



World Food Programme  
Programme Alimentaire Mondial  
Programa Mundial de Alimentos  
برنامج الأغذية العالمي

## Executive Board

Second regular session

Rome, 13–16 November 2023

Distribution: General

Date: 20 February 2024

Original: English

Agenda item 12

WFP/EB.2/2023/12/DRAFT

Summary of the work of the 2023 second regular session of the Executive Board

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# Draft summary of the work of the 2023 second regular session of the Executive Board

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## Current and future strategic issues

### Election to fill vacant positions in the Bureau and appointment of the Rapporteur

1. Noting that three Bureau members elected at previous sessions of the Board in 2023 were no longer available to perform their roles, the President invited the Board to approve the nomination of Dr Jujvarapu Balaji, Alternate Permanent Representative of India, as convenor of List B; H.E. Mr Ngor Ndiaye, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Senegal, as alternate convenor of List A; and Her Excellency Elissa Golberg, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Canada, as alternate convenor of List D. The representatives would be appointed for the remainder of the 2023 term.
2. The Board was also invited to approve the appointment of Mr Khalid Atlassi, Minister Plenipotentiary from the Permanent Representation of Morocco, as Rapporteur for the session.
3. All proposed appointments were duly approved.

### 2023/EB.2/1 Opening remarks by the Executive Director

4. The Executive Director opened her remarks by expressing her condolences to the family and friends of United Nations employees and civilians who had lost their lives in the conflict in Gaza and Israel and paying tribute to WFP's courageous team in the State of Palestine.
5. Having received the unprecedentedly high contribution income of USD 14 billion in 2022, WFP was facing a very different funding situation in 2023, with soaring operating costs and global commodity prices leading to operational requirements of USD 23.5 billion while a funding forecast of USD 10 billion marked a return to pre-coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) funding levels and left a funding gap of almost 60 percent. WFP had been forced to remove 10 million people from its distribution lists in Afghanistan, 3 million in Somalia and 2.5 million in the Syrian Arab Republic, among others, while rations for beneficiaries in many countries had also been drastically reduced. In response, WFP's leadership and staff were intensifying their fundraising efforts, including with governments, international and regional financial institutions, the private sector, philanthropic foundations, high net-worth individuals and the general public.
6. WFP was also adapting to the funding gap by adopting an ambitious agenda for change with five main thrusts:
  - prioritizing work in the field by channelling more resources to country offices, including through a 24 percent increase in programme support and administrative (PSA) funding;
  - improving cost efficiency by asking offices and divisions to revise their plans for 2024, including by matching beneficiary caseloads to the resources available, targeting resources to those in greatest need;
  - ensuring that assistance reached the right people, in full and without interference, including by accelerating the implementation of the reassurance action plan and the rollout of the new assurance framework, with enhanced identity management systems, a comprehensive track-and-trace system covering the entire supply chain, and stronger monitoring and community feedback mechanisms;
  - concentrating on programmes in areas where WFP had proven expertise and using partnerships to maximize the impact of WFP's work; and
  - revising WFP's corporate structure into three departments for workplace and management, operations, and partnerships. A freeze on the recruitment of new staff for headquarters, global offices and the regional bureaux would be in place until the organizational restructuring was complete but did not apply to country offices.

7. Having outlined recent developments in ongoing crises in countries that included the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti, Myanmar and the Sudan, the Executive Director closed her remarks by appealing for the Board's support in raising funds, leveraging diplomatic influence to raise the issue of food security on the global political agenda, and providing insights, knowledge and resources to help address the challenges together.
8. Board members thanked the Executive Director for her address and commended her and the staff of WFP for their unwavering efforts to save lives and change lives in often extremely difficult circumstances around the globe, helping to ensure that WFP maintained its role as the world's pre-eminent humanitarian organization. They expressed their condolences for the family and friends of WFP staff who had lost their lives in the field, and for the United Nations personnel killed recently in Gaza. Several members expressed their gratitude for WFP's support in their own countries, saving lives and collaborating with governments on sustainably changing lives.
9. Recognizing that the combination of growing humanitarian needs and declining resources was forcing WFP to make hard decisions as it sought to do more with less, members welcomed the measures being put in place to address persistent funding gaps, including the prioritization of resources for country offices and the field; the strengthening and broadening of partnerships at the international, national and local levels; the diversification of funding sources and efforts to obtain more flexible and predictable forms of funding; and initiatives that increased the effectiveness and efficiency of WFP operations. A number of Board members called on their colleagues to support WFP's efforts through their own advocacy work, saying that the funding of humanitarian response should be a global priority.
10. Many members saw the reassurance project and reorganization of WFP's internal structure recently as having the potential to contribute to more efficient and effective operations as well as restoring and enhancing trust in WFP's management of risks and stewardship of resources. Recognizing the challenges WFP faced, members welcomed the emphasis on transparency, accountability and strengthened communications with the Board, donors and partners, including on any risks of the diversion or misuse of resources. In particular, they expressed support for work on improving targeting, identity management, the safety and access of beneficiaries, the tracking and monitoring of resources and operations, including in high-risk environments, and the capacities of country offices to implement those improvements. Urging management and donors to ensure that these initiatives received sufficient funding, and looking forward to hearing more about their implementation, several members said that the Board had a vital strategic role to play in improving the positioning and resilience of WFP and that the ongoing governance review provided an opportunity for defining that role.
11. Nearly all of the Board members who spoke expressed concern for the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, with many calling on both sides in the conflict between Hamas and Israel to adhere to international humanitarian law and ensure the protection of civilians and humanitarian personnel and infrastructure. One member said that conditions were also worsening in the West Bank, and a number mentioned the risk of tension spreading to neighbouring countries. Of particular concern was the lack of humanitarian access to Gaza, and there were many calls for a humanitarian ceasefire to allow that access, with several members mentioning their own countries' diplomatic efforts to that end, along with the financial support they were providing for the humanitarian response in the State of Palestine. Members applauded WFP's preparatory work in setting up the logistics for a swift distribution of assistance in Gaza as soon as humanitarian access was possible, and the Executive Director's work with the governments of Egypt and other countries in the region aimed at raising resources and exploring alternative ways of getting humanitarian assistance into Gaza.

12. A large number of Board members expressed their solidarity with the people of Ukraine affected by conflict and the resulting humanitarian crisis in that country. Many also mentioned their concern about the collapse of the Black Sea Grain Initiative and its repercussions on global food security, and encouraged the humanitarian community to continue seeking and using alternative routes for exports from Ukraine. Several members recalled that the conflicts in Gaza and Ukraine were only two of the major crises that were currently affecting countries all over the world, in many cases undoing much of the progress achieved over decades, with conflict, earthquakes and natural disasters related to climate change hitting Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti, Libya, Mali, Morocco, Myanmar, South Sudan, the Sudan and the Dry Corridor of Central America. Commending WFP for its role as a leader and convenor in responding rapidly to emergencies in those and other countries, members called on the wider humanitarian community to sustain their attention to those and other hidden crises.
13. Regarding aspects of WFP's plans for the coming year, members said that the management plan for 2024–2026 provided a good framework for tackling WFP's internal issues and balancing WFP's efforts to save lives during humanitarian emergencies while investing in long-term solutions that built resilience of people and governments to future crises. They welcomed the focus on building national capacities to prevent and respond to food crises and encouraged WFP to continue enhancing the development of gender-responsive, inclusive and localized approaches to its humanitarian and development work. In particular, they applauded the growing emphasis on anticipatory action to mitigate the effects of crises prior to their arrival; the increasing use of cash assistance and local food procurement to protect and strengthen local markets; and the recent focus on the transformation of food systems as part of efforts to build resilience, adapt to climate change and contribute to action at the humanitarian–development–peace nexus, as discussed at the 2022 follow-up to the United Nations food systems summit. Several members emphasized the importance of gender- and protection-centred programming in helping to ensure the inclusion of women and other marginalized population groups in the design, implementation and leadership of activities, and school feeding as an effective response to food crises with both humanitarian and development benefits.
14. The Executive Director thanked the Board for a constructive discussion, joined members in thanking the Government of France for hosting the first global summit of the School Meals Coalition, and undertook to keep the Board updated on WFP's progress on the initiatives discussed.

#### **Special address by H.E. Majid Al-Suwaidi, Director-General of COP 28**

15. The President introduced H.E. Mr Majid Al-Suwaidi, Director-General and Special Representative of the United Arab Emirates for the 28th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP 28).
16. H.E. Al-Suwaidi acknowledged the support provided by WFP for the preparation of COP 28, which would focus on energy transition and climate finance. Noting that climate disasters disproportionately affect people in fragile and conflict settings, he underscored the interconnectedness between climate change, food insecurity and conflict, highlighting the role of stakeholders such as WFP in assisting climate-vulnerable communities. The COP 28 action agenda included initiatives aimed at climate adaptation and mitigation, development and peace. Climate actions to address food insecurity would need to be better resourced. For that reason, COP 28 would promote the increased availability and scale of climate finance, including through the loss and damage fund and other funding arrangements.
17. H.E. Al-Suwaidi invited the Board to endorse the COP 28 Declaration on Climate, Relief, Recovery and Peace, which recognized that climate action was possible and effective in crisis settings and aimed to rally support for enhancing technical and institutional capacities,

financial resources, data and information to build climate resilience and leave no one behind. He also invited the Board to come forward with concrete pledges of financial or technical capacity support. The COP 28 Presidency, WFP and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) would also co-host an event showcasing integrated actions proven to support resilient agricultural food systems, livelihoods, climate adaptation and social cohesion in fragile settings.

18. Three Board members delivered statements on behalf of their lists. They recognized the profound impact of climate change on food systems and described COP 28 as an opportunity for countries to come together to formulate innovative solutions.
19. One Board member emphasized the importance of adapting to and mitigating the consequences of extreme weather events. COP 28 presented a critical opportunity to unite, share experiences and formulate collective strategies on climate change. He also called upon developed nations to fulfil their financial and technological commitments, ensuring Africa's capability to adapt to and mitigate the impacts of climate change.
20. Another Board member highlighted the interlinkages between sustainable agriculture, resilient food systems and climate action, as well as the interconnectedness of climate change and conflict. Given WFP's experience in fragile settings, the organization was urged to continuously monitor climate risks and increase its focus on anticipatory action. She added that resilience programming was critical for climate adaptation and called for COP 28 to showcase climate action for the most vulnerable and identify key opportunities to address the impact of climate change on food security in humanitarian contexts.
21. The third Board member welcomed efforts to enhance the equity, accessibility and sustainability of food and agriculture systems and underscored the importance of WFP maintaining a balanced approach to its mandate, with a growing emphasis on building resilience and capacity in countries vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.
22. The Executive Director commended the COP 28 Presidency for its leadership in highlighting the need for urgent action on climate change in fragile settings. She said that, at the upcoming session, WFP would showcase solutions designed to help food-insecure communities avert, minimize and address loss and damage, such as early warning systems and anticipatory action, climate risk insurance and locally-led resilience programmes.

## **Operational matters**

### **Oral global overview on humanitarian needs and operational concerns and priorities**

23. The Deputy Executive Director warned that the level of humanitarian needs around the world remained very high and that the global environment was increasingly complex. Speaking of the swift initial responses by WFP to conflicts in Armenia and Gaza, earthquakes in Afghanistan and storms in Libya, he underscored that, in addition to responding within a few hours, WFP had also leveraged its presence to contribute to long-term solutions for the affected populations.
24. WFP was developing a framework for prioritizing limited resources, minimizing the overlap of its activities with those of its partners and ensuring coherence across the organization while retaining the ability to adapt to different operational settings. In Ethiopia, for example, measures such as vulnerability-based targeting, digitalized beneficiary lists and enhanced food monitoring had enabled WFP to resume assistance to refugees. Nevertheless, insufficient funding had led to dramatic cuts, increasing destitution and malnutrition, especially in Afghanistan, Somalia and South Sudan.
25. With a view to being able to stay and deliver assistance even in highly fluid settings, WFP was working to improve its access in countries such as Mali, Myanmar and the Sudan, seeking to enhance humanitarian diplomacy and accelerate joint planning with partners.

