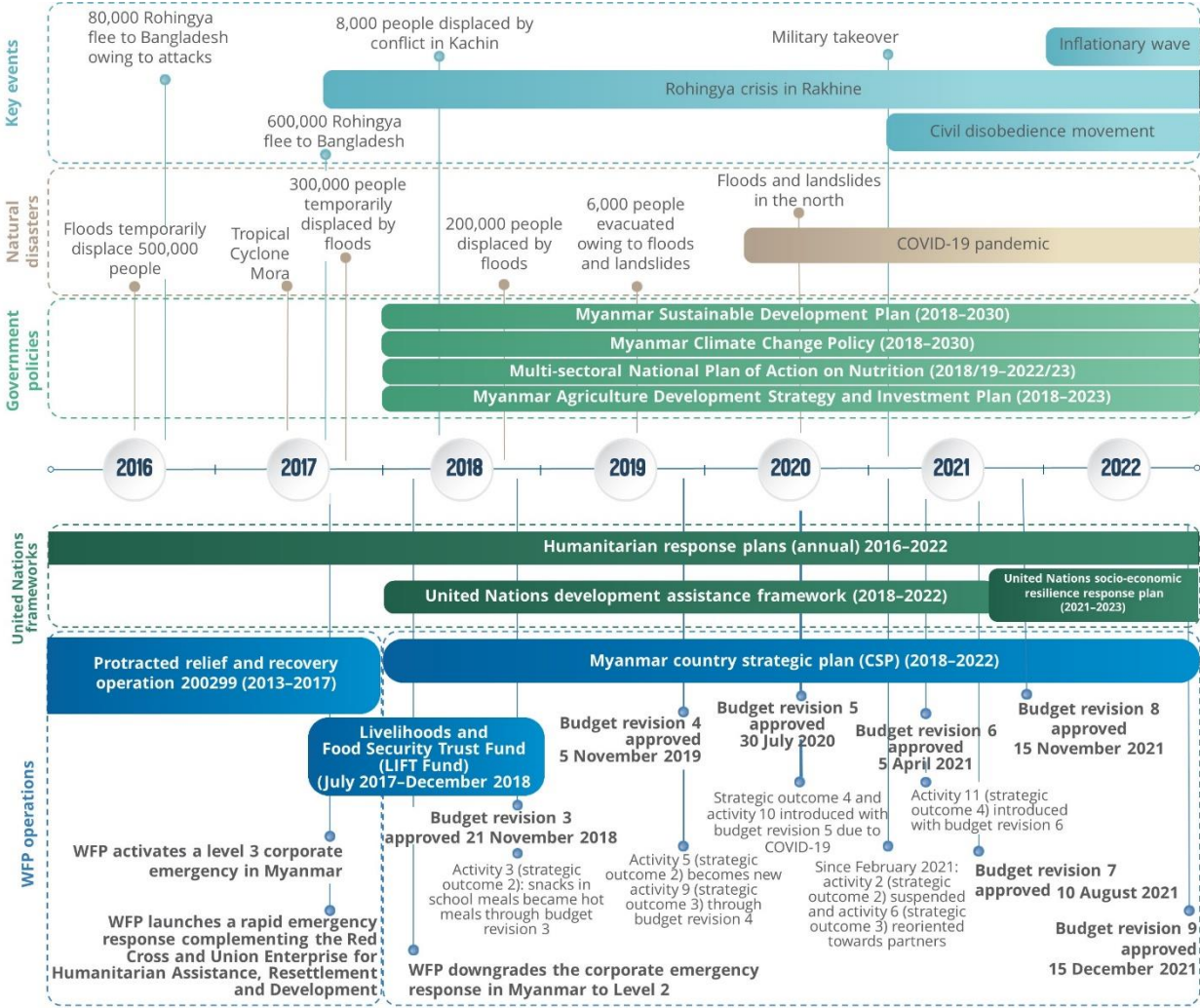
¹² Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. 2022. [Data Portal: Myanmar situation](#). (Data as of 31 December 2022).

Assistance is currently provided under the United Nations socioeconomic resilience response plan, which runs until the end of 2023.

WFP emergency response

- 8. The current CSP for Myanmar originally covered the five-year period from January 2018 to December 2022 and has undergone nine budget revisions. Through the latest budget revision, the CSP was extended until December 2023 to align the new interim CSP for 2024–2025 with the United Nations transitional cooperation framework for 2024–2025.

Figure 1: Country context and WFP operational overview, 2016–2022



Source: Elaborated by the WFP Office of Evaluation based on the CSP document and budget revisions, WFP annual country reports for 2018–2022, and Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs humanitarian response plans for 2017–2022.