Through anticipatory action – another key focus – WFP had reached nearly 1 million people in seven countries in 2023. Substantial progress also continued under school meals programmes, particularly in Armenia, where operations had been successfully transferred to national ownership, and in Iraq and the Niger.

26. Board members commended WFP for its vital work in reaching the most vulnerable people, including in sudden onset disasters and in complex protracted crises. They acknowledged the challenges facing WFP staff including in relation to resource cuts and organizational change; several referred to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, paying tribute to all United Nations staff working in such difficult conditions and sharing their condolences for those who had lost their lives in the conflict. One Board member lamented the lack of political will to solve conflicts, which continued to drive large-scale humanitarian emergencies around the world.
27. Board members expressed deep concern about the growing gap between humanitarian needs and available funding and its impact on operations. Some remarked that flexible, multi-year commitments were needed to close the gap; others praised efforts to prioritize and improve targeting to ensure that WFP reached those in greatest need, noting the importance of investing in new technologies and data analysis tools in that regard. One member urged WFP to ensure that prioritization decisions took intersectional gender and vulnerability factors into account; another called for targeted programmes for displaced people and those impacted by climate change.
28. Implementation of the reassurance action plan was seen as key to ensuring that assistance reached those for whom it was intended. One member welcomed efforts to strengthen WFP's internal oversight systems and standards and urged WFP to remain proactively transparent with its partners about any programme irregularities. Another asked WFP to review its partnerships with local organizations to ensure transparency, accountability and effective coordination.
29. Board members encouraged increased advocacy in relation to policies on sustainable agriculture and poverty reduction and solutions to the drivers of conflict and displacement. Several members noted the efficacy of anticipatory action and encouraged WFP to further mainstream this approach and advocate its use by partners, working with others to amplify outcomes and avoid duplication of effort. Noting improvements in inter-agency collaboration, one Board member suggested that the Rome-based agencies (RBAs) provide the membership with a joint update on their collective action. More information was sought on decision making related to the handover of operations to governments and on how WFP addressed obstacles to humanitarian access, particularly in the Sudan.
30. Responding to Board questions, the Assistant Executive Director, Programme and Policy Development Department, described the depth of WFP's collaboration with the other RBAs and, through the Inter-agency Standing Committee, with other United Nations entities; the requested joint update could be provided to the membership through the quarterly operational briefing delivered with FAO. On the handover of operations to governments, WFP ensured that this was a consideration even as interventions were being planned. For emergency assistance, initial needs assessments examined national capacity to respond and WFP only stepped in to provide support when a crisis exceeded national capacity. WFP's programmes integrated activities aimed at strengthening emergency preparedness and response systems so that when operations ended or passed to national ownership, these systems would be better able to respond to future shocks.
31. In his remarks, the Deputy Executive Director thanked Board members for their support for the organization as it faced very complex challenges and their words of appreciation for staff in the field. He echoed calls for increased flexible funding, which facilitated swift and effective emergency response and enabled WFP to adapt programming, strengthen the

humanitarian–development–peace nexus and transition operations to national ownership. On access issues, he confirmed that WFP was pursuing every possible means of delivering humanitarian assistance in the Sudan, including through cross-border and cross-line operations and using increasingly decentralized approaches.

32. In relation to the situation in Gaza, the Deputy Executive Director reminded Board members that more details would be provided under agenda item 7 e). The safety and security of WFP was a paramount concern for the organization and every effort was being made to prepare for a scale-up in humanitarian assistance in Gaza once conditions allowed.

### **Oral update on the reassurance action plan**

33. Management presented the Board with an update on the implementation of WFP's reassurance action plan, recalling that the plan's objectives were to ensure that people who needed assistance received it safely, in full and without interference and enable WFP to provide donors with assurance of its good stewardship of resources, particularly in complex and high-risk emergency settings.
34. The global assurance project was currently focused on complex and high-risk operations and on establishing an "assurance mindset" throughout WFP. Elements included a global assurance framework, which was comprised of global assurance standards and minimum measures for all operations to meet and was "end-to-end", from needs assessment to post-distribution monitoring; efforts to strengthen WFP's existing systems and controls for preventing and detecting cases of fraud or diversion; and the development of costed assurance action plans for 31 country offices at highest risk.
35. Areas of particular focus included enhancing targeting; strengthening monitoring systems, including community feedback mechanisms; adopting digitized identity management for all transfers and rolling out centrally-managed reconciliation services in 2024; introducing more effective cooperating partner management including a digital platform; and increasing oversight and security along WFP's supply chain by launching a multi-year "track and trace" project for in-kind distributions.
36. To fund the project, upfront costs would be covered under a critical corporate initiative (CCI) and PSA departmental budget allocations would be prioritized for the project's implementation. Additionally, PSA savings from 2023 and 2024 were being passed on to country offices for indirect support costs. Ultimately, assurance work would be funded through the country portfolio budgets linked to country strategic plans (CSPs). The key performance indicators for related CCIs would inform reporting on progress.
37. Board members described the project as a critical step in strengthening donors' trust in WFP. They welcomed the plans for mainstreaming an assurance mindset throughout WFP, timely reporting on progress and challenges to the Board, and establishing a high-level task force to guide implementation.
38. Turning to specific aspects of the plan, members urged management to ensure that all WFP staff and cooperating partners, including local ones, understood the importance of maintaining the protection of and accountability to beneficiaries, starting with consultations during the design phase. They recommended that lessons learned be shared among country offices and with partners and that headquarters and regional bureaux provide country offices with technical support for monitoring and reporting, and engagement with governments. They urged management to develop a long-term monitoring strategy and protect related resources.
39. One member recommended that WFP and its United Nations partners develop a common framework for addressing compliance and integrity matters.

40. Looking forward to collaborating with management on the plan's implementation, members sought further insight into the Board's role as well as management's plans for integrating gender and protection considerations into the plan.
41. Management reaffirmed its commitment to localization and embedding accountability to affected populations in its operations. Management said that although the plan did not foresee the development of any normative instruments or policies requiring the Board's approval, they were committed to transparent communication, providing quarterly updates and seeking the Board's guidance and inputs throughout its implementation.

## **Regional overviews**

### **Eastern Africa portfolio**

42. The Regional Director said that 63 million people in the region remained acutely food insecure. Conflicts remained the key drivers of food insecurity in countries such as Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan and the Sudan, but good rains earlier in 2023 had relieved the drought in Ethiopia, northern Kenya and Somalia. The projected shortfall in funding in 2023 had necessitated a prioritization exercise. WFP would thus be reducing the number of people assisted, for example in Ethiopia, Somalia and the Sudan, or providing smaller rations for shorter durations, as in Burundi, Djibouti, Kenya and Uganda.
43. In the Sudan, hunger had more than doubled since 2022 and 1.3 million people had taken refuge in neighbouring countries. The situation risked destabilizing the entire region. WFP was stepping up collaboration with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in the search for long-term solutions to population displacement throughout the region.
44. In Tigray, Ethiopia, WFP operations had resumed thanks to systems put in place under the reassurance action plan. WFP was already reaching over 660,000 people and hoped to apply the same approach elsewhere in the country. Food insecurity remained high in Somalia, where WFP was working with the Government to meet short-term humanitarian needs, make long-term investments in food systems and underwrite many of the Government's social protection systems.
45. Noting the severe impact of conflict, climate change and economic shocks on the region, Board members underscored the importance of strengthening the resilience of vulnerable populations to withstand further shocks. Sustained efforts by WFP and development partners were needed to address the root causes of food insecurity, and the region required greater financial and technical support. One Board member remarked that life-saving operations remained essential nonetheless, given the high levels of malnutrition and large-scale displacement.
46. One member said that he looked forward to continued collaboration with WFP on country-specific and system-wide reform and asked WFP to increase its focus on needs-based humanitarian targeting to ensure that available funding was used to meet the life-saving needs of the most vulnerable.
47. Several members spoke of the reported aid diversion in the region. One member appreciated the transparency of WFP in addressing the issue and looked forward to progress in Somalia. Another said that WFP had to draw lessons from such occurrences and take steps to strengthen internal controls. Both members encouraged WFP to monitor food distributions effectively and to investigate any reported irregularities. The reassurance action plan was welcome in that respect.
48. Board members sought more information on WFP's corporate risk policy and how cash assistance could be delivered in emergencies when financial systems collapsed.

49. Thanking Board members for their support, the Regional Director reiterated WFP's commitment to meeting immediate humanitarian needs while seeking to invest in long-term development and resilience in Eastern Africa.
50. On risk management, every WFP country office had a risk register, which included measures aimed at minimizing the identified risks. WFP monitored markets closely when implementing cash-based transfers (CBTs), particularly in fragile economies; more detail on this could be provided bilaterally. WFP welcomed the opportunity to support government-led systems.
51. The Regional Director also warned that the level of displacement in the region was catastrophic. In the Sudan, a humanitarian ceasefire was essential to enable the scale-up of life-saving assistance required. Meanwhile, political solutions to conflicts were needed to enable long-term development investment.

### **Asia and the Pacific portfolio**

52. The Regional Director said that the number of people afflicted by acute hunger in Asia and the Pacific had risen again and stood at 78 million. In 2023, WFP and its partners had demonstrated effectiveness in crisis response, reaching 28 million people with food assistance. In Afghanistan and Nepal, earthquake victims had received food within 24 hours.
53. The economic slowdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic had depleted the coping capacities of the poorest. WFP was focused on supporting government efforts to address chronic poverty and hunger and adapt to climate change.
54. Faced with inadequate funding, WFP was prioritizing assistance in the region using robust multisectoral assessments carried out with partners and taking into account the contributions of other organizations, access limitations and WFP's capacity to deliver. A subset of core priority needs was also being determined, something which would potentially lead, in Afghanistan, to USD 500 million being cut from the budget in 2024. Regional savings of USD 30 million had also been made by rationalizing delivery infrastructure and negotiating better rates, including for transport. Even so, funding cuts meant that WFP was operating under a minimum operational threshold in a number of critical countries and that there would be little capacity to meet new needs. Consequently, Member States were urged to help WFP to diversify its funding sources.
55. With regard to reassurance, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Pakistan had been identified as high-risk operations. Comprehensive risk and control reviews were under way in those countries to reassure stakeholders that WFP assistance was reaching the right people.
56. Several Board members expressed concern about the challenges faced in the region, particularly in Afghanistan and Myanmar. One member urged WFP to maximize its impact in Afghanistan through more precise targeting; she also called for transparent monitoring, evaluation and reporting of humanitarian access constraints in the country as part of efforts to mitigate the risk of aid diversion and operational interference.
57. One member encouraged WFP in Myanmar to prioritize the most vulnerable and ensure close coordination with other aid organizations. Given the impact of funding shortfalls on rations for Rohingya refugees, she urged WFP to ensure that community engagement involved effective two-way communication.
58. Board members commended WFP's work on school meals, capacity strengthening and emergency preparedness and response. Two members welcomed the engagement of WFP in the Pacific, including through the multi-CSP and pilot projects on anticipatory action. One member asked whether rising rice prices had affected food availability in the region; he also encouraged enhanced collaboration with the other RBAs, especially in efforts related to regional stability.

59. The Regional Director thanked Board members for their comments and questions. In Afghanistan, WFP was continuing to implement resilience programming in partnership with FAO and others. Anticipatory action was a focus in the region, where pilot projects in Bangladesh and the Philippines had demonstrated the cost effectiveness of such approaches.
60. Calls for increased transparency were welcome, and WFP was keen to engage more systematically with donors and Member States on risk-sharing. The need to prioritize assistance and improve targeting and coordination was a priority across the region, including in a bid to increase operational efficiency. Through the reassurance project, WFP was working to improve its beneficiary feedback mechanisms.
61. On RBA collaboration, WFP looked forward to the establishment of an International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) presence in Bangkok, which would facilitate cooperation. WFP worked with FAO at the regional level on policy work and at the operational level on climate change adaptation. WFP tended to work more with FAO in countries where it had greater capacities.
62. Increased rice prices were affecting WFP operations but more importantly, they were compounding the challenges faced by populations in the region, whose coping capacity had been greatly reduced by the COVID-19 pandemic. WFP was concerned about the implications of lower coping capacity for future crises.
63. On the broader question of reducing future humanitarian needs and addressing funding gaps, the Deputy Executive Director noted that in addition to increasing efficiency and diversifying and mobilizing resources, it was vital to address the three biggest drivers of food insecurity – socioeconomic shocks, climate change and conflict – through commitments made in relevant international frameworks such as Agenda 2030 and the Paris Agreement.

### **Western Africa portfolio**

64. The Regional Director ad interim reminded the Board that by the end of 2022, an estimated 9.4 million people had already been displaced in Western Africa, making the region one of the fastest-growing forced displacement crises in the world. The situation had not improved and large refugee influxes into Chad and political instability in the Central Sahel threatened to further undermine regional stability. Displacements beyond the Central Sahel continued to expand, increasing food insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea countries. In 2023, despite the increasingly complex environment, WFP had continued to deliver life-saving assistance including in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, the Niger and Nigeria. In Burkina Faso, in areas where cash assistance was no longer possible, WFP had swiftly transferred 500,000 people from cash to in-kind support within just two months. In the Niger, WFP had accelerated local procurement to avoid the suspension of assistance while food remained blocked outside the country.
65. Increased needs, funding shortfalls and rising operational costs had led WFP to make tough decisions to optimize its activities and stretch every dollar received. WFP had initially planned to reach 11.6 million people during the 2023 lean season, but had been forced to cut assistance to 5.5 million people in Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Nigeria and the Sahel. The effects of prioritization on populations were already seen with deepening hunger and malnutrition; additional cuts were foreseen. Given their cost-efficiency, CBTs had been systematically prioritized and scaled up when appropriate. WFP was also increasing efforts to ensure that the right assistance reached the right people with the rollout of reassurance action plans for the seven highest-risk country operations. Nigeria had been the first WFP office to implement the new corporate escalation system.

66. Meanwhile, WFP had scaled up its investment in community resilience and long-term solutions, focusing on climate-resilient food systems, including land rehabilitation and access to water, supporting governments in strengthening social protection systems and providing durable solutions to refugees. Evidence in the Niger showed that large-scale resilience interventions helped to reduce humanitarian needs, restore the environment and strengthen stability and social cohesion. As partnerships and concerted efforts were key to reducing future needs, WFP had signed new agreements with the Economic Community of West African States and the Great Green Wall Initiative and continued to leverage its comparative advantage through established collaboration including with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Bank, UNHCR, the Green Climate Fund, the Sahel Alliance and the other RBAs. Despite a USD 1 billion funding gap for its operations in the next six months, WFP had been increasingly trusted by Western African governments, whose financial support to WFP had almost tripled compared to 2022.
67. Paying tribute to the work of WFP staff, particularly in the field, Board members voiced concern at the impact of climate change, political crises, insecurity and displacement on food and nutrition security in the region. They praised WFP's work on school meals, resilience and social protection and commended the organization for making tough prioritization decisions. Donors were urged to increase funding and to maintain focus on the Central Sahel, where WFP was advised to strengthen its emergency preparedness, risk management, localization and targeting capacities and engage with government bodies on the design of its cooperation. Strong monitoring capacities and clear evidence were also needed in that region for quick and informed decision making.
68. Board members highlighted the importance of local procurement, community engagement, land rehabilitation and the restoration of ecosystems in building sustainable food systems and ensuring better health and livelihoods outcomes for people in the region. One Board member requested further information on obstacles to humanitarian access in the region and on the implications for WFP operations of the withdrawal of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). Another member sought more details on how investment in resilience reduced the cost of future emergency response.
69. The Regional Director ad interim thanked Board members for their engagement and support. In response to questions on humanitarian access, she explained that WFP had increased its negotiation capacity, strengthened efforts to gain community acceptance and improved its security and political analysis. On the withdrawal of MINUSMA, WFP had engaged in consultations on how to adjust its operations, including in terms of increasing the capacity of the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service, reinforcing aviation security and taking care of its staff. Further details on the success of resilience-building investments could be found in a WFP brochure on resilience programming in the Sahel. For the reassurance action plans, operations had been identified as high risk on the basis of their scale, complexity and number of partners in addition to the security and access situation in the country.

### **Middle East, Northern Africa and Eastern Europe portfolio**

70. Through a video, the Regional Director summarized WFP's emergency response activities throughout the year and then focused on Gaza, where the recent outbreak of conflict had resulted in the displacement of two thirds of the population and had severely limited humanitarian access. WFP had provided food for 760,000 people, planned to reach 1.1 million people and would do more if required if sufficient access was granted and funding received. It was strengthening its monitoring and other systems to ensure that assistance reached the right people. Concerns remained about the safety of WFP partners, beneficiaries and staff as well as the potential impact of the conflict on neighbouring countries.

71. To align budgets with expected funding and focus limited resources on the most vulnerable, the regional bureau planned a budget reduction of USD 3 billion – or 40 percent – in 2024 for its four largest operations. The Regional Director provided an overview of reductions across the region, such as in Yemen, where the number of targeted beneficiaries had been reduced from 13 million to 8.8 million and in the Syrian Arab Republic, where beneficiary numbers had been reduced by 40 percent. The regional bureau continued to prioritize cost efficiencies, for example in Ukraine, where deduplication had enabled WFP to help reduce costs by USD 150 million for members of the cash working group and by USD 15 million for WFP itself.
72. WFP's resilience-building efforts in the region included supporting smallholder farmers in Ukraine, creating large-scale water recycling plants and planting mangroves in Iraq.
73. The regional bureau was supporting the eight high-risk operations in the region through a task force and was implementing the corporate reassurance plan, including through enhancements to feedback mechanisms, which were critical for WFP in ensuring that assistance reached the right people with the planned quantities.
74. Board members thanked the Regional Director and WFP staff for their efforts to address the many challenges they faced. Several spoke of the financial and other support that their governments were providing to countries in the region and emphasized the need to invest in resilience and livelihoods.
75. All the members who spoke mentioned the conflict in Gaza, with several expressing concern for all the victims in Israel and Gaza and most calling for a ceasefire to allow access for humanitarian assistance.
76. Board members praised WFP's work in the region, including in implementing the reassurance plan. They urged management to maintain those efforts and called on the donor community to fund them.
77. The Regional Director thanked Board members for their support.

### **Southern Africa portfolio**

78. The Regional Director summarized the situation in Southern Africa, where high agricultural potential was countered by high vulnerability to climate shocks and natural disasters and 60 million people were food insecure. WFP was addressing the forecasted poor harvests and funding shortfalls by enhancing the targeting and monitoring of its operations, diversifying its funding sources, expanding its partnerships and integrating its new global assurance framework into all of its operations, starting with those at greatest risk of resource diversion.
79. The strengthening of emergency response and anticipatory action capacities was a priority, with USD 12.8 million in anticipatory financing set aside to address the potential impacts of El Niño. Other priorities included increasing collaboration with governments and other partners on national and regional programmes, including through WFP's Rapid Rural Transformation pilot project, which used solar-powered hubs to boost energy, water and food availability, and the Indigenous food value chain development programme of the Southern African Development Community.
80. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, increased conflict had displaced 450,000 people in recent weeks and WFP was providing food assistance for 1.9 million. The Regional Director thanked Board members for their support for WFP's work in the country, but WFP needed an additional USD 1 billion to fund its operations for the following six months.
81. Thanking the Regional Director and staff of WFP for their achievements in the region, Board members extended their condolences to the families of those people who had lost their lives while working for humanitarian causes.

82. They commended WFP's focus on anticipatory action and preparedness and its engagement with regional leaders in addressing the challenges of climate change and El Niño, including through the initiatives of the Southern African Development Community and its own Rapid Rural Transformation programme, which would improve access to water, health and education services throughout the region. They welcomed WFP's linking of local smallholder farmers to school feeding and food assistance interventions in Malawi and its collaborative approach to refining targeting in Mozambique.
83. Expressing concern about the funding situation, particularly for operations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Board members called on donors to work with WFP and its partners on addressing funding gaps and urged WFP to maintain its own efforts in that area. Members supported WFP's focus on sustainable solutions to food security crises, engagement with the private sector, resilience building, transformation of local food systems and anticipatory action. One member requested examples of the anticipatory actions envisaged.
84. Thanking Board members for their collaboration in the region, the Regional Director said that WFP was working with the Famine Early Warning Systems Network on strengthening vulnerability-based targeting processes in Mozambique and other countries. Innovations and experiences from Southern Africa were shared with other regions, and WFP's agreements with private sector entities could be shared bilaterally on request.

#### **Latin America and the Caribbean portfolio**

85. The Regional Director outlined WFP's recent achievements in the areas of local procurement, shock-responsive social protection systems, school meals, anticipatory action, innovative financing and partnerships. Despite many promising initiatives, however, the region remained fragile and an estimated 40 million people were food insecure in October 2023, 10.4 million severely so. Climate change, violence and poor economic growth continued to undermine food security and drive displacement; moreover, the effects of El Niño weather patterns were already impacting harvests, with implications for up to 5 million people in Central and South America. The migrant crisis affected the entire hemisphere and could only be addressed through investments that targeted the underlying causes of population movements.
86. Across the region, WFP had directly assisted 5 million people in the first six months of 2023 and planned to reach 10 million by the end of the year. In Ecuador, a recent economic downturn and escalating violence were jeopardizing food security; WFP had assisted 27,000 vulnerable Ecuadorians and 207,000 migrants with vouchers or food kits. Meanwhile in Haiti, 44 percent of the population were in Integrated Food Security Phase Classification phase 3 food insecurity or worse; by the end of October 2023, WFP had assisted 1.7 million Haitians with CBTs, food and hot meals.
87. Many Board members commended WFP for its work in the region, especially in the areas of local procurement, food losses, social protection, anticipatory action, innovation and private sector engagement. Several Board members voiced concern that the complex challenges faced in the region received insufficient international attention; they highlighted the severe consequences of climate change and El Niño on food security and rural livelihoods, particularly in Central America and the Amazon basin. Many members described the humanitarian and environmental impact of the migrant crisis on the whole hemisphere and through the Darién Gap as well as the dangers faced by people in transit. One Board member remarked that support for smallholder farmers could play a role in reducing migration; others said that greater international cooperation was vital to addressing the migrant crisis and building resilient and sustainable food systems.

88. The situation in Haiti was of grave concern for many Board members. They thanked WFP for its support for people displaced by gang violence and for the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service activities in the country. One member expressed alarm at the prevalence of gender-based violence in Haiti and urged WFP to continue prioritizing protection issues in its operations. Several members called for greater international support for efforts to improve the security situation and bring stability to the country.
89. Board members commended WFP for its school meals operations in Venezuela. They also praised WFP's commitment to regularly reviewing targeting in Colombia, its collaboration with the other RBAs in the region and its support for school canteens in Honduras, Guatemala and Cuba.
90. South-South and triangular cooperation was cited by many as an important mechanism for the region and beyond and WFP was encouraged to continue facilitating technical and knowledge transfer and the sharing of best practices, especially in relation to innovative approaches. One member underscored the value of localization, national integrated approaches to resource mobilization and long-term solutions for water security.
91. The Regional Director thanked Board members for their comments, particularly their support for South-South and triangular cooperation and their emphasis on continued efforts to address the impacts of climate change and El Niño on food security in the region. WFP was implementing food security and nutrition activities in seven Amazonian countries, focusing on support for indigenous communities. Particular attention was paid to gender-based violence in all WFP projects and through the regional gender policy, and WFP continued to build the capacities of its staff and those of government and non-governmental partners in this area.