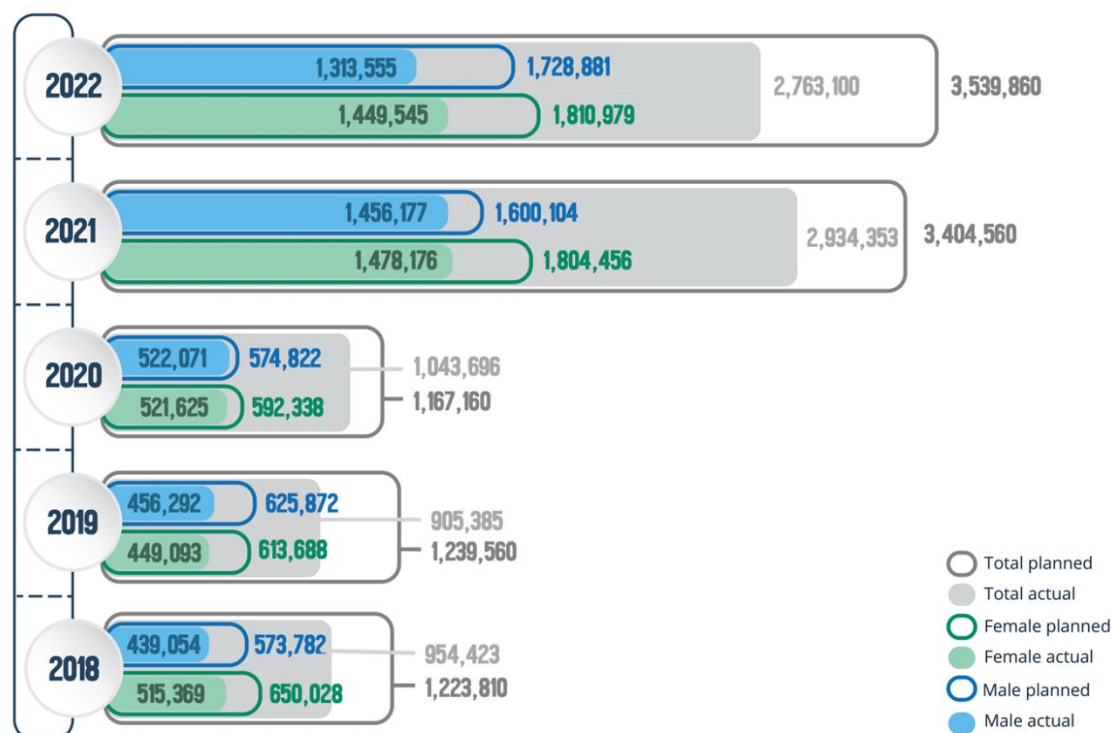
- 9. The CSP was designed around four strategic outcomes focusing on crisis response; resilience building through asset creation and school feeding; nutrition support; and the provision of humanitarian services.
- 10. The original needs-based plan estimated the total cost of the CSP at USD 310.8 million. At the end of 2022, the latest needs-based plan, approved through the ninth revision of the CSP and its budget, estimated the cost at USD 860.6 million, with USD 452.3 million allocated and USD 336.4 million spent between 2018 and the end of 2022 (table 2). The main sources of funding have been the United States of America, multilateral flexible funding sources, Japan, private donors, Australia and Switzerland.

TABLE 2: CUMULATIVE FINANCIAL OVERVIEW, 2018–2022										
Focus area	Strategic outcome	Activity	Original needs-based plan (2018–2022) (USD)	% of total	Latest needs-based plan (2018–2022) (USD)	% of total	Allocated resources (2018–December 2022) (USD)	% of latest needs-based plan	Expenditures (2018–December 2022) (USD)	% of allocated resources
Crisis response	1	1	111 754 379	41	525 093 717	67	320 618 191	61	247 685 476	77
	Subtotal		111 754 379	41	525 093 717	67	320 618 191	61	247 685 476	77
Resilience	2	2	8 806 477	3	8 076 615	1	1 714 546	21	1 479 417	86
		3	55 605 444	20	94 538 499	12	21 947 433	23	20 777 092	95
		4	39 450 579	14	52 588 860	7	15 712 767	30	12 792 299	81
		5	17 310 034	6	5 247 554	1	1 135 373	22	1 135 373	100
	Subtotal		121 172 534	44	160 451 528	21	40 510 119	25	36 184 181	89
	3	6	3 155 580	1	2 893 540	0	1 701 384	59	1 185 229	70
		7	10 619 959	4	16 929 895	2	9 297 880	55	6 040 265	65
		8	27 611 078	10	45 216 816	6	26 114 398	58	21 803 438	83
		9	n.a.	n.a.	17 120 344	2	4 037 517	24	3 352 770	83
	Subtotal		41 386 617	15	82 160 595	11	41 151 179	50	32 381 702	79
Crisis response	4	10	n.a.	n.a.	2 789 041	0	1 532 682	55	1 465 733	96
		11	n.a.	n.a.	11 751 505	2	1 835 616	16	1 835 616	100
	Subtotal		0	n.a.	14 540 546	2	3 368 298	23	3 301 349	98
Non-strategic outcome-specific			-	-	-	-	2 471 353	-	-	-
Total operational costs			274 313 530	100	782 246 386	100	408 119 140	52	319 552 708	78
Total direct support costs			16 156 538	-	26 728 806	-	21 416 411	80	16 865 132	79
Total indirect support costs			20 332 905	-	51 608 727	-	22 721 511	44	0	0
Total			310 802 973		860 583 919	-	452 252 063	53	336 417 840	74

Sources: Original CSP needs-based plan data, CSP budget revision 9 (of 13 December 2022), country portfolio budget resources overview 18/01/2023. Data as of 31 December 2022.