## **Policy issues**

### **2023/EB.2/2 Analysis of policy gaps**

92. The Assistant Executive Director, Programme and Policy Development Department presented the analysis of policy gaps, which provided a holistic view of WFP normative work, covering formal policies and other instruments such as strategies, circulars and directives. Three major policy updates – on climate change, resilience and school feeding – were being prepared for consideration by the Board in 2024.
93. Two Board members took the floor to speak on behalf of their respective lists. One voiced appreciation for plans to formulate a localization framework and the potential development of a localization policy, which could improve WFP's ability to work sustainably and effectively in crises and to engage with local partners. The development of such a policy should involve Member States and its implementation would need funding and a carefully designed plan.
94. While agreeing that a separate policy on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus was not currently necessary, the Board member proposed a strategic evaluation of WFP's work in this area, which could inform initial discussions on a potential policy. Praising the disability inclusion road map and the gender policy, he suggested that WFP conduct a review of the operationalization of inclusion as a first step towards establishing a framework for inclusion; WFP could also consider introducing a normative framework for service provision.
95. On innovative financing, he said that the Board should be involved in the development of any normative instrument in this area and requested more information on the relationship between the strategies on innovation and innovative financing. More insight was also sought into potential operational risks and risk mitigation measures related to the use of innovative financing mechanisms.

96. Another Board member speaking on behalf of a list noted that there were still overlaps in joint programme implementation among the RBAs, which, he said, could be overcome through closer collaboration at every stage. He also observed that policies were only as good as the evidence that informed them.
97. Both speakers looked forward to the revision of the policy formulation policy, with one noting the coordination of that work with the ongoing Executive Board governance review. The Board members also stressed the importance of keeping policies up to date. One said that it was crucial to engage in continuous monitoring and review; the other proposed that WFP update its partnerships strategy, which covered the period 2014–2017.
98. One list requested that an update of the analysis of policy gaps be presented to the Board at its 2024 second regular session at the latest.
99. In response to the questions raised, the Director, Programme – Humanitarian and Development Division said that management was well advanced in preparing an internal paper on localization and planned to continue the dialogue with the Board on this topic as a normative product was developed. The planning of a strategic evaluation on WFP's work on the humanitarian–development–peace nexus would be considered by the Office of Evaluation. The WFP strategic plan 2022–2025 had affirmed the continued relevance of the partnership strategy. The innovation strategy encompassed thematic areas, techniques and approaches and was therefore broader than the innovative finance strategy, which focused on tools and instruments; there were oversight bodies for both, which worked on alignment.
100. The Director also shared that service provision was governed by an Executive Director's circular and complemented by more technical and operational guidance on key areas of service provision including CBTs, supply chain and others. He said that it might be useful to convene an information session for the Board on service provision before considering additional normative products. He also suggested that if the requested update on the analysis of policy gaps were presented at the 2024 second regular session, it could be informed by the outcome of the mid-term evaluation of the strategic plan.

## **Resource, financial and budgetary matters**

### **2023/EB.2/3 WFP management plan (2024–2026)**

101. Management introduced the management plan for 2024–2026 and thanked the Board for their inputs into earlier drafts. The plan included a reduction of USD 8.3 million in the PSA budget, with a larger share of that budget allocated to country offices, while the budgetary impacts of the headquarters restructuring had not been reflected in the document. Management sought the Board's approval for those and other adjustments of the plan.
102. Board members welcomed the plan and WFP's focus on anticipatory action, the strengthening of emergency response capacities, innovation, resilience building, and enhanced effectiveness and efficiency in its operations. They expressed their support for the proposals presented for their approval and for management's prioritization of life-saving assistance, using CBTs whenever feasible, mainstreaming cross-cutting themes into all WFP programmes and addressing funding shortfalls by diversifying partnerships and funding sources and enhancing cost savings.
103. Regarding the pursuit of cost savings, Board members urged management to ensure that key oversight functions received sufficient funding and that WFP continue to invest in its people and workplace culture. Members emphasized the importance of timely and transparent communications with the Board and donors, particularly with regard to the diversification of funding sources and partnerships and the implementation of innovative solutions, all of which could entail operational risks. In that regard, Board members welcomed the global assurance project and the recent work on enhancing monitoring and

oversight. One member recommended that WFP develop a long-term strategy for its monitoring structures. Several encouraged WFP to increase the share of local purchases from smallholder farmers and markets in its food procurement.

104. Members sought additional information on the impacts of the current freeze on staff recruitment; management's plans for optimizing corporate processes; CCIs on WFP staff and capacity building and "fit for future"; the allocation and use of additional PSA funding in country offices; and the funding of work on cross-cutting priorities.
105. Looking forward to receiving regular updates on the global assurance project, WFP's new organizational structure, the prioritization of targeted population groups and the funding of CCIs, members asked management to include in future management plans an annex laying out the indirect support costs of country offices. WFP was also requested to hold an informal consultation on the country office support model optimization and simplification initiative and to report on the outcomes of its various resilience-building initiatives.
106. Management responded to the points raised. Additional PSA allocations for country offices covered the costs of maintaining a basic office structure and ensuring minimum control standards. Details of planned and ongoing CCIs were provided in an annex to the management plan; updates on CCI performance were included in the annual performance report. The "fit for future" CCI built on the previous CCI on private sector funding, and two of the ongoing CCIs had carry-over funds and did not require additional PSA funding for 2024. Oversight and assurance functions were excluded from the recruitment freeze; other functions could request exemptions from the Human Resources Division. Most of the work on cross-cutting priorities was covered by CSP budgets; within the baseline budget, approximately 9 percent of staff costs were linked to cross-cutting priorities.

#### **2023/EB.2/4 Housing allowance of the Executive Director**

107. The President reminded the Board that the housing allowance of the Executive Director had been considered by the FAO Finance Committee and by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions of the United Nations, which had both provided advice.
108. Presenting the item, WFP management recalled that the review of the housing allowance of the Executive Director had been conducted following the appointment of the Executive Director in April 2023. WFP had analysed data covering the period March 2017 to March 2023 published by the Italian Consumer Price Index and that of the Harmonized Index Consumer Prices published by Eurostat for the same period, including for housing, water, electricity and fuel. An international real estate firm had also been engaged to ensure objectivity and independence. Based on the analysis, the Secretariat recommended increasing the provision for reimbursement of the Executive Director's housing allowance from EUR 160,000 to EUR 170,000 per annum. The Executive Director, however, had indicated her willingness to retain the housing allowance at the rate established in 2017.
109. The Board approved the proposal of the Executive Director, setting the housing allowance at EUR 160,000 per annum, inclusive of services and utilities, until further notice.

#### **Asia and the Pacific portfolio**

110. Presenting insights and recommendations from the evaluations of the CSPs for Cambodia and Nepal, the Director of Evaluation said that WFP had been agile in responding to the needs of the most vulnerable and well aligned with national priorities. The CSPs provided a suitable strategic framework but lacked clear articulation of the integration of crisis response and resilience-building activities. School feeding had gained momentum while country capacity strengthening activities had demonstrated value, but a lack of meaningful indicators limited full assessment of capacity strengthening sustainability.

111. Although food security and nutrition work had surpassed expectations in Cambodia, linkages between standalone action on nutrition and mainstreaming efforts could be enhanced. Direct assistance was effective, but broad coverage limited its impact on community resilience. Implementation was efficient and emergency response timely, although challenges remained including because of internal “silos” and project-based approaches.
112. In Nepal, gender perspectives were well integrated in the programme, whereas in Cambodia the approach could be more sophisticated. Although improving, attention to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and accountability to affected populations was still limited in both countries. Opportunities for enhancing community-level engagement, staffing structures and strategic partnerships had also been identified.
113. The evaluation recommendations for the new CSPs included refinements to WFP’s strategic focus to improve the integration of humanitarian and development activities and maximize effectiveness; the development of partnership strategies; the handover to the governments of school feeding programmes; support for governments in designing nutrition and gender-sensitive programmes and improving their data analysis capacity; the strengthening of monitoring and evaluation; and increased mainstreaming of inclusion and accountability to affected populations.
114. The Regional Director thanked the Office of Evaluation for its work, agreeing in particular with the finding that a more systematic approach to capacity strengthening was needed as WFP shifted its focus to upstream support for governments and the enhancement of national systems.
115. One Board member took the floor to express his country’s support for the implementation of the evaluation recommendations, including through South–South and triangular cooperation. The Regional Director noted that the region had benefitted from such cooperation in the past and looked forward to continued work in this area.

**2023/EB.2/5 Cambodia country strategic plan (2024–2028), including the management response to the evaluation recommendations from item 6 a) 3)**

116. Presenting the new CSP, the Country Director explained that WFP in Cambodia continued to move away from direct assistance towards leveraging government strengths. Guided by an overarching strategy and monitoring framework, the CSP encompassed social protection, food systems transformation and disaster management. Evidence generation and use would be promoted, as would inclusive interventions that met diverse needs, countered harmful social norms, empowered women and fostered social accountability. Partnerships, risk assessment, oversight and the mainstreaming of cross-cutting issues would be prominent in the implementation of the CSP.
117. Many Board members expressed their support for the new CSP, particularly the integration of evaluation recommendations and the attention paid to local context, climate risks and monitoring. They appreciated the use of schools as platforms for nutrition education and health-related behavioural change and recognized the significant progress made in scaling up the national school meals programme. Several members welcomed WFP’s intention to advocate the development and use of fortified rice, particularly as part of the home-grown school feeding approach. One noted the potential for expanding WFP activities to cover all vulnerable people, including those with disabilities.
118. One member encouraged WFP to share lessons learned with its partners in order to build collective capacity to respond to development needs. Another urged WFP to pay adequate attention to local capacity in order to improve implementation and institutional effectiveness and ensure sustainability. WFP was also encouraged to further improve

national and international logistics and supply chains and to cooperate closely with the International Civil Defence Organization for resilience interventions.

119. One member appreciated plans to pilot and use new indicators and looked forward to receiving updates on their development. Another asked whether, given the progress made by Cambodia, WFP had considered reducing its operations and allowing other development-focused organizations to take over some activities, particularly in light of current funding shortfalls.
120. In response to Board comments, the Country Director confirmed the focus of her office on establishing a clear strategy on capacity strengthening, which would facilitate monitoring of activities in that area. On the question of partnerships, the Director of Evaluation noted that the CSP evaluation had found that WFP had strong partnerships with its sister agencies in Cambodia, particularly with FAO; for the new CSP, the recommendation was to link partnerships with the issue of operational sustainability.
121. Addressing the question of coordination between various organizations, particularly on development, the Regional Director agreed that stronger joint work and alignment was needed in the region. However, both the Government and development donors saw WFP as a credible partner in Cambodia, as shown by the funding of the CSP for 2019–2023, which had surpassed the original budget. The new CSP was already more than 50 percent funded by development donors and the Government also provided funding for its implementation. Given the distinction between humanitarian and development budgets, it did not follow that less funding for development initiatives in Cambodia would translate into increased funding for humanitarian response elsewhere. The Assistant Executive Director added that as WFP shifted to an enabling role, there would be an opportunity to engage with partners on the boundaries of and opportunities for work in climate and food security resilience.
122. In a recorded video message, H.E. Dr. Hangchuon Naron, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Education, Youth and Sport of Cambodia, expressed his gratitude for the longstanding collaboration with WFP that had contributed to his country's development trajectory. He confirmed that the CSP was aligned with government priorities and national aspirations and reaffirmed the commitment of his Government to work towards full ownership of the school feeding programme.

**2023/EB.2/6 Nepal country strategic plan (2024–2028), including the management response to the evaluation recommendations from item 6 a) 9)**

123. The Country Director presented the new CSP, which was aligned with government priorities and responded to the recommendations of the CSP evaluation. Through the plan, WFP aimed to accelerate efforts to transition from direct assistance to technical support through better integration of country capacity strengthening into interventions under each CSP outcome. Work with the Government would encompass social protection, food systems transformation, school meals and emergency preparedness and response. WFP would prioritize marginalized population groups and work in partnership with administrative bodies at every level and with other United Nations entities. South–South and triangular cooperation, including with research institutions, would continue, as would efforts to diversify funding sources.
124. Thanking WFP for its response to the recent earthquake in Nepal, Board members welcomed the new CSP, particularly the incorporation of the evaluation recommendations and its focus on nutrition, livelihoods support, capacity strengthening and crisis response. One member endorsed the CSP's integrated approach, support for a national nutrition strategy, strategic engagement in the national school meals programme and increased attention to climate change and resilience building. Another highlighted the value of South–South and triangular cooperation in supporting CSP implementation.

125. On school feeding, WFP was encouraged to retain a shock-responsive approach including during the handover of the programme. The organization should explore the links between resilience investments and improvements in food security and consider strengthening monitoring, planning and coordination. Work on forecast-based anticipatory action and targeting should be strengthened in close collaboration with local government.
126. Board members called on WFP to increase the complementarity of its programming, support the effective targeting of women, people with disabilities and other socially marginalized groups for social protection and education programmes and ensure that handover arrangements were considered in the design of interventions.
127. One observer sought more clarity regarding collaboration with federal, provincial and local governments and the CSP's contribution to the Government's 16<sup>th</sup> plan. He recommended greater emphasis on the role of provincial and local governments in enhancing the capacity of farmers and other value chain actors, particularly under CSP outcome 3; a broader range of international partners should also be considered under that outcome.
128. Thanking Board members for their support, the Country Director took note of their feedback on increasing country capacity strengthening, retaining a focus on emergency preparedness and response, and enhancing monitoring arrangements. On cooperation with provincial and local authorities, he clarified that WFP planned to work with other development actors on augmenting the project management and technical skills of such bodies, including in relation to smallholder farmer support and value chain actors. CSP activities combined direct implementation and technical assistance for governments at all levels and built on existing programmes, such as the local infrastructure support programme, which supported local government action in the areas of green recovery, job creation and climate-resilient local infrastructure.
129. On alignment with the Government's 16<sup>th</sup> plan, the Country Director noted that the document had not been available when the CSP was being designed; however, a concept note recently released by the Government indicated close alignment between the new plan and the CSP. If requested by the Government, WFP would adjust the CSP to support implementation of the 16<sup>th</sup> plan.
130. The Regional Director underscored the importance of interconnected interventions, increased partnerships with other United Nations entities and development actors, and the "leave no one behind" approach, all of which were prominent features of the new CSP. Coordination among development actors at the local level was a key consideration to ensure that capacity building efforts were structured and effective.
131. In a recorded video message, Mr Krishna Hari Pushkar, Finance Secretary of the Ministry of Finance of Nepal, described WFP as a longstanding partner for the Government in achieving its target of zero hunger. Through the new CSP, Nepal would continue to work with WFP to strengthen its national emergency preparedness and response capacity, reduce its vulnerability to the impact of climate change and build community resilience.

**2023/EB.2/7 Summary report on the evaluation of the corporate emergency response in Myanmar (2018–2022) and management response**

**2023/EB.2/8 Myanmar interim country strategic plan (2024–2025)**

132. In her presentation, the Director of Evaluation noted that WFP had achieved a major scale-up in response to overlapping crises in Myanmar and that despite considerable challenges, the organization had achieved positive results in food security, asset creation and the treatment of moderate acute malnutrition. The military takeover in 2021 interrupted early progress on building a public social protection system and affected the school meals programme. There were likely significant coverage gaps in inaccessible areas. The evaluation made four recommendations on maintaining operational flexibility, staff

welfare and WFP's capacity to work at scale; achieving consistency in internal decision-making processes particularly in the face of difficult ethical and practical choices; adjusting qualitative and community-based data collection processes; and using the interim CSP to test and gradually integrate a broader resilience perspective throughout WFP's programming in Myanmar.

133. The Country Director welcomed the evaluation findings and recommendations, which had been key in shaping the new interim CSP. He described the actions planned in response to the four recommendations then proceeded to present the new interim CSP, through which WFP would provide life-saving assistance to vulnerable shock-affected communities; seek to boost livelihoods and eradicate malnutrition; continue to advocate for humanitarian access to all in need of assistance; strengthen the response capacity of its partners; and integrate protection and accountability in its conflict-sensitive programming. Flexibility, adherence to the humanitarian principles, accountability and close collaboration with other United Nations entities and humanitarian actors would remain key priorities throughout the implementation of the interim CSP.
134. Board members praised WFP and its partners for their work in Myanmar in very challenging circumstances and endorsed the evaluation recommendations, particularly recommendation 2. They welcomed the interim CSP, with its continued focus on school meals, community resilience, local partnerships, gender equality and inclusion, protection and accountability to affected populations. Food and cash assistance for crisis-affected people, particularly those facing long-term displacement, was appreciated, as was WFP's commitment to collecting disaggregated data. One Board member expressed support for effective humanitarian data collection and sharing with humanitarian partners and robust activity monitoring to ensure programme effectiveness.
135. In the area of school meals, Board members welcomed the promotion of local procurement, including fortified rice, and plans to strengthen the capacity of school management committees. One member endorsed WFP's strategic focus on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus and its use of vulnerability-based targeting.
136. WFP was urged to pay continued explicit attention to the risks including in relation to food diversion and to consider how risk was shared with its cooperating partners. One Board member remarked on the importance of conducting an evaluation or review of the interim CSP to inform future planning. Another asked WFP to continue providing assistance in urban areas and encouraged greater attention to social cohesion, including inter-religious and inter-ethnic cohesion, through outreach and communication initiatives.
137. More information was sought on plans to hand over activities to local organizations, WFP's coordination with the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Livelihoods and Food Security Fund, and the steps planned to ensure synergy between relief, social protection and resilience programming. One Board member requested that WFP report on the share of funding channelled through local organizations and to indicate how multi-year funding facilitated such an approach. Another recommended more explicit reference to conflict sensitivity analysis in the interim CSP and asked how WFP planned to manage the risks involved in implementing a principled humanitarian response. She also asked how WFP would support its cooperating partners and work with stakeholders on optimizing accountability to affected populations and targeting and how capacity strengthening for local partners would complement other capacity strengthening activities.
138. WFP was urged to develop corporate guidance on engaging in inclusive, principled and risk-sensitive approaches in challenging operational environments. All humanitarian actors should be consistent in their application of a principled approach to ensure a strong unified response to any interference in humanitarian activities. Strong measures were recommended to mitigate reputational risk, particularly communication campaigns

conducted with local community-based and civil society organizations. WFP should also support the implementation of the humanitarian country team's centrality of protection strategy for Myanmar and continue its role in the Kachin durable solution working group, while exploring additional locations for such work.

139. Responding to Board members' comments and questions, the senior evaluation officer in charge of the evaluation offered more insight into the risks faced by cooperating partners in Myanmar, which included reputational risks in addition to those associated with staff safety and wellness and access. The country office discussed these risks transparently with its partners, but at the time of the evaluation there had been no protocols or resources in place to assist partners in the event of these risks materializing. WFP was recommended to consider establishing processes for gathering feedback from cooperating partners to ensure the latter did not feel pressured to undertake high-risk activities; financial provision could also be made to help address actual and potential risks that were transferred to cooperating partners.
140. The Country Director thanked Board members for their constructive comments, which would be taken into account during the implementation of the interim CSP. WFP was committed to working with cooperating partners on transferred risks, including through additional funding and increased communication. WFP staff directly implemented 20 percent of interventions and were also exposed to significant risks. Flexible and multi-year funding was key to enabling the timely delivery of activities and allowed WFP to plan with and support its partners. The country office was implementing the reassurance action plan, prioritizing targeting, monitoring and identity management for cash-based assistance. Conflict sensitivity continued to evolve, with further studies planned to ensure WFP captured ongoing risks and did no harm through its operations. Major investments had been made in urban operations, where WFP worked in partnership including with UNICEF and the United Nations Office for Project Services, particularly on social protection. On ensuring support for resilience, the Country Director explained that as far as possible, WFP would seek to use resources for life-saving assistance to help people in situations of protracted displacement to resettle. Flexible funding was also required for vital activities in the areas of school meals, nutrition, resilience and livelihood support.
141. The Regional Director emphasized WFP's commitment to delivering principled humanitarian assistance, noting that the organization had increased its reach to newly displaced people sevenfold in the past month; 75 percent of this expansion had been achieved through negotiated access, which allowed WFP to deliver with much more certainty and in a way much more closely aligned with international standards of assessment, monitoring and oversight. It was harder to deliver principled humanitarian assistance in hard-to-reach areas in Myanmar, where for some actors it was difficult to adhere to the principles of independence and neutrality. WFP worked with the humanitarian community to recognize, analyse and share these risks.
142. On reputational risk, the Regional Director observed growing division within the humanitarian and international communities in Myanmar. He agreed that stronger communication from WFP and the United Nations was vital to counteract this but said that more was needed to ensure that actors came together to work in a much more coherent and unified way.

## **Latin America and the Caribbean portfolio**

### **2023/EB.2/9 Dominican Republic country strategic plan (2024–2028), including evaluation findings, recommendations and management response from item 6 a) 4)**

143. The Director of Evaluation presented the evaluation of the CSP, through which WFP had strengthened the capacity of national institutions in the areas of nutrition, social protection,

emergency response and supply chain management. The efficiency of programming and the effectiveness of resilience interventions, however, had been constrained by issues related to programme coherence, funding, coordination between the RBAs, human resource capacity and monitoring data. The six recommendations presented in the evaluation report included further alignment of WFP operations with the upper-middle-income status of the country, the development of a strategy for transitioning from capacity strengthening to demand-led technical assistance, and increased attention to gender equality, the empowerment of women, inclusion, and accountability to affected populations.

144. Presenting the management response to the evaluation, the Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean confirmed that the recommendations had been integrated into the new CSP for the Dominican Republic. Taking a comprehensive and integrated approach, the new CSP focused on strengthening social protection, disaster risk management and food systems in order to reduce the needs of the most vulnerable and promote their development. Working groups had been established to ensure better integration between the United Nations entities active in the country. Approaches to environmental sustainability, protection, nutrition mainstreaming, gender equality and women's empowerment had been incorporated throughout the CSP.
145. Board members expressed satisfaction with the integration of the evaluation findings and recommendations in the new CSP, particularly appreciating the focus on achieving consistency and components on capacity building, risk management and school meals. Efforts to strengthen coordination mechanisms were welcomed, along with support for joint action between Haiti and the Dominican Republic in areas such as climate change, emergency response and the development of border regions.
146. They commended the Dominican Republic for its role in addressing challenges faced in Haiti and noted the pressures placed on its social protection programmes from increased migration – a challenge faced by many countries in the region. One Board member reiterated his country's support for national efforts to transform its food system, improve resilience to natural disasters and improve its social security system.
147. Board members highlighted the importance of strengthening cooperation with the Government, especially for climate action, regional food security, anticipatory action and standard operating procedures and other disaster risk reduction measures. One Board member voiced support for the establishment of disaster funds and actions that built local government capacity in rapid disaster response; she welcomed WFP's commitment to funding an impact evaluation on anticipatory action and looked forward to reviewing results related to the effectiveness of cash assistance in this regard. Effective data collection, transparency and robust monitoring were also key.
148. The Country Director thanked Board members for their comments, adding that the CSP aimed to produce a multiplier effect in the region, supporting the adoption of good practices that could be replicated elsewhere. Innovation was key to addressing funding challenges, improving data processes and better integrating reliable data from a variety of institutions. Anticipatory action was increasingly important in light of the climate crisis and a holistic approach was needed to improve the sustainability of food systems.
149. H.E. Mr José Ramón Holguín Brito, Vice-Minister of Governmental Monitoring and Coordination of the Dominican Republic, described WFP as an important partner for his country, citing joint action on issues related to disaster risk reduction, food systems, gender equality and childhood obesity. He welcomed the approval of the new CSP and expressed his country's commitment to continued international cooperation, transparency in programming and the use of funds, and support for those most in need.