11. The initial number of 2.79 million planned beneficiaries of the CSP was progressively increased to 5.76 million under the latest budget revision. Beneficiary coverage fluctuated between a low of 73 percent of the planned number in 2019 and a high of 89 percent in 2020. Overall, WFP was able to mobilize adequate resources for the scale-up of its emergency response during the first five years of the CSP.

Figure 2: Actual versus planned beneficiaries by sex, 2018–2022



Source: WFP Myanmar annual country reports 2018–2022.

Evaluation findings

WFP's strategic positioning in relation to evolving needs

Use of evidence to inform strategy and interventions

12. The WFP country office in Myanmar uses a wide range of means to collect information on population needs and the coverage of those needs, relying on its decentralized sub-offices and network of cooperating partners, surveys and its community engagement mechanism. While access constraints in some areas have led to knowledge gaps and very approximate estimates of needs, the information provided by the country office is generally appreciated by partners.
13. The multidimensional nature of the information required for management decision-making makes streamlined information management a challenge. The country office uses multiple software systems and is attempting to integrate these into a management dashboard approach, reflecting similar efforts at the corporate level.

Adaptability to changing contexts

14. The information gathered following the main shocks faced by the country allowed WFP to make appropriate CSP and budget revisions in response to changing conditions. Following the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and the military takeover in 2021, WFP expanded its emergency assistance to reach new states and population groups – most notably in peri-urban Yangon – while making efforts to maintain gains under its “changing lives” agenda.
15. WFP’s decentralized decision-making structure allowed it to make timely operational adjustments. COVID-19 forced a fundamental change in the methods and practices used to protect affected people and humanitarian personnel, and WFP mobilized its logistics capacity to help its United Nations and other humanitarian and development partners continue to function during the crisis.
16. Since the military takeover in February 2021, in line with the United Nations principles of engagement with the *de facto* authorities, WFP has suspended its capacity strengthening activities for institutional partners and shifted towards the provision of support to civil society actors and communities.

Internal coherence

17. The CSP is well aligned with the WFP strategic plan for 2017–2021 and specific WFP policies. It covers all the strategic objectives of the corporate strategic plan, including through an optional strategic outcome related to service provision to partners, which was activated during the COVID-19 crisis. The overall CSP framework remained relevant even when shifts in emphasis were required.
18. The general assumption underlying the CSP was that conditions were in place for an evolution from a focus on emergency response to the provision of longer-term development support and a gradual handover of WFP operations to state institutions. While the assumptions stated in the logical framework of the CSP appeared valid at the time of its design, they overlooked the fact that political stability and adequate capacity in national institutions were critical factors. The emergence of new constraints has invalidated some of the CSP’s underlying assumptions, such as security, and drawn attention to the importance of additional factors, such as price stability, but the resulting challenges are being managed by the country office.

Targeting and tailoring of assistance to needs

19. Geographical targeting, based largely on food security and livelihood surveys supplemented by information gathered by sub-offices and cooperating partners, has been adjusted flexibly to address the expanding crisis. The targeting of individuals and households was primarily status-based. Some challenges were met in identifying certain population groups because of social stigma. The tracking of internally displaced persons as a priority target group was difficult owing to their mobility, but WFP was able to rely on its network of cooperating partners and community-based organizations. Vulnerability-based targeting was used in peri-urban areas and for the beneficiaries of protracted relief operations in some areas.
20. Over the period of CSP implementation, delivery modalities have been flexibly adjusted to maximize coverage and efficiency while adjusting to conditions. WFP has reflected beneficiaries’ preferences including when they prefer to receive cash, which maximizes their choice and agency. Cash support is based on the minimum expenditure basket agreed by the inter-agency cash working group but owing to challenges in obtaining frequently updated market price information, adjustments to the minimum expenditure basket have sometimes lagged behind the rapid rate of inflation. Electronic cash transfers currently cover

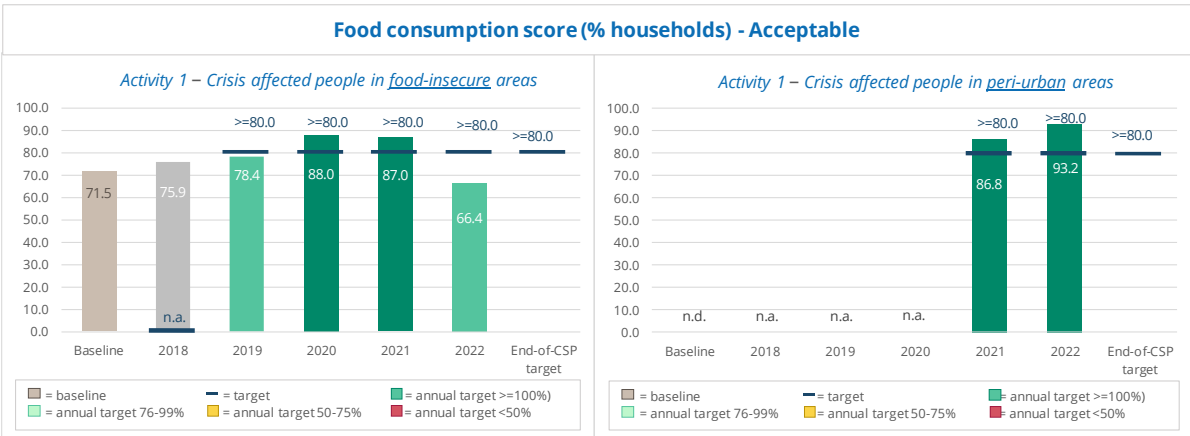
about 20 percent of WFP cash beneficiaries, but their rollout is hampered by banking regulations.