**2023/EB.2/10 Haiti country strategic plan (2024–2028), including evaluation findings, recommendations and management response from item 6 a) 6)**

150. In her overview of the CSP evaluation, the Director of Evaluation said that through the plan WFP had helped to improve food consumption and reduce reliance on negative coping strategies. Although WFP had successfully adapted the plan in order to assist large numbers of people, despite the challenging operational environment, overall food security and nutrition had continued to deteriorate, indicating that emergency assistance alone could not reverse the situation. Efforts to address the root causes had been hampered by contextual and funding constraints, and while expanded school meals provision was having a positive impact on learning, retention rates and nutrition, insufficient funding had led to inconsistent interventions in the area of nutrition and WFP had been unable to expand the home-grown school feeding programme or cash transfers for social protection. The evaluation made five recommendations in areas including partnerships, resource mobilization, targeting and capacity strengthening in relation to cross-cutting issues such as gender equality, protection and climate change.
151. The Country Director presented the new CSP for Haiti, where some 4 million people were facing acute hunger in the context of gang violence, economic decline and the climate crisis. Informed by the evaluation, the new plan would increase WFP's focus on addressing the drivers of food insecurity and building the capacity of national institutions, while maintaining WFP's vital humanitarian response capacity. Through local procurement and CBTs, WFP would seek to stimulate the local economy while continuing its support for social protection, school meals and, in conjunction with FAO, the livelihoods of Haitian farmers. The specific needs of women and children, who were disproportionately affected by violence and food insecurity, would be systematically integrated in all WFP activities, and WFP would invest in local partnerships and technology and ensure a conflict-sensitive approach throughout the CSP, contributing to the humanitarian–development–peace nexus.
152. Board members welcomed the new CSP and commended WFP for its work in Haiti. They expressed concern that violence in the country could lead to further displacement and broader regional instability. It was hoped that the recently established United Nations security mission for Haiti would help to contain the violence. Increased and consistent funding and international engagement in addressing the multiple systemic challenges faced in Haiti were key to addressing hunger in the country. One Board member highlighted the importance of innovation, anticipatory action and strategic partnerships with actors at all levels in Haiti; several members pointed to school meals and local procurement as powerful mechanisms for supporting communities and long-term development.
153. Giving the alarming protection risks, WFP was urged to ensure safe access to assistance and design needs-sensitive interventions, engaging in training for key stakeholders and communities and strengthening internal reporting and referral procedures. Board members also voiced support for continued efforts to build relationships with government partners, strengthen data collection and monitoring, enhance the transparency of WFP's targeting approach and integrate cross-cutting priorities.
154. Board members sought further information on WFP's plans to engage in capacity strengthening related to school meals, its efforts to achieve a realistic balance between emergency response and resilience-building activities, and the division of responsibilities between UNICEF and WFP with regard to malnutrition screening and prevention, particularly in light of guidelines recently issued by the World Health Organization. Some members asked for concrete examples of how conflict sensitivity and climate action would be mainstreamed throughout the CSP; they also requested details of activities planned in Haiti within the framework of WFP's reassurance action plan. One member asked about plans to address structural issues by promoting local food commodities and whether efforts would

- be made to improve national institutional capacity to prevent sexual and gender-based violence.
155. Responding to Board questions and comments, the Country Director emphasized that despite the difficult operating environment, it was nonetheless possible – indeed, it was vital – to implement resilience-building activities, as evidenced by results already achieved in school feeding and social protection and as recommended in the evaluation report. In school feeding, WFP had used a decentralized approach to substantially increase local procurement over the previous academic year, when the number of children receiving meals produced in Haiti had doubled. In social protection, WFP had worked with the Government to set up a network that covered most major regions in the country and had successfully introduced a digital platform for mobile money transfers.
  156. WFP was acutely aware of the protection risks facing women and girls in Haiti; community feedback and referral mechanisms were in place and WFP was co-funding a protection officer at the resident coordinator's office.
  157. It was vital that the United Nations security mission was accompanied by a fully funded humanitarian response if stability were to be achieved in the country. WFP worked very closely with other United Nations entities, including with UNICEF on malnutrition interventions, with United Nations Environment Programme on climate funding, with the International Labour Organization on cocoa production, with IFAD on support for smallholder farmers and with FAO on local procurement in school feeding.
  158. The Regional Director and Assistant Executive Director, Programme and Policy Development Department, emphasized that the new CSP for Haiti was clearly within the mandate of WFP and was fully consistent with the strategic plan for 2022–2025. The Assistant Executive Director added that WFP faced significant funding challenges in Haiti, particularly for emergency response interventions in hard-to-reach areas. Noting the importance of resilience programming in reducing future humanitarian needs, she said that work on strengthening social protection – a key focus for WFP in Haiti – was particularly powerful, as such systems could reach billions of people.
  159. Mr Pierre Ricot Odney, Minister of Social Affairs, Haiti, welcomed the support expressed for his country and described the new CSP as a continuation of a fruitful ten-year partnership between his Government and WFP. The Government undertook to consolidate its work with WFP and pool resources so that interventions could be more effective for the people of Haiti.

## **Southern Africa portfolio**

### **2023/EB.2/11 Malawi country strategic plan (2024–2028), including evaluation findings, recommendations and management response from item 6 a) 7)**

160. The Director of Evaluation presented the evaluation of the CSP, noting that despite funding and operational challenges, WFP had achieved positive results under each strategic outcome, particularly through its integrated approach to programming and work on protection, environmental and climate adaptation and accountability to affected populations. The evaluation presented five recommendations in areas including integrated programming, strategic positioning, partnerships and gender equality.
161. The Country Director presented the new CSP, which had been informed by community, district and national consultations and reflected the findings and recommendations of the evaluation. Among the changes introduced were an increased focus on WFP's enabling role, the integration of nutrition-sensitive approaches, more robust knowledge management, an expansion of home-grown school feeding activities, the prioritization of CBTs where appropriate, and a stronger integrated resilience approach. Partnerships, gender-sensitive approaches and shock-responsive social protection would continue to be important

components of WFP's work in Malawi, with due attention to reassurance, risk management and compliance.

162. Board members welcomed the new CSP and encouraged WFP to implement all the evaluation recommendations. They emphasized the value of partnerships in achieving impactful and sustainable results and the need for innovative approaches to ensure future food security, including through collaboration with the private sector and with full participation of women and young people. Operational flexibility, context-specific solutions and a focus on meeting the food and nutrition needs of refugees and other vulnerable people were key concerns, as was support for strengthening food systems and social protection.
163. Members praised the multidimensional approach of the new CSP, the leveraging of schools as platforms for delivering community health and nutrition programmes, and the improved integration of gender-transformative approaches. One member urged WFP to apply such approaches consistently across all programming; another called for increased efforts to operationalize government policies linked to sustainability and the equitable improvement of food systems and social protection.
164. One Board member asked WFP to provide more detail on the food security impact of Malawi's status as a landlocked country. He advocated the provision of an integrated package of climate and nutrition-sensitive resilience and livelihoods support for households and communities, noting the value of technical assistance for farmers and stronger land tenure policies for long-term agricultural development. Remarking that short-term productivity gains could be achieved through the provision of fertilizers as humanitarian assistance, he asked WFP to assess the impact of such support on local food production.
165. More information was also sought on whether the country office would use monitoring and assessments from ongoing WFP programmes to gather evidence on gender-transformative work and on how WFP would ensure that all refugees were informed about the assistance available to them.
166. Thanking Board members for their comments, the Country Director agreed that productivity was an issue in Malawi, adding that the Government was focused on a new phase of agricultural support that would include fertilizers. Although landlocked, Malawi had good links with the coast through Mozambique and was also well connected to the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia, which facilitated market access. Gender-transformative approaches would be a priority under the new CSP. Communication with refugees had encountered challenges following the introduction of a targeting exercise; a change in leadership among the refugee community had improved the situation and WFP held monthly meetings with refugee leaders to explain the arrangements for the following round of cash distributions. WFP was also increasingly using radio broadcasts to reach refugees directly.
167. The Assistant Executive Director, Programme and Policy Development Department, underscored the strong partnerships in place in Malawi and the joint programmes under way including in schools and in the area of social protection.
168. Following the approval of the CSP, the Deputy Director of the Department of School Health, Nutrition, HIV and AIDS, Ministry of Education of Malawi, thanked WFP for its commitment to advancing food security and nutrition and addressing humanitarian and development needs in her country. She welcomed the new CSP, which aligned with the Government's priorities and would contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

**2023/EB.2/12 Summary report on the evaluation of the country strategic plan for Namibia (2017–2023) and management response**

169. Presenting the evaluation report, the Director of Evaluation said that the CSP had been found to be relevant and aligned with government priorities. WFP had achieved results through innovative approaches to resource mobilization, capacity strengthening for government partners and emergency operations in response to drought and COVID-19. Projects on home-grown school feeding and food systems had been piloted but were too recent to show results. The evaluation had identified scope for improvement in areas including data collection, cross-cutting issues, monitoring and knowledge management systems.
170. The Country Director outlined some of the actions being taken in response to the four evaluation recommendations, including efforts to enhance strategic planning, activity design and project implementation; the revision of the country office monitoring plan; the introduction of satellite data and artificial intelligence technology to strengthen monitoring, learning and research processes; and measures to improve the integration of cross-cutting issues into the design and implementation of interventions.
171. Thanking WFP for its work in Namibia, Board members welcomed the insights presented in the evaluation report and their contribution to accountability and learning. They highlighted recommendations on strengthening monitoring and evaluation systems, knowledge management and the assessment of pilot projects as priorities.
172. Noting the rising pressure on regional food security triggered by multiple conflicts, climate-related shocks and price hikes, Board members called on all Member States to support the Executive Director in mobilizing more resources for WFP's vital work. One Board member voiced support for WFP's work with national institutions in the areas of disaster preparedness and response. Gender inclusion, accountability to affected populations and effective beneficiary communication platforms were described as key concerns, and WFP was encouraged to leverage the evidence-based and regional coordination of the School Meals Coalition to inform efforts to scale up school feeding.
173. More information was sought on opportunities for capacity building at the activity level and on the scope of the evaluation with regard to refugee operations, with one member calling on WFP to urgently address reports of significant food security and protection concerns at the Osire refugee camp; she emphasized the importance of close coordination with UNHCR for refugee feeding operations and the imperative to ensure that refugees received sufficient and reliable food rations.
174. In response to Board questions and comments, the Director of Evaluation welcomed the appreciation of the learning and accountability purposes of evaluations and thanked Board members for incorporating evaluation evidence in their feedback to WFP. On the scope of the evaluation of the CSP for Namibia, she explained that refugee operations had not been a key focus as the country had hosted few refugees at the time of the exercise.
175. The Country Director added that WFP had led an inter-agency joint assessment mission in Osire camp and the resident coordinator was leading efforts to address all issues raised. Welcoming all feedback from the Board, he said that under the next CSP, WFP would focus on enhancing monitoring and evaluation capacity, diversifying funding sources, strengthening anticipatory action and emergency preparedness and response, promoting rural development through school meals programming and fostering inclusion through new partnerships, capacity building and the mainstreaming of cross-cutting themes.
176. Her Excellency, the Ambassador of Namibia, welcomed the evaluation and commended WFP for its work in her country, particularly in the areas of emergency food assistance, government capacity strengthening and policy development and implementation.

## **Organizational and procedural matters**

### **2023/EB.2/13 Biennial programme of work of the Executive Board (2024–2025)**

177. The Secretary to the Executive Board presented the programme of work for 2024–2025, which set out details of the items and documents that would be considered by the Board during that period and included a provisional calendar of meetings for the governing bodies of the RBAs.

## **Other business**

### **2023/EB.2/14 Proposal for the review of the recommendations stemming from the governance review and establishment of a working group of the Executive Board**

178. The President reminded the Board of the purpose of the governance review and the milestones achieved since its inception in mid-2022. He invited Board members to endorse the proposal drawn up by the Bureau for the next stage of the process, which included the establishment of a working group tasked with reviewing the recommendations made by the independent consultant and developing an implementation plan. The working group would be invited to present its final report to the Board no later than its 2024 annual session.

179. Several Board members, including one speaking on behalf of a list, supported the proposal, describing the exercise as urgent given the pressing challenges faced by WFP. Setting and meeting deadlines was therefore seen as important by one member, while another saw the review as a part of a broader reform process and recommended that the working group also seek the advice of the External Auditor. Some members mentioned the importance of transparency within the working group and towards the Board. One member said that he would have preferred the working group membership to be open-ended to allow for broad participation.

180. With regard to the recommendations that would be reviewed by the working group, one member sought more information on the possibility of reviewing recommendations from other governance initiatives. Several other members suggested that the primary focus be on the independent consultant's recommendations, without excluding the possibility of considering other relevant recommendations. One member said, however, that the list of recommendations should be kept concise and focused; she proposed that at its initial meetings, the working group identify a first set of recommendations that were straightforward to implement or had limited or no budgetary implications so that they could be taken up immediately by the Secretariat.

181. It was suggested by one member that the proposed timeline for the working group was too ambitious, given the aim of garnering consensus on all issues. Another member, however, recalled that the previous governance review had been particularly extensive and encouraged the working group to build on that work.

182. The President said that the Bureau would establish the working group at the beginning of December 2023, with the first meeting of the group convened later that same month.

## **Western Africa portfolio**

183. The Director of Evaluation presented the findings of the recent evaluations of the CSPs for Benin and Ghana, recalling that, in early 2020, a new strategic outcome had been added to both plans, focusing on the response to flooding, the COVID-19 pandemic and an anticipated influx of refugees from the Sahel.

184. In Benin, the evaluation found that WFP had successfully implemented the national integrated school feeding programme, the initial focus of the CSP. Scope for improvement had been identified in areas including WFP's capacity strengthening strategy, its enabling role and efforts to address the root causes of food and nutrition insecurity. In Ghana, WFP had contributed to improved nutrition for vulnerable populations, better school attendance among adolescent girls and increases in the production and sale of nutritious food. Challenges had been found in the timeliness of beneficiary registration, coverage of school interventions, supply chains, and funding and expertise for capacity strengthening and policy related work.
185. The evaluation of the Benin CSP had recommended that WFP strengthen the sustainability of the school feeding programme; improve the balance of its strategic orientation, nutrition, resilience and preparedness components; increase the integration of cross-cutting issues; and improve the alignment between staff profiles and the strategic direction of the CSP. In Ghana, WFP was advised to better define its enabling role, increase support for government emergency preparedness and response, support the Government in developing sustainable models for a market-based approach to strengthening food systems and scale up its nutrition-sensitive livelihood programme.
186. The Regional Director *ad interim* welcomed the insights provided by the evaluations, which illustrated the complexity and diversity of the countries in the region. The country offices and regional bureau had worked hard to incorporate all recommendations into their strategic planning, tailoring programming to local context. In Benin, Ghana and Senegal, WFP had become a trusted government partner, ensuring the delivery of essential social services and strengthening resilience. In Burkina Faso, WFP focused on crisis response, while laying the foundations for reducing future humanitarian needs and safeguarding development gains. In Sao Tome and Principe, WFP maintained a lean presence and worked to support the shock resilience of government systems and the universal school feeding programme. Throughout the region, WFP's integrated resilience and social protection programmes sought to ensure that national systems and vulnerable populations were better equipped to withstand shocks, in line with a growing body of evidence that the provision of essential social services and creation of assets reduced humanitarian needs and increased social cohesion.

**2023/EB.2/15 Benin country strategic plan (2024–2027), including the management response to the evaluation recommendations from item 6 a) 1)**

187. Presenting the new CSP for Benin, the Country Director emphasized that the plan was in line with priorities of the Government's action plan and reflected the CSP evaluation recommendations. The plan focused on providing emergency assistance to shock-affected populations, strengthening national and local emergency preparedness and response capacities and ensuring that all school children received nutritious meals. Partnerships would be strengthened at all levels to ensure the effective and efficient implementation of the plan, with enhanced joint programming and advocacy with other United Nations entities, a consolidated and diversified donor base to facilitate access to flexible and multi-year funding and stronger collaboration with the Government for the handover of school meals operations. Complementary interventions would be integrated in the school meals programme to address the root causes of vulnerability and accelerate progress towards the SDGs, and cross-cutting issues would be embedded in the various CSP outcomes.
188. Board members expressed their support for the new CSP and praised WFP's partnership with the Government. Benin's school meals programme was described as a model for other countries to follow, with several Board members encouraging WFP to facilitate knowledge transfer through South–South and triangular cooperation and the School Meals Coalition. Board members welcomed plans to expand the school meals programme and highlighted its integrated approach and the focus on building community resilience, fostering economic

development and ensuring operational sustainability through local procurement and the inclusion of women.

189. One Board member focused on support for smallholder farmers, endorsing plans to provide technical assistance to increase their productivity and diversify their crops. Another encouraged the involvement of private sector partners in delivering school meals.
190. Board members supported the crisis response component of the CSP, noting the potential for further displacement driven by instability in the Sahel. One member asked WFP to work with partners to prepare for an influx of refugees and asylum seekers from Burkina Faso, particularly vulnerable people located in inaccessible zones near the border with Benin. She also supported better coordination in data collection and sharing and robust monitoring throughout the programme cycle.
191. Responding to Board comments, the Country Director confirmed that WFP was reinforcing its public and private sector partnerships, particularly for the school meals programme. On nutrition, WFP sought to promote the fortification of local food and was exploring the use of CBTs in order to extend the benefits of the school meals programme to local communities and boost local economies. WFP stood ready to share best practice from its experience in Benin including through South–South and triangular cooperation.
192. Speaking after the approval of the CSP, H.E. Mr Salimane Karimou, Minister of Maternal and Primary Education of the Government of Benin, said that his country's partnership with WFP had led to enviable outcomes, particularly through the school meals programme. His Government was committed to expanding the programme to cover all primary schools and would work hand in hand with WFP to ensure an optimal handover of operations.

**2023/EB.2/16 Ghana country strategic plan (2024–2028), including the management response to the evaluation recommendations from item 6 a) 5)**

193. The Country Director highlighted how the new CSP set out WFP's commitment to implementing the evaluation recommendations. Through the plan, the organization would transition from the role of implementer to that of enabler, with a focus on resource optimization and the adoption of an integrated approach based on the humanitarian–development–peace nexus. Designed using an evidence-based and consultative approach, the CSP was characterized by government-driven capacity strengthening, enhanced community engagement and expanded partnerships.
194. Describing the new CSP as well designed and ambitious, Board members expressed their support for the plan, particularly the integration of evaluation findings and recommendations, the consultative development of the plan and its alignment with national priorities and the United Nations sustainable development cooperation framework (UNSDCF). They praised WFP's work in Ghana, highlighting progress in food security, nutrition, sustainable food systems, gender equality, accountability to affected populations and protection. WFP's engagement in parliamentary forums and other platforms for advocacy on school meals, social protection and agricultural development was also noted.
195. On crisis response, Board members welcomed the inclusion of a contingency CSP component and encouraged WFP to develop a rapid response plan and resource mobilization strategy, noting the risk of a large-scale crisis that could exceed the capacity of the Government to respond. One member urged WFP to improve the link between capacity strengthening and direct implementation for all activity types, in line with the evaluation findings.
196. Partnerships were widely seen as key. Some members underscored the importance of a robust partnership action plan. One encouraged WFP to increase collaboration with United Nations, national and local partners; others urged concerted action to achieve SDG 15 on life on land. WFP was also asked to work with the United Nations network on the

- prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment to deliver training and awareness-raising sessions and to strengthen its procedures in this area.
197. Board members requested more information on plans to improve monitoring, reinforce accountability to affected populations and inform beneficiaries of the assistance available to them. One member sought further details on the digital follow-up programme for school meals set out in the CSP.
  198. Thanking Board members for their support, the Country Director echoed comments regarding the importance of private sector engagement and donor diversification, digitization and nutrition. On monitoring and evaluation, the country office planned to expand its team to address the evaluation findings in that area. On partnerships, WFP chaired the inter-agency group on emergencies in Ghana and participated in numerous other working groups with United Nations entities, advocating the inclusion of NGOs and other actors. South-South cooperation would continue to be a focus, including for work on supporting resilient food systems.
  199. In response to concerns about emergency preparedness and response for northern areas of Gulf of Guinea countries, the Regional Director *ad interim* pointed to the Gulf of Guinea prevention and response strategy, which supported national government efforts to strengthen social safety nets, school meals programmes and other national systems. The strategy also contained a component for directly supporting government response through cash assistance in the event of an influx of refugees or asylum seekers. The strategy involved full collaboration with governments, other United Nations entities and national and international partners on the ground.
  200. Thanking the Board for approving the CSP, Dr Kodjo Mensah-Abrampa, Director General of the National Development Planning Commission, Ghana, applauded WFP's shift in focus from the direct provision of assistance to an enabling role, which was well aligned with Ghana's national development and its aspiration of economic self-sufficiency.

**2023/EB.2/17 Oral report on the joint field visit of the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP**

201. The Ambassador of Hungary and the Deputy Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Morocco shared their experiences of the field visit, which had taken place in early October in Senegal. The delegation had included 18 Member States and eight staff members from the secretariats of the United Nations funds and programmes.
202. The visit had focused on inter-agency collaboration for the implementation of the UNSDCF for Senegal, which was aligned with national priorities. The delegation appreciated efforts by the United Nations entities and the Government to strengthen coordination and mobilize funding; that spirit of collaboration was also manifested in the new United Nations House designed to accommodate all United Nations entities working in Senegal, which would be inaugurated later that year.
203. Delegates welcomed the focus on the role of women and girls in strengthening peace and achieving the SDGs in Senegal. High-level meetings were held with the Prime Minister and the ministers of foreign affairs, and economy, health and social protection; the participants also witnessed a pilot project on gender sensitivity training for police officers as well as visiting a school, health centres, hospitals and youth centres. Discussions with the resident coordinator had afforded valuable insight into the challenges faced in the country including in relation to climate change, sustainable farming, access to markets and the livelihoods of smallholder farmers.

204. The delegation made several observations and recommendations for the United Nations funds and programmes, which would be incorporated in its written report. Recommendations included the provision of technical and financial support for local entities to enable the scale-up of activities; consideration of blended financing arrangements in settings where official development assistance was static or declining; and, given the situation of refugees in West Africa and the impact of the regional security situation on food systems, efforts to explore new approaches to addressing the root causes of migration, including the current crisis affecting the Sahel region. The delegation also noted potential for increased understanding by the governing bodies of the United Nations funds and programmes of the impact of their decision making on political and peacekeeping work, which could be facilitated through engagement with the regional Under-Secretaries-General and their representatives.

**2023/EB.2/18 Summary report on the evaluation of the country strategic plan for Senegal (2019–2023) and management response**

205. The Director of Evaluation summarized the findings of the evaluation of the CSP for Senegal, under which WFP had supported household-level food security through cash assistance, promoted food fortification and strengthened national capacities related to school meals and malnutrition treatment. Limited results had been recorded, however, for efforts to empower women and foster changes in dietary behaviour, and some gaps were observed in terms of linkages with the national social protection programme and inter-agency coordination on resilience. The evaluation made six recommendations in areas including WFP's strategic focus, the effectiveness and sustainability of its interventions, efficiency, and monitoring and evaluation.
206. Presenting the management response to the evaluation, the Country Director assured the Board that WFP would incorporate the evaluation findings and all six recommendations into the next CSP, in consultation with national counterparts and development stakeholders. Detailed work was planned under each recommendation and included the development of a strategy for strengthening the capacity of government institutions, the streamlining of targeting approaches, an in-depth review of cooperating partners, consolidation of support for the national school meals programme and increased attention to monitoring and evaluation and gender issues.
207. Welcoming the evaluation, Board members commended WFP for the implementation of the CSP and its focus on social protection, nutrition and resilience in the face of climate change. They encouraged continued work on gender equality, home-grown school feeding and the expansion of the national school meals programme and emphasized the need for WFP to strengthen cooperation with the other actors, including those providing school meals and other United Nations entities, in order to harness synergies and improve efficiency.
208. Board members sought more information on plans to strengthen government engagement and improve the monitoring of capacity building programmes and on WFP's approach for assisting refugees from Mali and communities affected by displacement, noting the importance of close collaboration with UNHCR in this regard. They encouraged WFP to align its programming with national priorities on adaptive social protection and resilience and to target women and other marginalized groups, such as people with disabilities, the LGBTQI+ community and vulnerable people in peri-urban areas.
209. In response to Board comments and questions, the Country Director confirmed that WFP was working closely with the Ministry of Education on mainstreaming school canteens; with UNICEF, WFP was also supporting the Government's modernization programme for traditional schools. The CSP would reflect national priorities, with nutrition and social protection as key components. Regarding refugees, the country office was working with UNHCR and was striving to support fragile communities living on the border with Mali.