WFP’s effectiveness in achieving country strategic plan objectives

Contribution to strategic outcomes

21. **Strategic outcome 1:** Despite operational difficulties, WFP succeeded in expanding the scale of its unconditional food assistance to reach people and communities affected by crisis. This activity was initially focused on people in food-insecure areas, particularly internally displaced persons concentrated in Rakhine, Chin, Kachin and Shan states, but was expanded during the surge in needs resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and in the aftermath of the military takeover in 2021. The inclusion of peri-urban Yangon in 2021 added 1.7 million beneficiaries to the operation and unconditional food assistance reached 2.3 million beneficiaries in 2021 and 2022. Composite food consumption score targets have largely been met although about a third of assisted households outside peri-urban Yangon continued to have “borderline” scores. The proportion of assisted households resorting to livelihood-based crisis and emergency coping strategies has remained high in all areas covered by WFP assistance.

Figure 3: Households with acceptable food consumption scores compared with targets



Abbreviations: n.a. = not applicable; n.d. = no data.
Data on peri-urban areas available for only 2021–2022.
The colours of the vertical bars indicate the percentages of the targets reached.
Sources: Annual country reports 2018–2022.

22. **Strategic outcome 2:** Capacity strengthening support for the Ministry of Social Welfare, including for the establishment of a social protection management information system, was interrupted in 2021. WFP has maintained some complementary activities under its own programming and recently explored opportunities for contributing to social protection in partnership with the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Office for Project Services.

23. Prior to 2020, school feeding in some areas already suffered from challenges related to protection, funding, water and sanitation and community involvement. The COVID-19 pandemic and the military takeover led to severe disruption in the education system. WFP still managed to help feed a significant number of children by adjusting its delivery methods and modalities, including by distributing take-home rations, but was generally unable to meet its targets. After the military takeover, the number of primary schoolchildren reached rose from 25 percent of the target of 500,000 in 2021 to 50 percent in 2022. According to the 2023 humanitarian response plan, 3.7 million of the 13 million children in Myanmar are

currently out of formal schooling. Without WFP's school feeding programme, this figure would likely be even higher.

24. Asset creation activities were affected by social distancing measures during the pandemic. The proportions of planned beneficiaries reached were highest in 2021, for cash-based transfers (CBTs), due to an increase in funding, but somewhat low in other years and generally lower for in-kind food assistance because of food transport restrictions. It is likely that WFP contributed to improved food security for participants in asset creation activities. According to annual country reports, the targets for food consumption scores were achieved in 2020 and 2021, but not in 2022. A high proportion of beneficiary households continued to rely on emergency or crisis-level coping strategies even though the 2022 end-of-year target was achieved, with 46.8 percent using such strategies against a target ceiling of 51.8 percent. Assets created included family and community gardens, rural roads, water points, irrigation infrastructure, and soil and water conservation measures. Long-term follow-up is required to assess the contribution of those assets to resilience.
25. **Strategic outcome 3:** Country capacity strengthening in nutrition included WFP's support for national nutrition assessments, planning and coordination. Following the military takeover, among other actions WFP contributed to the development of food-based dietary guidelines in collaboration with UNICEF.
26. Activities aimed at the prevention of chronic malnutrition and the treatment of moderate acute malnutrition did not reach their targeted number of beneficiaries owing to the earmarking of funding and access constraints. The achievement of beneficiary targets was satisfactory under activities for the prevention of acute malnutrition, thanks to better access and the alignment of those activities with emergency relief. Capacity strengthening activities and CBTs for people living with HIV/AIDS and/or tuberculosis largely met their beneficiary targets, but for the latter, access issues limited the provision of in-kind food assistance.
27. Progress towards planned outcomes was poor for chronic malnutrition prevention activities, indicating that assistance was insufficient to significantly improve the dietary diversity of mothers and ensure a minimum acceptable diet for young children. However, the achievement of outcome targets, including those for mortality and recovery rates, was highly satisfactory among children treated for moderate acute malnutrition. Outcome targets for nutrition support provided to people living with HIV/AIDS and/or tuberculosis, including adherence to treatment, 12-month survival rate and nutritional recovery rates, have all been exceeded, which can be largely ascribed to WFP programming given the scarcity of other support provided to these target groups.
28. **Strategic outcome 4:** This strategic outcome was introduced in July 2020 following the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and had the aim of facilitating access to reliable common services for WFP's humanitarian and development partners in Myanmar. It reflects WFP's comparative advantages, particularly in logistics, throughout the country. The services provided, including personnel transport via WFP-operated flights and supply chain services, were highly appreciated by partners.