**2023/EB.2/19 Summary report on the evaluation of the country strategic plan for Burkina Faso (2019–2023) and management response**

210. The Director of Evaluation gave an overview of the CSP evaluation. Initially focused on resilience building and capacity strengthening, the CSP had been adapted to respond to escalating emergency needs. Conflict had impacted the delivery of certain planned activities, but WFP's common services and its experience in emergency response had been highly appreciated by partners, including the Government of Burkina Faso.
211. The Country Director said that management agreed with most of the six strategic recommendations from the evaluation and had begun implementing them within the framework of the current CSP.
212. Board members thanked WFP for its work in Burkina Faso, acknowledging its successful transition to emergency response operations in the face of growing conflict and the COVID-19 pandemic. They endorsed the evaluation recommendations and welcomed the management response.
213. Some Board members underscored the importance of continued attention to resilience while responding to emergency needs. They called for deeper assessment of regional and geopolitical factors, especially with regard to the provision of life-saving assistance for displaced people, and encouraged stronger collaboration with other organizations, particularly on gender equality.
214. Other Board members asked WFP to increase its emergency preparedness and response capacity while working on resilience in partnership, based on its comparative advantages. They advised clearer definition of the synergies between emergency response and resilience activities and clarification of WFP's objectives in relation to the triple nexus. Increased use of vulnerability-based targeting and more evidence-based decision making were also recommended.
215. One Board member encouraged WFP to coordinate more closely with local and national partners, including for the development of the next CSP. She sought more insight into WFP's plans for integrating gender equality, age and inclusion considerations into its programming.
216. Board members requested more information on the financing of the CSP; the implementation status of evaluation recommendations; plans for improving accountability to affected populations and ensuring conflict sensitivity; the implementation of the reassurance action plan in Burkina Faso; the transition from emergency assistance to medium-term support; and WFP's plans to improve the integration of cross-cutting issues.
217. The Country Director thanked Board members for their comments. Gender-transformative programmes were informed by a gender analysis, and a gender action plan was being implemented. The country office was finalizing its "communication with communities" strategy, a standardization process for the complaint and feedback mechanism had been finalized and corporate tools were being used to track and follow up on feedback received through the hotline.
218. On the reassurance action plan, the country office had already revised its operations to meet global standards; an action plan had been designed and would be implemented by March 2024.
219. On the strategy for transitioning people to medium-term support, WFP planned three months of rapid assistance for newly displaced populations, then six months of assistance under early recovery; those who graduated from early recovery and internally displaced persons then moved into resilience activities.

220. WFP saw potential for the triple nexus approach in zones close to conflict-affected areas where there were high concentrations of displaced people. Research had found that WFP's integrated resilience interventions had strengthened social cohesion in the Niger and Burkina Faso. Conflict sensitivity analysis was fully embedded in WFP's participatory planning approach and would be mainstreamed in its design strategy.
221. WFP was investing further in inter-agency collaboration including in the framework of the Government's social protection programme and the Joint Programme for the Sahel in Response to the Challenges of COVID-19, Conflict and Climate Change.
222. The Regional Director *ad interim* added that enormous efforts had been made to prioritize the most vulnerable in Burkina Faso, and lean season support had been reduced from 1.3 million to 800,000 beneficiaries. WFP had a leadership role in resilience programming with international development partners and was committed to demonstrating how such programmes reduced humanitarian needs and increased social cohesion.

### **2023/EB.2/20 Sao Tome and Principe country strategic plan (2024–2028)**

223. The Country Director presented the Sao Tome and Principe CSP, which was aligned with national priorities and the UNSDCF and built on lessons learned from the previous CSP. With the Government, WFP had engaged in a more integrated approach to expand school feeding through the promotion of local food production and increased attention to climate change adaptation, emergency preparedness, gender equality and social protection. The new CSP set out WFP's value proposition in Sao Tome and Principe, with support for national emergency preparedness and response capacity, provision for WFP to complement national emergency response when needed and a focus on strengthening systems to ensure the continuity and scale-up of the national school feeding and health programmes.
224. Noting the vulnerability of Sao Tome and Principe to climate change and challenges linked to its geographic isolation, Board members welcomed the CSP and its integrated support for the national social protection system, the school feeding programme, emergency response and broader efforts to achieve the SDGs. They urged donors and partners to provide greater assistance to WFP and to help mobilize resources for the CSP.
225. One member commended Sao Tome and Principe for achieving universal school meals coverage, noting the positive impact of school feeding programmes on smallholder farmers and local food production. He sought more insight into the challenges faced in strengthening supply chains and stakeholder involvement in that work. Welcoming WFP's role in fostering partnerships, he also asked for more information on inter-agency collaboration for the school meals programme, including with the other RBAs.
226. Another Board member highlighted WFP's commitment to localization through capacity strengthening for national and local actors and praised efforts to increase government capacity to respond to climate-related shocks, engage in inclusive and equitable programming and promote economic growth and resilience. She encouraged WFP to ensure that vulnerable groups, such as households led by women and people who identified as LGBTQI+, were fully integrated into programmes. Board members also praised WFP's community engagement plans and support for sustainable agriculture.
227. Thanking Board members for their support, the Country Director described WFP's plans to work with smallholder farmers through cooperatives, providing technical support and encouraging aggregation to facilitate procurement from local producers. WFP engaged in close collaboration with FAO, IFAD, the World Health Organization and the other partners on the ground, including through the joint implementation of projects, such as community school gardens. WFP would continue to promote South-South and triangular cooperation. With regard to gender, the Government had appointed its first Minister for Women's Rights, and she had approached WFP for collaboration.

228. Following the approval of the CSP, Her Excellency Isabel Maria Correia Viegas De Abreu, Minister of Education, Culture and Science of Sao Tome and Principe emphasized the importance of her country's long-standing partnership with WFP in reducing dependence on imported food, boosting the production and consumption of locally grown food and improving access to education and health. In addition, the Minister highlighted the critical role that WFP could play in implementing a sophisticated and integrated school meals programme as a critical entry point to improving food security, health, nutrition and local economic development, which would serve to inspire other countries in the framework of South-South cooperation.

## **Middle East, Northern Africa and Eastern Europe portfolio**

### **Oral update on WFP operations in the State of Palestine**

229. The Deputy Executive Director described WFP's tireless efforts to respond to the humanitarian crisis in the State of Palestine. Through the full mobilization of the organization at the country, regional and senior management levels, WFP remained sharply focused on addressing food security needs and assisting as many people as possible in the best possible way. The Deputy Executive Director commended the work of the country office in rapidly responding to the events and preparing for a scale-up of operations as soon as conditions allowed.
230. In his update, the Country Director warned that living conditions in Gaza had become disastrous, with food production paralysed, markets collapsed and bakeries and mills brought to a standstill by the lack of fuel. Along with so many other displaced people, WFP staff were also struggling to find food, safe drinking water and shelter. The latest assessments indicated that 2.2 million people – almost the entire population of Gaza – required food assistance; for some, the risk of starvation was high.
231. Through the activation of a corporate scale up, WFP had accessed advanced financing to support a rapid scale-up in procurement and establish corridors in Jordan, Israel and Egypt. WFP had reached 764,000 people in Gaza and the West Bank since early October, distributing ready-to-eat meals, food parcels and e-vouchers, and almost half a million people in United Nations shelters had received bread, canned food and nutrition-dense food.
232. In Gaza, more than 520,000 people received monthly e-vouchers, which they were able to redeem in October. Vouchers were also distributed in November as a form of anticipatory assistance; however, given the shortage of food, WFP was planning a complete shift to in-kind operations, which would include the distribution of ready-to-eat food. By December, WFP aimed to reach 1 million of the most vulnerable people with in-kind assistance and nutrition support.
233. WFP would continue to work directly with local retailers, hoping to keep them operational until commercial imports resumed. While it continued to advocate for food, fuel and water supplies, the organization was exploring every option to get bread to the people of Gaza, despite the lack of functioning mills and bakeries. Potential actions included bringing in bread with an extended shelf life from Egypt and setting up mobile or solar powered bakeries; over the longer term, WFP was looking into rehabilitating bakeries.
234. WFP was grateful to all who were supporting efforts to secure humanitarian access; however, the number of trucks that had entered Gaza since the start of the crisis was a fraction of that required, bringing in just 10 percent of pre-conflict food imports. Without a resumption of commercial trade, 100 trucks a day would need to enter Gaza just to meet food needs. One border crossing would be insufficient to handle such a flow of goods.

235. All WFP operations would continue to adhere to the humanitarian principles and be guided by needs. Staff were starting to enter Gaza to assist with logistics and relieve colleagues. In the medium term, it was likely that more support would also be required in the West Bank, where more than 200,000 people had lost their jobs, with long-term implications for the economy and food security.
236. Board members thanked WFP for the update and for all its efforts to respond to the crisis, paying particular tribute to staff on the ground in Gaza. Many Board members took the floor to express their deep concern at the humanitarian emergency unfolding, underscoring the urgent need for safe and sufficient access to all those in need of assistance. Several members said that it was important for the Board to focus on WFP's mandate, ensuring that the organization, including its Executive Director, had full support in carrying out its vital work and that the necessary authorizations were granted to ensure that resources were available when needed.
237. At the suggestion of the President, Board members agreed to include the following summary of their discussions in the summary of work for the second regular session:
- The President will formally convey to the Executive Director of WFP, in his capacity as President of the Executive Board, members' strong views with regard to the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, their appreciation of WFP work, and their expectations that WFP shall emphasize the severity of the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, and continue its advocacy so that WFP can effectively fulfil its mandate in ensuring immediate delivery of humanitarian assistance to all civilian populations in need in the Gaza Strip.

## **Summary of the work of the Executive Board**

### **2023/EB.2/21 Summary of the work of the 2023 annual session of the Executive Board**

238. The President thanked the Rapporteur for the 2023 annual session of the Executive Board for preparing the summary of that session and reported that the draft summary had been distributed to the Board members. The Board then approved the summary.

## **Verification of adopted decisions and recommendations**

239. Following the President's introduction of the agenda item, the Rapporteur confirmed that the decisions and recommendations presented in the draft compilation of decisions and recommendations adopted by the Board at the current session corresponded to those that had been agreed during the session. The final versions of the adopted decisions and recommendations would be posted on the Board's website by the next working day, and a draft summary of the discussions that took place during the session would be circulated for comment in due course.

## **Closing remarks by the Executive Director**

240. Delivering closing remarks on behalf of the Executive Director, the Deputy Executive Director thanked Board members for their insights, support and encouragement during the session, which had been characterized by in-depth discussions on the complexities of the current operational environment and potential ways to bridge the gulf between global humanitarian needs and the resources available. WFP was stepping up to the challenges and, with strong support from Board members, had set clear priorities to ensure that the organization was able to continue serving the most vulnerable people.

241. The Deputy Executive Director welcomed the approval of the management plan and reiterated WFP's commitment to transparency and accountability. Collaboration and partnerships would remain at the heart of its efforts to address the current challenges. Resources would be channelled to front-line operations and WFP would continue to strive for maximum efficiency in the use of funding. Through the implementation of the reassurance action plan, WFP would ensure that all operations had stringent safeguards and controls in place, and the introduction of a more streamlined organizational structure would result in enhanced collaboration and support for the field.
242. Cognizant of the imperative to reduce future humanitarian needs, WFP was investing in resilience programmes while continuing to respond effectively to emergencies. Governments were also called on to fulfil their pledges in relation to the Agenda 2030 and the Paris Agreement, setting aside political differences to focus on the shared goal of achieving zero hunger.

## Acronyms

CBT	cash-based transfer
COP 28	28th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
CSP	country strategic plan
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
MINUSMA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
PSA	programme support and administrative (budget)
RBA	Rome-based agency
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNSDCF	United Nations sustainable development cooperation framework