Coverage of assistance and humanitarian response

29. While access issues and other operational constraints have affected the coverage of WFP interventions for people in need, WFP has performed consistently well in reaching planned beneficiaries with emergency in-kind food assistance. Cash-based assistance received a boost during the pandemic but its further expansion was curtailed by the introduction of more stringent banking regulations and a lack of official approval in some areas.
30. In 2022, WFP covered 71 percent of the total number of people reached as reported by humanitarian organizations.

Preparedness for and response to consecutive crises

31. Good preparedness for and early response to crises are salient characteristics of WFP's work in Myanmar, underpinned by its wide geographical presence, strong supply chains, logistics capability and decentralized but very integrated management approach, under which access and risk management issues are dealt with directly by the country office senior leadership. The country office was able to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and the military takeover and their wide-ranging consequences proactively and collaboratively within the broader humanitarian system.

Mainstreaming gender equality and women's empowerment

32. The country office has consistently aimed to implement gender-sensitive programming, including by taking the "intersectionality" of various vulnerability factors into account in targeting exercises and vulnerability assessments. WFP has sought to ensure gender parity in its own human resources, community committees and asset creation activities. Evidence suggests that women's representation in household-level decision-making, such as on how to spend cash transfers, is reasonably equitable in Myanmar, but there may be pronounced ethnic and cultural variations. WFP has participated in working groups, networks and task forces on protection, gender-based violence and child rights violations and has partnered with the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women on gender-related research.

Connectedness of WFP's assistance***Extent to which WFP assistance in Myanmar taps into local capacities and is community-driven***

33. Cooperating partners are central to WFP operations and played a key role in delivering assistance and providing WFP sub-offices with contextual knowledge. The sub-offices implemented considerable capacity strengthening interventions for cooperating partners aimed at enhancing the partners' use of participatory methods and their understanding of the risks faced by people and communities affected by crises. The relationship between WFP and its cooperating partners was closer and more collaborative at the sub-office than the country office level, where there was limited consultation of cooperating partners on strategic planning and coordination.
34. Cooperating partners have been selected based on their programming and operational strengths. The engagement of cooperating partners in assisted communities shows that adequate attention was being paid to beneficiaries' needs, but external factors, including the processes required by international organizations or changes in national regulations, sometimes constrained partners' ability to adapt assistance to local needs and customs. Where cooperating partners were not able to operate, WFP could sometimes implement activities directly.

Humanitarian-development-peace nexus

35. The country office has shifted its focus back to emergency response. Most resilience building initiatives were based on asset creation and nutrition, focusing on the individual, household and community levels and constituting a relatively small component of the WFP portfolio of activities. The resilience of communities, institutions and systems was not considered in a formal, structured manner in strategic and results measurement frameworks. For example, the provision of on-demand logistics services, while demonstrating connectedness between humanitarian and development activities, was not framed as part of a proactive resilience building approach that could strengthen institutions and systems, and there was no clear strategy for strengthening food systems through local procurement.

36. Managing the potential effects of its activities on the dynamics of conflict and peace has been a priority for the country office. Staff were continually adapting to, negotiating with and considering the local setting. WFP occasionally considered the enhancement of social cohesion as a way of strengthening its programming, but its contributions to peace were not measured.

Social and environmental sustainability

37. From 2018 to 2021, reflecting what many other country offices were already doing, the Myanmar country office took environmental risks into account by using basic environmental screening checklists to inform the design and implementation of its asset creation and livelihoods activities. In 2022, the country office started to introduce the expanded WFP environmental and social standards to its staff and cooperating partners, using new screening tools. This is expected to lead to enhanced tracking of social and environmental risks and mitigation measures.

WFP partnerships and coordination with the wider humanitarian sector

Coherence and alignment with the wider United Nations and humanitarian sector

38. The CSP and subsequent WFP engagement have been fully integrated into United Nations and humanitarian assistance frameworks and the country office has played an active role in humanitarian coordination mechanisms, including as lead or co-chair of several clusters, working groups and committees.

Partnerships

39. In the early stages of CSP implementation, the country office's relationship with central government improved, but after the military takeover WFP, in line with the United Nations principles of engagement with the *de facto* authorities, adapted its partnership strategy by moving away from direct engagement with state institutions and deepening and expanding its engagement with other United Nations agencies, international and national non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations.
40. The collaboration established with international partners has been extensive and highly versatile, reflecting the priority given to the delivery of assistance. The country office is seen to have played a highly constructive and transparent role in its relations with donors and humanitarian partners, thanks to capable staff and networks of collaborators.
41. It was more often necessary for WFP to engage with the *de facto* authorities than it was for most other agencies because WFP is involved in food security and nutrition emergency assistance and must frequently discuss humanitarian access to conflict areas with those authorities.

Humanitarian principles, protection and accountability to affected populations

Humanitarian principles

42. The country office has made consistent and varied efforts to ensure that its programmes and operations did not increase social tensions or risks to people or communities. Those efforts included conducting situational analyses, empowering experienced national staff to take operational decisions and implementing specific measures to mitigate the risk of tension between population groups.

43. In line with the broader organizational culture of WFP described in previous evaluations,¹³ the country office has given priority to the principle of humanity while following attentively all four humanitarian principles. WFP made its best possible effort to prevent assistance from benefiting groups associated with the military, although the formal guidance and support provided by WFP headquarters have been limited in this area. When facing possible trade-offs between the principles of humanity or impartiality, on the one hand, and independence or neutrality, on the other, WFP has explored scenarios for a principled approach, carefully assessing the options and risks. When faced with dilemmas related to humanitarian principles, there was no focal point nor a formal escalation mechanism for the country office or regional bureau to request and receive headquarters guidance.

Protection and accountability to affected populations

44. The WFP country office has detailed knowledge of the protection risk environment and has taken appropriate measures to mitigate such risks, in particular in relief operations. However, the expansion of its programmes in Myanmar has outstripped the country office's capacity to manage all protection risks, even with the support of new technologies.
45. Cooperating partners made significant contributions to WFP's analysis of area-based protection risks. Digital technology, training and the careful drafting of contracts were the main ways in which protection challenges were avoided. However, the budgets allocated to cooperating partners did not include provisions for responsibilities and activities related to protection.
46. There has been a progressive expansion of WFP's community engagement mechanism for receiving feedback from affected populations, demonstrating WFP's commitment to ensuring the relevance and high quality of its programmes. The use of the mechanism is still challenged by low beneficiary awareness and technology limitations, and its coverage has lagged behind the growing operations. The role of cooperating partners in accountability to affected populations is significant and valued but not maximized.

Efficiency and risk management

Human and financial resources

47. WFP secured adequate human resources for most of its expanding operations, except in a few sub-offices. Staff continuously operated under conditions of high pressure, and various initiatives were undertaken to improve staff well-being. Country office staffing levels may require a clearer rationale. The recruitment of specialized staff was a challenge, and the deployment of international staff was affected by entry and travel restrictions.
48. Overall, WFP secured adequate financial resources for its operations, with higher levels of funding for emergency response, at more than 75 percent of the needs-based plan for the period from 2018 to 2022, than for school feeding (31 percent) and asset creation activities (37 percent). Fundraising was aided by the country office's strong investment in building relationships with donors and its timely adjustments to activities during CSP implementation. While some flexibility of funding has been achieved, the earmarking of funding, including at the geographical level, is still a challenge.

Timeliness

49. The timeliness of operational response and the implementation of plans was satisfactory for most activities considering the challenging environment. Levels of expenditure were adequate in most years for the largest activities, indicating a successful scale-up. Restrictions

¹³ "Summary evaluation report on WFP's policies on humanitarian principles and access in humanitarian contexts during the period 2004–2017" (WFP/EB.A/2018/7-C).

on access to affected populations, which have been more severe since the military takeover, have delayed the implementation of interventions. WFP has taken adequate measures to ensure the timeliness of its interventions, including through the use of advance financing mechanisms, the maintenance of stocks and personnel rosters and the use of local procurement. Overall, strong leadership in the country office led to a flexible, innovative and problem-solving approach, which facilitated the smooth and relatively timely running of operations.

Cost-efficiency and cost-effectiveness

50. A range of factors that are under WFP's control have improved the cost-efficiency of the operations, including low levels of loss from supply chains, sound financial management, improvements in information and data analysis, and technological developments. WFP's operations in Myanmar achieved economies of scale as they grew, particularly following the introduction of cost-efficient assistance in peri-urban Yangon. The modest increase in staffing numbers compared with the expansion of operations has also contributed to cost-efficiency.
51. The distribution of CBTs has been more cost-efficient than that of in-kind food transfers in Myanmar (in line with global findings), but a more detailed analysis would be needed in order to compare cost-efficiency among the range of ways in which CBTs are provided – as cash in envelopes, cash over the counter or electronic transfers.
52. WFP has considered the cost-effectiveness of various processes, such as the targeting and prioritization of assistance and the choice of modality. However, cost-effectiveness analyses were not carried out systematically and were rarely included in reviews and evaluations of WFP's work in Myanmar.

Risk management

53. WFP responded consistently and appropriately to the highly diverse and continually evolving risk environment, relying on increasingly detailed risk analyses and mitigation measures. The attentive oversight and advisory role of the regional bureau has been key to those efforts, while WFP headquarters and the New York office have not consistently provided policy guidance in, for example, the areas of engagement with the *de facto* authorities, advocacy for increased humanitarian space, and staff recruitment and retention.
54. WFP's well-developed risk management systems are primarily focused on WFP staff in the country, who show a detailed knowledge of the risk environment. There is an explicit transfer of risks from WFP to cooperating partners but it is not clear what support WFP could provide should those risks be realized, and cooperating partners' risk management costs are covered by WFP to only a limited extent.

Conclusions

55. The evaluation found a mature and well-focused operation that achieved high levels of responsiveness to events and coverage of communities and people in need in very adverse circumstances. The operation is underpinned by well-managed human and financial resources, strong economies of scale and, above all, risk management practices that closely mirror corporate guidance on decentralized risk management systems that are constantly updated. The ability of the country office to work closely with donors, the humanitarian country team and the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific have ensured that challenges were foreseen and prepared for, and good performance was maintained. While the accessibility of people in need and the scale of their needs are likely to remain a major challenge, many elements of WFP's approach should be continued under the upcoming ICSP.

56. **Conclusion 1.** During the period of CSP implementation, WFP achieved a major scale-up of its operations in response to consecutive crises thanks to the wide foundation laid by the CSP framework, which permitted flexibility and responsiveness to changing circumstances via budget revisions. With regard to funding, the successful scale-up testifies to WFP's good reputation among donors as an agency able to deliver assistance effectively at scale in a highly complex and constrained environment. Decentralized decision-making coupled with regular guidance from the regional bureau were critical to the country office's high degree of adaptiveness.
57. **Conclusion 2.** In a situation of simultaneous humanitarian, governance and security crises, WFP's role as a humanitarian agency in Myanmar has grown. WFP has played this expanded role prudently and effectively. Its coordination with and complementarity to United Nations partners have been exemplary. WFP has carefully balanced the difficult tensions between the various humanitarian principles. Protection and operational risks were managed well, albeit with a tendency to underestimate both the degree to which cooperating partners assume risks and the need for constant communication with affected populations. Guidance on principled access and related risks was provided by the regional bureau but was limited from the corporate level.
58. **Conclusion 3.** The monitoring of food security was found to be adequate in areas where WFP or its local partners have access. The monitoring of nutrition, gender, resilience and social cohesion outcomes is more challenging. The availability of information declines in areas where access is poor – which are typically those affected by conflict – despite innovative data collection approaches. It is likely that humanitarian needs in such areas are significantly underestimated, possibly leading to gaps in the coverage of assistance. Considerable attention is devoted to targeting the geographical areas, households and individuals most in need of WFP assistance, with adequate consideration of gender equality and broader social inclusion aspects. An elaborate community engagement mechanism is in place, but several factors limit its use.
59. **Conclusion 4.** Several shocks in Myanmar have diverted WFP from its original CSP goal of providing support for medium-term, government-led development. At the same time, WFP has continued to support activities aligned with national policies such as those in nutrition and school feeding. The mitigation of social and environmental risks is an emerging area, and there are some indications of WFP making contributions to peace. This brings the operations close to a triple (humanitarian–development–peace) nexus approach. However, the fact that the CSP was not fully conceived as such means that it failed to live up to its full potential. A central element of the triple nexus in Myanmar was resilience building, for which WFP lacked a strategic approach for the community, institution and food systems levels and which was not integrated into all strategic outcomes of the CSP.

Recommendations

#	Recommendation	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
1.	Adaptation and scale-up Maintain and enhance the capacity to work at scale. Factors enabling operational flexibility should be actively maintained, along with staff well-being.					
1.1	WFP should enhance its capacity by continuing fundraising for and policy dialogue on the forgotten crisis in Myanmar, with headquarters support; identifying and addressing gaps between the various digital information systems; and maintaining the matrix-based management structure, which brings together responsibilities for operations, programmes and geographical coverage.	Operational	Country office		High	End of ICSP implementation
1.2	The country office should continue to promote measures that enable the rapid adjustment of operations, such as the use of flexible, multi-modal field-level agreements with partners, backed up by the country office tool for managing effectively, and the WFP Information Network and Global System; the maintenance and expansion of rosters; and agreements with suppliers and financial service providers. These mechanisms should be supported by proactive capacity development work with civil society organizations in areas such as the preparation of proposals and reporting.	Operational	Country office operations unit	Country office programme unit	High	End of ICSP implementation
1.3	WFP should maintain the staff capacity needed to deliver high-quality assistance under pressure. It should establish culturally appropriate processes for tracking staff well-being and enabling staff to share any concerns. The highly constrained recruitment of staff should receive greater attention from the Human Resources Division at headquarters. Opportunities for leave, internal training, temporary duty assignments and other options for staff should be expanded to promote career development in Myanmar.	Strategic	Country office operations and human resources units	Headquarters Human Resources Division	High	End of ICSP implementation

#	Recommendation	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
2.	<p>An inclusive, principled and risk-sensitive approach</p> <p>Difficult ethical and practical choices related to the humanitarian principles and the balancing of risk management priorities will continue to present themselves into the near future. WFP must find ways to sustain consistency in internal decision-making processes. Support for the individuals making decisions must be constant and tailored to operational situations. The key role of cooperating and service partners calls for fuller consideration of their capacities and status in operations than is granted under existing corporate systems. Current efforts in communication regarding WFP's humanitarian positioning should be extended to a wide range of stakeholders.</p>					
2.1	<p>At the corporate level, WFP must consider the formulation of mechanisms for country offices and regional bureaux to request support from higher levels of the organization when they need to make difficult ethical decisions regarding the humanitarian principles and risks in settings of high political sensitivity and polarization. When required, the corporate senior management team must give support to the senior management of the country office when issues and proposed choices are passed up for corporate endorsement. All relevant guidance on the applicable processes for addressing access issues and dilemmas regarding the humanitarian principles, such as the authority of the country office to make certain trade-offs between risks to populations and risks to operations, should be shared.</p>	Strategic	Deputy Executive Director and Chief Operating Officer, Operations Management Department	Headquarters Programme – Humanitarian and Development Division	High	June 2024
2.2	<p>WFP should define how it can respond when a partner or contractor is exposed to risks (such as the loss of their authorization to operate or the arrest of their staff) and provide support where possible. WFP should consider establishing feedback processes to ensure that cooperating partners do not feel pressured to undertake activities in high-risk areas. A financial facility should be in place to address the actual and potential risks transferred to cooperating partners, for example those related to their staff safety, security, organizational reputation and ability to operate.</p>	Operational	Country office operations unit	Country office programme unit	High	End of ICSP implementation

#	Recommendation	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
2.3	WFP should continue to expand its understanding of the risks to people and communities who are affected (indirectly, and either positively or negatively) by its food security and nutrition activities, beyond its collection of quantitative perception-based data via the community engagement mechanism. Knowledge gaps can be addressed through the enhancement of existing post-distribution monitoring surveys and the application of environmental and social safeguards with, for example, the inclusion of data on social cohesion and the simplification of post-distribution monitoring and its extension to affected population groups who are not WFP beneficiaries. There is also a need to collect more ethnographic data from beneficiaries and non-beneficiary population groups to ensure that no harm is done, and to follow up on complaints. Consideration must be given to linguistic and ethnic factors in developing trust and communication.	Operational	Country office research, assessment and monitoring unit	Country office protection and accountability to affected populations unit	Medium	End of ICSP implementation
3.	<p>Information and feedback systems</p> <p>Adjustments to the qualitative and community-based data collected will allow WFP to transmit, internally and to beneficiaries, a fuller picture of activities that impinge on food security and nutrition. Such information should not increase the quantity of text and figures presented in reports and other communication materials but should rely on integrated digital tools to a greater extent than is currently the case.</p>					
3.1	The country office should identify gaps in the digital systems it uses with a view to enabling the user-friendly presentation of quantitative and qualitative data – such as geospatial maps, conflict factor maps, process monitoring reports and “sentiment analysis” reports on the dignity of recipients of assistance, in ways that facilitate the analysis of trends and the experiences of affected populations for decision-making at the country office level. The country office should review the frequency of periodic reporting from sub-offices to ensure that it is optimal and use management meetings to highlight specific issues coming up at the sub-office level.	Operational	Country office operations unit	Country office research, assessment and monitoring unit	Medium	End of ICSP implementation

#	Recommendation	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
3.2	WFP must take measures to obtain access to the knowledge that partners draw from their own community information systems by establishing a simple communication process. Cooperating partners play a key role in information gathering owing to the time they spend in the field and the relationships they develop with communities. Greater use should be made of that information.	Operational	Country office research, assessment and monitoring unit	Country office programme unit	Medium	End of ICSP implementation
3.3	There should be regular reviews of communities' knowledge of and trust in WFP's community engagement mechanism and of cooperating partners' use of that mechanism across all states, with adjustments made when appropriate.	Operational	Country office protection and accountability to affected populations unit	Country office research, assessment and monitoring unit	Medium	End of ICSP implementation
4.	<p>Integration of resilience in the emergency response</p> <p>The interim country strategic plan period of two years should be used to test and gradually integrate a wider resilience perspective throughout the programme so as to address structural vulnerabilities. The aim will be to ensure that when shocks occur, communities can rely on local capacities and will require less humanitarian assistance. Focusing on communities and systems can help to create stronger links between the strategic outcomes in the long term and can strengthen the coordination across teams in the matrix-like structure of the country office. This will enhance the relevance and use of resources for affected people, given that the crisis is likely to be protracted.</p>					
4.1	A new approach that takes into account the ability of affected people and communities to respond to shocks and stressors should include the creation of a framework for resilience that applies across the interim country strategic plan as a cross-cutting outcome. The framework could also be applied at levels lower than strategic outcomes in the interim country strategic plan line of sight.	Strategic	Country office programme unit	Regional bureau	High	October 2023

#	Recommendation	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
4.2	A resilience perspective should be integrated into the strategic outcome on crisis response, in particular as regards disaster risk reduction. Among resilience capacities and assets there should be an assessment of social cohesion and how to avoid creating tensions. Social cohesion and the avoidance of tension are factors in the resilience of communities to shocks.	Strategic	Country office programme unit	Regional bureau	High	End of ICSP implementation
4.3	The resilience perspective should include an extensive analysis of key community-level assets and basic infrastructure and should encourage the increased localization of emergency response, for example through local procurement aimed at strengthening food systems, or through support for emergency preparedness capacities for managing sudden-onset crises. This work could also include capacity strengthening for private sector entities engaged in common services provision or home-grown school feeding in order to help build local food systems.	Strategic	Country office programme unit	Regional bureau	High	End of ICSP implementation

Acronyms

CBT	cash-based transfer
COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
CSP	country strategic plan
ICSP	interim country strategic plan
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund