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## Summary report on the evaluation of the country strategic plan for Lesotho (2019–2024)

### Executive summary

The evaluation of the country strategic plan for Lesotho for the period 2019–2024 covered WFP's strategy, interventions and systems under the plan. Taking a utilization-focused, consultative approach, the evaluation served the dual purpose of accountability and learning and informed the preparation of a new country strategic plan.

Lesotho is a lower-middle-income country in southern Africa with an estimated population of 2.3 million, 71 percent of whom live in rural areas. Almost one in three people live on less than USD 2.15 a day (2017 purchasing power parity); a similar proportion of the population is undernourished. In 2021, Lesotho ranked 168 out of 191 countries on the Gender Inequality Index. It is highly vulnerable to climate change and climate variability.

The country strategic plan contained strategic outcomes in relation to crisis response, efforts to address chronic vulnerability and resilience building. The plan reflected a commitment to continuing WFP's shift to capacity strengthening activities.

The country strategic plan was well aligned with national policies and plans. It explicitly focused on supporting the Government in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 2 (zero hunger) and was fully aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 5 (gender equality). On paper, the country strategic plan was firmly aligned with the United Nations development assistance framework, but challenges linked to the operating environment constrained overall coherence with the actions of other United Nations entities. Despite major changes in the humanitarian context, WFP's strategic positioning remained relevant throughout the country strategic plan implementation period.

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

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Under strategic outcome 1, food security improved in rural and urban areas as a result of cash and voucher distributions, but households struggled once WFP support ended. Under strategic outcome 2, WFP played an important role in the delivery of primary school feeding activities up to 2020, providing nutritious meals for schoolchildren; however, subsequent technical assistance, particularly at the policy level, has not led to improvements in the national school feeding programme. Some of the most vulnerable children of pre-primary-school age were inadvertently excluded from the provision of adequate and nutritious food through the early childhood care and development centres, and there were challenges in delivering the planned quantities of food on time. WFP efforts to strengthen early warning, food and nutrition security monitoring, and vulnerability assessment and analysis produced visible results but were hindered by weak government ownership and limited financial resources. Under strategic outcome 3, WFP was constrained by a lack of funding but played an important role in strengthening the generation of evidence on nutrition and supporting the Government in developing nutrition-related policies and strategies. Under strategic outcome 4, food and nutrition outcomes from resilience building interventions were not adequately tracked, but improvements were achieved and there is evidence that increased focus on household assets is leading to positive results. WFP efforts to link smallholder farmers to the school feeding programme saw limited success. Under strategic outcome 5, WFP received only two requests from partners to provide supply chain and cash-based transfer services but in both cases underestimated the administrative burden of providing such services.

WFP paid sufficient attention to protection concerns and accountability to affected populations, putting in place protection measures and responding to issues as they arose. The achievement of gender equality-related aims was limited by staff time and capacity. Furthermore, efforts to mainstream gender across the country strategic plan were not consistent, and attention to disability inclusion was limited. There was no clear attempt to integrate resilience building activities in crisis response.

WFP's coverage and timeliness of delivery were limited by funding constraints, which left the organization unable to reach the planned numbers of beneficiaries consistently. While WFP targeted the districts facing high food insecurity, its interventions did not always reach the most vulnerable people. At the same time, WFP was proactive in combatting fluctuations in the prices of food and other goods through cost-efficiency measures, although systematic monitoring and analysis of cost-efficiency was limited.

In terms of sustainability, WFP's support for capacity strengthening was largely focused on individuals, with less evidence of success in the systems strengthening on which sustainability depends. Other limiting factors included the lack of clear strategies for handing over activities to the Government, poor prospects for government and development partner financing, political instability, community level ownership and high turnover of senior government personnel. Community ownership of assets was limited, which hampered the long-term viability of the livelihood activities created.

The evaluation generated the following six recommendations:

- reinforce the approach to capacity strengthening across the new country strategic plan;
- link the theory of change for the next country strategic plan to stronger monitoring, evaluation and learning and deeper gender analysis;
- reconsider WFP's approaches to resilience building and the humanitarian–development nexus in Lesotho;
- strengthen targeting and prioritization to meet the needs of the most vulnerable, given limited resources, while maintaining WFP's capacity to respond to humanitarian crises;

- contribute to strengthening the humanitarian–development nexus by deepening engagement with the national social protection system; and
- strengthen country office capacity to cover new roles while making the best use of limited resources.

**Draft decision\***

The Board takes note of the summary report on the evaluation of the country strategic plan for Lesotho (2019–2024) (WFP/EB.A/2024/7-C/2) and management response (WFP/EB.A/2024/7-C/2/Add.1) and encourages further action on the recommendations set out in the report, taking into account the considerations raised by the Board during its discussion.

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

## Introduction

### Evaluation features

1. The evaluation of the country strategic plan (CSP) was timed to provide evidence and lessons that would inform the development of the next CSP for Lesotho.
2. The evaluation covered CSP activities implemented between July 2019 and mid-2023 and also considered the transitional interim CSP (T-ICSP) covering the period from January 2018 to June 2019. It assessed WFP's strategic positioning and the extent to which the organization made the shifts expected under the CSP; WFP's effectiveness in contributing to the strategic outcomes; the efficiency with which the CSP was implemented; and the factors explaining WFP's performance.
3. The evaluation was conducted by an independent evaluation team through a mixed-methods approach whereby qualitative data from key informants was supplemented with quantitative secondary data.
4. Consideration of gender and social inclusion was fully integrated into the evaluation's methodological approach. Ethical standards were applied to ensure the dignity and confidentiality of the individuals involved in the evaluation.

### Context














5. Lesotho is a lower-middle-income country in southern Africa with an area of 30,355 square kilometres and an estimated population of 2.3 million, 71 percent of whom live in rural areas. Despite a significant reduction in poverty over the past 20 years, incomes in rural areas have stagnated. Lesotho had one of the highest tuberculosis incidence rates in the world in 2020 and still has the second-highest prevalence of HIV.
6. In the period 2019–2021, undernourishment affected 34.7 percent of the population and between July and September 2022, 15 percent of the rural population was classified in phase 3 (crisis) of the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification framework. Child undernutrition is still a major challenge.
7. Agriculture is mostly at a subsistence or sub-subsistence level<sup>1</sup> and the country is a net importer of agricultural products. Lesotho is highly vulnerable to climate change; crop yields have fallen because of increasingly frequent droughts and floods related to El Niño and La Niña phenomena.
8. The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic profoundly damaged employment and income generation.<sup>2</sup> There was a spike in gender-based violence, and health-related impacts – including deterioration in maternal, neonatal and under-5 mortality rates – were seen.
9. Gender equality in Lesotho continues to be undermined by the underrepresentation of women in political, educational and social settings and by the prevalence of gender-based violence.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Children's Fund, World Health Organization and World Bank. 2021. *Levels and trends in child malnutrition: UNICEF/WHO/World Bank Group Joint Child Malnutrition Estimates – Key findings of the 2021 edition*.

<sup>2</sup> WFP. 2021. *Lesotho Annual Country Report 2021*.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. 2022. *Lesotho Fact Sheet*. Accessed on 21 January 2023.

SOCIOECONOMIC INDICATORS			
	Indicator	Value	Year
	Life expectancy at birth (years) (2)	59 (women) 52 (men)	2022
	Human Development Index (score and rank) (3)	0.514 168 of 189	2021
	Income inequality: Gini coefficient (1)	44.9	2018
	Agriculture, forestry and fishing, value added (% of gross domestic product) (1)	3.5	2023
	Population living in poverty (%) (1)	32.4	2023
	Global Hunger Index (rank) (4)	113 of 121	2022
	Height-for-age (stunting – moderate and severe, 0–5 years of age) (%) (5)	32.1	2020
	Weight-for-age (wasting – moderate and severe, 0–5 years of age) (%) (5)	2.4 (boys): 1.7 (girls)	2018
	Gender Inequality Index (rank) (3)	168 of 191	2021
	Labour force participation rate, female (% of population age 15+) (modelled International Labour Organization estimate) (1)	56.1	2021
	Prevalence of HIV, total (% of population age 15–49) (6)	21	2020
	Literacy rate (% , > 15 years) (7)	81	2022
	Adjusted primary school enrolment, net percent of primary-school-age children (%) (1)	93	2017
	Secondary school enrolment, net percent of secondary-school-age children (%) (1)	41	2016

Sources: (1) World Bank. [World Bank Open Data webpage](#); (2) United Nations Population Fund. [Data Portal](#); (3) United Nations Development Programme. [Human Development Index](#); (4) Concern Worldwide and Welthungerhilfe. [Global Hunger Index](#); (5) United Nations Children's Fund, World Health Organization and World Bank. [UNICEF Data Portal: Child Malnutrition](#); (6) World Health Organization. [The Global Health Observatory data portal](#); (7) United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Institute for Statistics. [Online data portal](#).

10. Between 2018 and 2021, Lesotho received a yearly average of USD 161 million in net official development assistance, and average annual humanitarian aid flows amounted to USD 9 million.<sup>4</sup>
11. Lesotho mainstreams the Sustainable Development Goals through its National Strategic Development Plan II (2018/19–2022/23, extended to 2028).<sup>5</sup> National commitments with respect to nutrition are also reflected in the food and nutrition policy (2016)<sup>6</sup> and strategy

<sup>4</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. [OECD Statistics data portal](#). Accessed on 17 February 2023.

<sup>5</sup> Government of Lesotho. 2023. [National Strategic Development Plan II Strategic Focus 2023/24–2027/28](#).

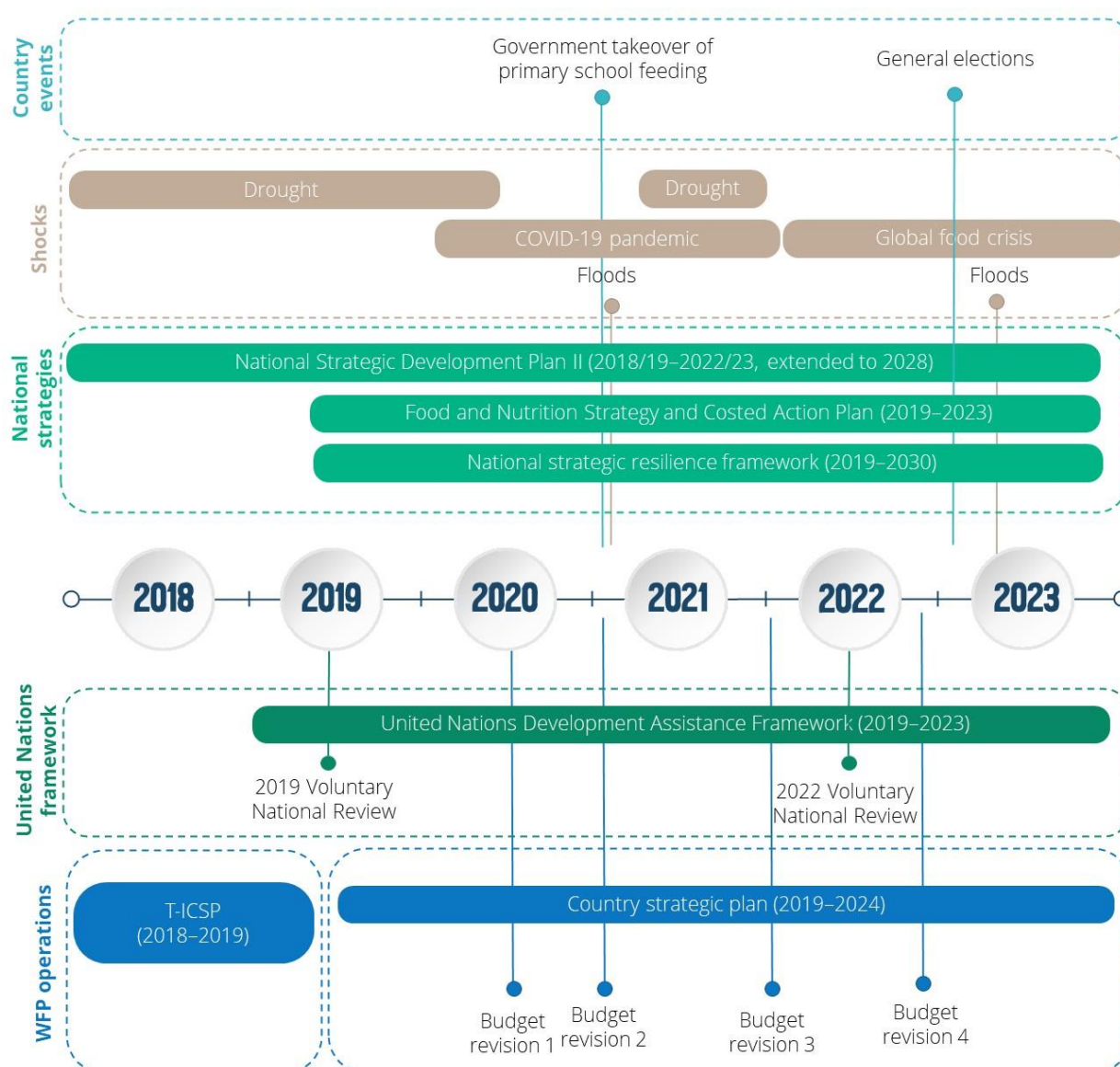
<sup>6</sup> Government of Lesotho, 2016. [Lesotho Food and Nutrition Policy \(LFNP\) 2016–2025](#).

(2019)<sup>7</sup> and in disaster risk management and reduction policies and legislation, which incorporate food security and nutrition components.

### WFP country strategic plan

12. The CSP was largely built on the T-ICSP that preceded it, with considerable continuity in activities. The CSP continued the shift towards country capacity strengthening across the portfolio. During CSP implementation, WFP had to accommodate several unanticipated events, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the abrupt transfer of responsibility for primary school feeding to the Government and the effects of the global food crisis. Figure 1 illustrates the major events affecting the country between 2019 and 2023 and the United Nations development assistance framework (UNDAF) and WFP operations under way during that period.

**Figure 1: Country context and WFP operational overview, 2018–2023**

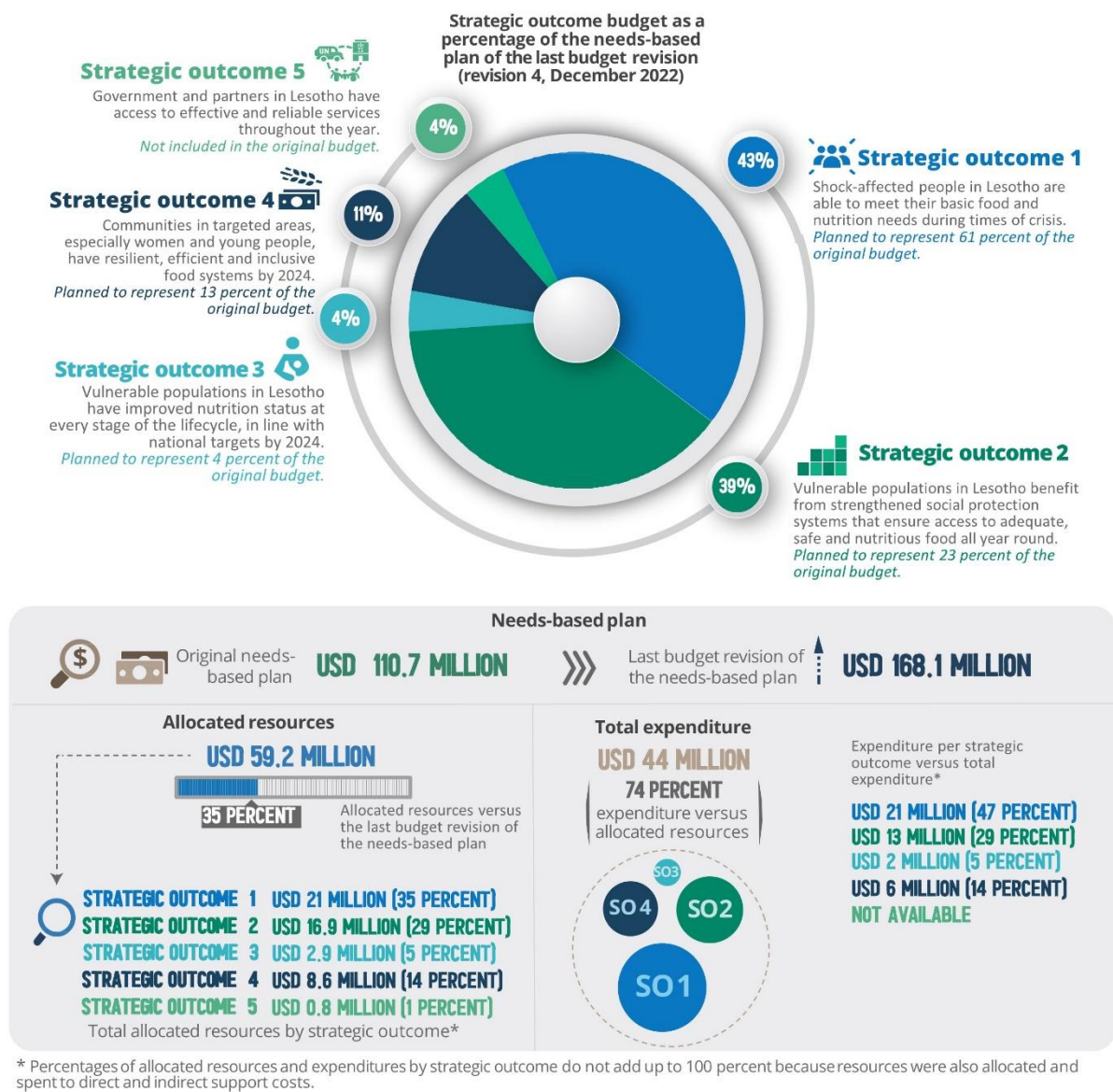


<sup>7</sup> Government of Lesotho, 2019. *Lesotho Food and Nutrition Strategy and Costed Action Plan 2019–2023*.

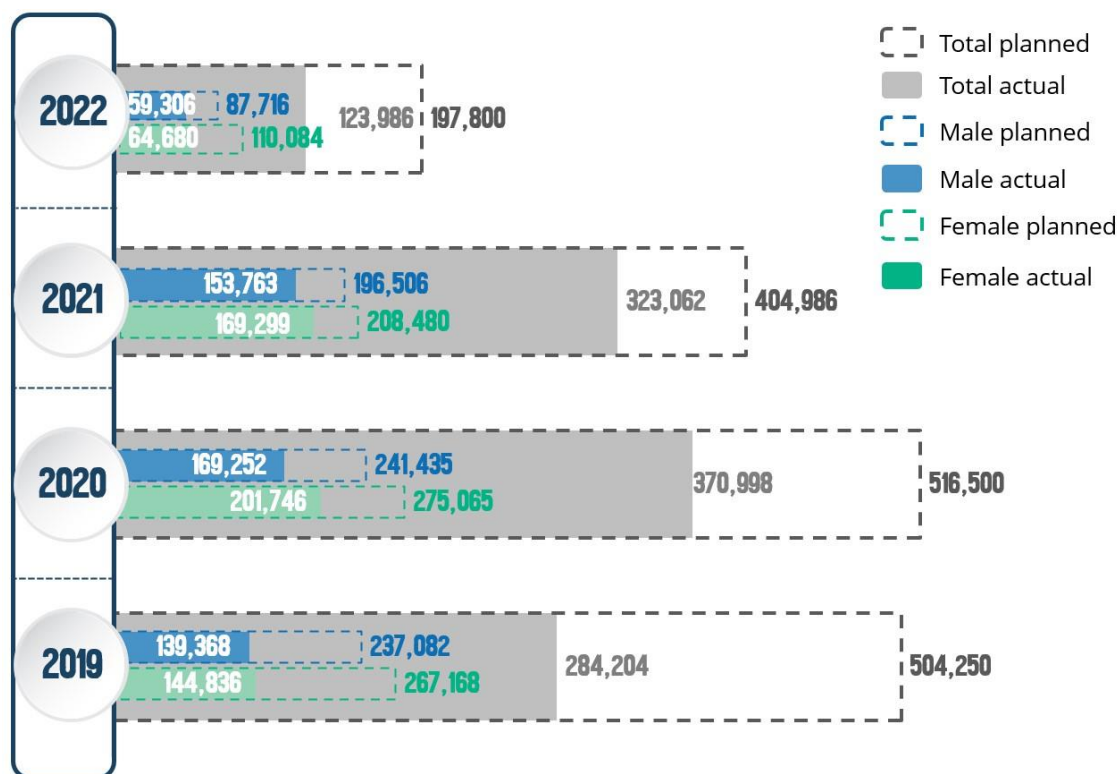


13. The budget for the original needs-based plan for the CSP was USD 110.7 million. This had risen to USD 168.1 million by 2022, reflecting four budget revisions (figure 2). Across activities and strategic outcomes, actual expenditure averaged 74 percent of the allocated resources.

**Figure 2: Lesotho country strategic plan (2019–2024) strategic outcomes, budget, funding and expenditures as at May 2023**



14. As indicated in figure 3, the actual numbers of beneficiaries were lower than planned in all years. Actual female beneficiaries outnumbered actual male beneficiaries in all years, with the gap highest in 2020.

**Figure 3: Numbers of beneficiaries reached during the period 2019–2022, by sex**

Source: Country office tool for managing effectively CM-R001b report (extracted on 28 April 2020).

## Evaluation findings

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

***Reference in the design of the country strategic plan to experience gained under the transitional interim country strategic plan and existing evidence***

- The CSP design built partially on the strategic focus and operations of the T-ICSP, which is evident in the continuity of some of the activities, including those related to crisis response, livelihood resilience and nutrition support. Its design also took account of several evaluations and reviews, including a mid-term evaluation and a summary of evaluation evidence for the country. Analysis of Lesotho's unique livelihood challenges was limited, however, as was the explanation of how the proposed activities would contribute to nutrition outcomes. Based on the recommendations of the zero hunger strategic review, the Government prepared a road map for accelerated progress towards zero hunger, but the CSP strategic outcomes and activities were not explicitly informed by the road map.

***Country strategic plan alignment with national policies, plans and capacity and with the Sustainable Development Goals***

- With its emphasis on supporting Lesotho in the development of livelihoods that are more resilient to climate change and its mainstreaming of gender equality and women's empowerment, the CSP was well aligned with the National Strategic Development Plan II. It was also aligned with key national strategies and policies, for example in the areas of food security and nutrition, resilience and social protection.



### ***Country strategic plan coherence and alignment with United Nations frameworks and inclusion of appropriate strategic partnerships***

17. On paper, the CSP was firmly aligned with the UNDAF. It included important collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), but these strategic partnerships, while appropriate, did not result in strong overall operational coherence. Achieving coherence around the roles of United Nations entities in food systems and natural resource management, for instance, was an important challenge. While WFP maintained working relationships with FAO, the evaluation found a lack of coherence between the organizations at the design and operational levels, especially with regard to the humanitarian–development nexus. This was exacerbated by insufficient resources and the limited scale of both entities' field operations.

### ***Country strategic plan internal coherence, reference to a clear theory of change and WFP's comparative advantage***

18. The CSP was grounded in WFP's established humanitarian strengths, but activities and operations were not structured to optimize internal coherence. Some elements of internal coherence emerged during operations but there was no systematic focus on maximizing coherence between the humanitarian and development components. Coherence was impaired by the fragmented and short-term nature of many of the operations, linked to insufficient funding and frequent earmarking of donor contributions. The CSP did not explicitly state WFP's comparative advantage, nor did it have a theory of change, although it identified challenges and opportunities for WFP and outlined lessons learned from its experience in Lesotho.

### ***Ongoing relevance of WFP's strategic positioning***

19. Despite major changes in the humanitarian situation, including the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic, WFP's established competence in responding to emergencies facilitated its provision of advice to the Government and the adjustment of its own operations. WFP's strategic positioning was designed to be dynamic in order to continue to consolidate the organization's shift away from direct implementation and to emphasize the developmental aspect of its mandate as well as the humanitarian side. This design posed numerous operational challenges, however, as WFP sought coherence between providing support for crisis-affected households, assisting the people with the most vulnerable livelihoods and working with those with good prospects of developing more resilient livelihoods. The design did not always fully meet the needs of the most chronically vulnerable people, in part due to outdated information in national databases.

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

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

20. **Strategic outcome 1 (assistance for shock-affected people):** WFP was able to respond flexibly to fluctuating numbers of beneficiaries following successive shocks, namely drought from failed rains for three consecutive planting seasons, the COVID-19 pandemic and heavy rains that damaged crops. WFP exceeded its target number of beneficiaries in 2020 and 2021, although it was able to reach only a limited proportion of those in need. The distribution of cash and vouchers improved food security in rural and urban areas; however, increased household sizes resulting from COVID-19 lockdowns and rising commodity prices meant that targeted households struggled to meet their food and nutrition needs once the support ended. Improvements in dietary diversity were achieved through collaboration with government partners at the district level, which ensured that targeted households benefited from a better understanding of nutrition and that nutrient-dense food items were covered

by the vouchers distributed; however, government partners did not have the resources required to consistently reinforce and follow up on the messaging.

21. **Strategic outcome 2 (strengthened social protection systems):** Prior to the earlier-than-anticipated handover of primary school feeding to the Government in 2020, direct provision of primary school meals by WFP was recognized as providing nutritious meals for schoolchildren and encouraging attendance by both boys and girls. The income transfer effect also made this a significant instrument for social protection. The accelerated transfer of responsibility for the activities meant that a handover strategy between WFP and the Government was not formulated as planned, and a general lack of institutional ownership and financial resources on the part of the Government hindered the implementation of the subsequent capacity strengthening activities promoted by WFP.
22. WFP has been able to sustain its support for nutritious meals provided through early childhood care and development (ECCD) centres throughout the CSP but has inadvertently excluded some of the most vulnerable children of pre-primary-school age from receiving this food assistance, as school fees precluded their attendance. Funding constraints prevented WFP from delivering the composition of the food basket planned for the children in terms of the mix and quantities of items. In addition, food deliveries were not always timely owing to procurement delays and challenges in obtaining lists of registered ECCD centres; however, there is some qualitative evidence of improved attendance as a result of ECCD food assistance.
23. WFP has provided technical and financial support to the Government in early warning, food and nutrition security monitoring, and vulnerability assessment and analysis; however, a lack of government technical and financial ownership has hindered the routine collection of food security monitoring data. The COVID-19 pandemic and delays in procurement and the dissemination of messaging had a significant impact on support for government efforts to strengthen its national early warning systems, which were part of the drive to deliver early action and crisis response through social protection systems.
24. **Strategic outcome 3 (improved nutrition status):** WFP was constrained by a lack of funding throughout the CSP implementation period for activities under strategic outcome 3. The organization nevertheless played an important role in strengthening the generation of evidence on the nutrition situation. It also played a significant technical and financial role in supporting the Government's development of nutrition-related policies and strategies. Dissemination of the associated documents was affected by COVID-19 restrictions, however, and limited government ownership and budget presented additional challenges. Through its facilitation of the advocacy and social and behaviour change communication strategy, WFP was seen as an important partner in Lesotho for promoting a multisectoral approach to nutrition.
25. **Strategic outcome 4 (resilient, efficient and inclusive food systems):** Food and nutrition security outcomes from WFP resilience-building interventions were not adequately tracked owing to challenges in monitoring community groups that rotate every three months in communal asset creation activities. Similarly, WFP and partners in Lesotho did not conduct long-term activities to learn "what works and why" in building household resilience. Food and nutrition outcomes for male and female participants improved, however, largely as a result of cash distributions. Similarly, the increased focus on household assets yielded positive results related to household food production and consumption. Households engaged in vegetable production reported sufficient sales to reinvest in other livelihood activities and also said that they were able to share vegetables with more vulnerable members of their communities.
26. WFP sought to foster an environment conducive to linking smallholder farmers to markets, using market assessments and analysing post-harvest losses and by helping to revive a local

purchase task force responsible for providing oversight and guidance on smallholder farmer linkages to local markets and supporting a national market linkage forum to bring together buyers and producers. However, there was limited success in linking smallholder farmers to the national management agencies running the school feeding programme. In 2019 and 2020, WFP implemented a local purchase initiative in northern districts, in which it procured beans from farmers for school feeding. That support ended when the Government took over school feeding, however, and there is limited evidence that such support has been sustained and that local smallholder farmers have the capacity to take advantage of the school feeding market.

27. **Strategic outcome 5 (service provision):** WFP was recognized by partners as having a comparative advantage in cash-based transfers (with entities able to use an existing system rather than setting up their own with service providers) and international procurement. WFP only received two requests from partners to provide supply chain and cash-based transfer services during the CSP, however, and in both cases there were delays. To some extent the delays were beyond the control of WFP, but WFP also underestimated the administrative burden of providing such services.

#### ***Protection and accountability to affected populations***

28. WFP paid sufficient attention to protection concerns across the CSP, notably through relevant assessments to ensure security and accessibility for beneficiaries receiving cash and voucher transfers. Outcome data confirm that most households reported no protection challenges, with targets met across districts and crisis response activities. A complaint and feedback mechanism in the form of a toll-free number managed by the National University of Lesotho was in place throughout the CSP period. Although the evidence indicated that not all beneficiaries were aware of the toll-free number across all activity areas, WFP monitored the complaints and feedback received closely and redoubled its efforts to raise awareness of the mechanism in activities where the use of the service was lower.

#### ***Gender, disability and inclusion***

29. The ability of WFP to achieve gender and other cross-cutting aims was limited by staffing levels and expertise, which constrained the country office's ability to focus on staff training, capacity strengthening and analysis. There is no dedicated gender officer; gender and protection are the responsibility of a single officer, who is also responsible for leading one of the activity areas under the CSP. Although there are examples of attempts to mainstream gender across the CSP, they were inconsistent and attention to disability inclusion was limited. Transformative approaches to gender were more an aspiration than an achievement. WFP recognized this capacity gap, however, and ensured that relevant partnerships were formed, including with the Child and Gender Protection Unit within the Lesotho Mounted Police Service and the United Nations Population Fund, so that gender and protection concerns could be integrated into programming.

#### ***Sustainability***

30. WFP's support for capacity strengthening across activities was appreciated by beneficiaries but largely focused on individuals, with less evidence of success in the systems strengthening on which sustainability depends. Although WFP mapped the capacity needs of key ministries and collaboratively developed associated capacity strengthening strategies, the design of the CSP was not based on an analysis of capacity needs, and the lack of such analysis at the start of the CSP hampered the sustainability of the results of capacity-strengthening interventions. Other limiting factors included the lack of a clear strategy for the handover of activities to the Government, poor prospects for government and development partner financing and high turnover of senior government staff.

31. There were gaps in efforts to promote sustainability at the community level by empowering communities and individuals to sustain their own development, which left communities dependent on WFP support. Under strategic outcome 4, community ownership of assets was limited, which hampered asset sustainability and the long-term viability of the livelihood activities created. Activities requiring low-cost inputs, such as vegetable production, tended to continue without the support of cash-based transfers, whereas activities such as livestock and poultry production were less likely to be sustained, owing to the costs of feed and households' limited capacity to produce their own feed.

### ***Environment***

32. There was limited evidence that environmental standards were applied to the design, planning and implementation of all WFP activities under the CSP. Under strategic outcome 4, communities were assisted through the creation of soil and water conservation structures, and support sought to encourage smallholder farmers to adopt less destructive land management practices and cultivate drought-tolerant crops; however, procurement of drought-tolerant seeds was often not synchronized with forecasts and planting seasons. In 2021, WFP piloted an electric pressure cooker project in five schools in the Maseru district to replace biomass cooking, with refresher training carried out in 2022. The project met with high satisfaction from the schools, with cooks reporting improved health as a result of the clean air; however, it did not progress beyond this small scale.

### ***Linkages between humanitarian and development work***

33. WFP was unable to systematically integrate crisis response with resilience building activities. For instance, lean season and COVID-19 assistance programming was not linked to complementary resilience building activities owing to geographical and financial constraints. Many crisis response interventions were undertaken in mountainous districts or urban areas, whereas resilience building activities were solely focused on lowland districts. WFP was unable to expand resilience building activities because of limited funding. Nevertheless, WFP contributed to the humanitarian–development nexus through capacity strengthening in early warning systems, with increased engagement in strengthening national policies, systems and programmes, although there is not yet evidence of community-level anticipatory action.

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

### ***Timeliness of delivery***

34. WFP could not fully deliver its planned outputs owing to funding constraints. It nevertheless mounted a rapid and timely response to the COVID-19 pandemic and expanded its scope to cover three additional districts, incorporating urban areas in the CSP for the first time. Subsequently, WFP provided a combination of cash and commodity vouchers for the seven districts most affected by COVID-19, improving food access for food-insecure families who had been affected by drought and whose situation was exacerbated by the pandemic. Procurement was frequently a challenge, however, hindering the timely delivery of outputs despite steps taken to strengthen compliance and efficiency in WFP's procurement systems. Miscommunication around the technical specifications of the required inputs and equipment, as well as a lack of clarity around procurement procedures, also delayed processes in other activities.

### ***Coverage and targeting***

35. WFP's coverage was limited by funding shortfalls which meant that it was unable to consistently reach the planned number of beneficiaries each year. In response, WFP understandably chose to reduce its levels of support rather than beneficiary numbers, in a context where it could only reach a fraction of those in need. While WFP's geographical

targeting covered the districts facing high food insecurity, its interventions did not always reach the most vulnerable people. This was partly because the National Information System for Social Assistance database was not updated regularly and therefore the list of beneficiaries did not always accurately represent those in greatest need of support.

### ***Cost-effectiveness***

36. WFP was proactive in combatting fluctuations in the prices of food and other goods and variations in other expenses by utilizing its global long-term agreements to procure equipment and by identifying suppliers outside Maseru to reduce transportation costs and obtain greater value for money. The country office has access to various data on the cost-efficiency of its operations, but such data are not systematically collated and used to understand cost-efficiency issues or inform management decision making in areas such as prioritization or targeting for ECCD food assistance.

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

#### ***Resourcing***

37. Funding shortfalls were experienced across all the strategic outcomes and focus areas. The best-resourced activities were principally those that benefited from financing from the Adaptation Fund, which funded a government-implemented project on improving the adaptive capacity of vulnerable and food-insecure populations in Lesotho (IACOV). The Adaptation Fund contribution was closely earmarked for IACOV activities, however, with little flexibility to support other CSP activities. Funding shortfalls affected the implementation of different activities at different times. A lack of flexible funding also compromised WFP's ability to manage and deliver the CSP as a coherent programme, with almost 72 percent of confirmed contributions earmarked at the strategic outcome or activity level. Further, funds for emergency response and resilience building were directed to specific geographical areas, reducing opportunities to layer and synergize interventions.

#### ***Monitoring and reporting***

38. WFP systematically reported on corporate results framework indicators under the CSP. While output data were collected and used for upward accountability and to inform operational management decisions, monitoring at the outcome level was more problematic. For instance, the rotation of participants in asset creation schemes every three months made it difficult to track a given cohort of beneficiaries, and many indicators were disaggregated at the district or local community council level. Several CSP activities included capacity strengthening, but that area remains a particular weakness in terms of corporate results framework reporting. Thus, there was limited evidence of outcome monitoring being used for strategic, adaptive management. Where changes were made in strategic approaches, it is not clear that they were driven by monitoring and evaluation.
39. WFP built the capacity of government partners to collect and use monitoring data, but there are challenges with regard to the Government's lack of resources and the lack of a clear framework and transition strategy for the handover of monitoring responsibilities.

#### ***Partnerships***

40. Partnerships were critical to the country office given WFP's limited capacity and staffing levels. They provided key capacity and skills that the country office would otherwise not have been able to maintain, including in the areas of gender equality, protection and capacity strengthening. Government counterparts reported generally good relationships with WFP. WFP also partnered with a range of United Nations entities, including FAO, the United Nations Population Fund, UNICEF, the International Organization for Migration and the United Nations Environment Programme, but engaging in joint implementation with other United Nations entities based on comparative advantage remained a struggle owing

to ongoing competition for limited funding. WFP also established relationships with civil society organizations working on crisis relief; those partnerships mainly involved operational and strategic coordination rather than service delivery for WFP. The private sector was an important partner, especially in the delivery of commodity vouchers through a network of retailer merchants and the distribution of cash; however, maintaining such a complex and diverse range of partnerships was demanding for country office staff, who had limited time.

### **Human resources**

41. The country office adjusted staffing periodically in line with funding availability and changes in the operating environment. No major persistent staffing gaps were reported for any specific positions over the CSP period. There was some turnover but WFP staffing remained relatively stable. The strategy of empowering existing staff through training to equip them with the skills needed to take on new responsibilities facilitated staff continuity. WFP also paid attention to ensuring appropriate gender balance in the workforce. The CSP shift in focus from direct implementation to building government capacity had major implications for human resources requirements, however, leading to fewer field offices and making it logistically harder to support national-scale activities. Similarly, due to budget constraints, some functions were thinly staffed – notably, there was just one position to cover nutrition, gender and protection.

### **Conclusions**

42. The basic strategic orientation of the CSP, which entailed responding directly to humanitarian needs while increasingly focusing on strengthening the capacity of national institutions and seeking to strengthen humanitarian–development links, was appropriate for WFP in Lesotho. The CSP was well aligned with national policies and with the joint objectives of United Nations system and other entities. The UNDAF had only limited success in achieving coherence in implementation, however, and the government policy and implementation frameworks were an additional constraint. The CSP was generally relevant to the needs of the vulnerable but the scale of WFP's humanitarian response was limited by financial constraints. The scope for internal coherence between WFP-supported activities was limited by the fact that its short-term crisis response and medium-term resilience building work were focused on different geographical areas.
43. Although the CSP's basic strategic direction was appropriate, most of the assumptions underpinning the CSP turned out to be only partially valid at best. This shows the depth of the underlying food security challenges in Lesotho, the limited knowledge of “what works” in addressing vulnerability in the country and the challenges linked to capacity development.
44. Overall, WFP made a positive contribution in Lesotho while operating under difficult circumstances. Crisis response activities improved short-term food security outcomes for beneficiaries but benefits were not sustained once the interventions ended. There is evidence that WFP contributed to a limited strengthening of nutrition outcomes. School feeding at ECCD centres had positive effects but did not necessarily reach the most vulnerable children of pre-primary-school age. The launch of the IACOV project was disrupted by the pandemic but there are signs that the project is beginning to show positive results.
45. Financial constraints meant that WFP was unable to deliver on the scale envisaged in the original CSP, but resources were generally deployed efficiently and the country office acted to address problems with the timeliness of procurement. Targeting of food-insecure communities was appropriate but targeting of the most vulnerable households and individuals within communities proved more difficult.



46. WFP responded well to crises, including in its adaptation to COVID-19. WFP's shock-responsive support was appropriately targeted but resource constraints meant that it covered only a limited proportion of identified needs in Lesotho, and there are concerns about targeting within communities and the sustainability of gains made. WFP also responded well to the Government's unanticipated decision to take over primary school feeding in 2020 by continuing to provide capacity strengthening support and deliver ECCD food assistance.
47. WFP was insufficiently analytical in its design of resilience building activities that were intended to contribute to climate resilience and sustainable livelihoods. Approaches that have been followed for decades were based on certain unrealistic assumptions about the viability and sufficiency of rural livelihoods in Lesotho. There was scope for stronger linkages between WFP activities and the national social protection strategy and programmes.
48. The limited footprint of WFP-supported resilience building interventions meant that there was little scope for working at the humanitarian-development nexus at the intervention level. Efforts to strengthen the nexus have been limited, partly due to funding constraints and the geographical spread of WFP interventions.
49. Significant progress was made in the reorientation towards capacity strengthening, although the country office was not able to carry out a full analysis to inform the design of capacity strengthening strategies due to time constraints. Country capacity strengthening efforts were mainly focused on individual technical capacity, with less emphasis on strengthening government and national institutions.
50. Partnerships are increasingly important, especially in view of the focus on country capacity strengthening, but there is a risk of overstressing the human resources of the country office and scope for focusing more on the areas where WFP can add the most value. Partnerships with the Government were strong at the technical and service-provision levels but, partly because of political instability, less effective at a higher strategic level, such as for influencing policy and strategy.
51. While the country office made an effort to mainstream gender across its activities, its ability to ensure gender-transformative programming was limited by staffing levels and expertise. WFP paid sufficient attention to protection concerns across the CSP and accountability to affected populations was addressed, but more could have been done to ensure that communities were informed about feedback mechanisms.
52. The sustainability of the benefits of both humanitarian and resilience building interventions remains a concern. This is exacerbated by the lack of good evidence regarding which interventions are most effective in Lesotho over the long term.

#	Recommendation	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
<b>1</b>	<b>Reinforce the approach to capacity strengthening across the new country strategic plan.</b>		Country office	Regional bureau and headquarters (Country Capacity Strengthening Unit)		
1.1	Continue to assess capacity needs but rebalance the approach to country capacity strengthening to include advocacy at the highest levels to support the strengthening of government systems and improve the necessary preconditions for a successful handover of activities.	Strategic			High	2029
1.2	Consider increasing government capacity strengthening activities at the district level to complement national-level work.	Operational			Medium	2029
1.3	Strengthen the monitoring of capacity development activities and their outcomes.	Operational			High	2025
<b>2</b>	<b>Link the theory of change for the next country strategic plan to stronger monitoring, evaluation and learning and deeper gender analysis.</b>	Strategic	Country office	Regional bureau and headquarters (Research, Assessment and Monitoring Division; Gender Equality Office)	High	2024
2.1	The theory of change for the next country strategic plan should spell out how WFP activities will contribute to the desired outcomes and state the key assumptions on which effectiveness depends. It will be important to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ make more realistic assumptions;</li> <li>➤ specify WFP's role in relation to the Government and other partners; and</li> <li>➤ provide a clear explanation of the results that could be attributable to WFP and how they will be monitored.</li> </ul>					

#	Recommendation	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
2.2	Elaborate a specific sub-theory of change that outlines pathways for achieving gender-transformative results.					
2.3	<p>The country strategic plan should include a monitoring, evaluation and learning strategy that is linked to the theory of change. The strategy should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ streamline corporate results framework reporting to the extent possible;</li> <li>➤ coordinate monitoring and evaluation activities with those of other United Nations entities;</li> <li>➤ support the strengthening of data gathering and analysis by the Government;</li> <li>➤ improve monitoring protocols for all levels of results; and</li> <li>➤ ensure that monitoring information is used to inform strategic decision making during the implementation of the country strategic plan.</li> </ul>					2025

#	Recommendation	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
3	<p><b>Reconsider WFP's approaches to resilience building and the humanitarian-development nexus in Lesotho.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ In preparing the next country strategic plan, draw on an analysis of multisectoral vulnerabilities and related coping strategies in Lesotho.</li> <li>➤ Work with partners (Government, United Nations, others) to build a common understanding of resilience to food crises in Lesotho.</li> <li>➤ Invest in gathering evidence on and analysing the effectiveness of resilience interventions, in order to inform decisions on which interventions should be scaled up by all stakeholders, including the Government.</li> <li>➤ Support efforts to establish a single registry to coordinate interventions by various entities at the humanitarian-development nexus.</li> </ul>	Strategic	Country office	Regional bureau	High	2029
4	<p><b>Strengthen targeting and prioritization to meet the needs of the most vulnerable, given limited resources, while maintaining WFP's own capacity to respond to humanitarian crises.</b></p>	Strategic and operational	Country office	Regional bureau and headquarters (Research, Assessment and Monitoring Division; Resilience and Food Systems Service; School-based Programmes Division)	High	
4.1	Continue to support the strengthening of the Lesotho vulnerability analysis committee.					2029

#	Recommendation	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
4.2	Support the development of national guidelines on the targeting of vulnerable households for crisis response and resilience-building activities.					2026
4.3	Continue to support community-based approaches to targeting that support equity and inclusion.					2029
<b>5</b>	<b>Contribute to strengthening the humanitarian-development nexus by deepening engagement with the national social protection system.</b>	Strategic	Country office	Regional bureau and headquarters (Social Protection Unit)	High	Ongoing
5.1	Support efforts to address the needs of chronically food-insecure households through social protection programmes rather than through emergency response.					2029
5.2	Support the Government in the development of shock-responsive social protection mechanisms.					2029
5.3	Improve the link between social protection and rural development efforts and instruments to provide pathways to self-reliance for social assistance beneficiaries. This would involve helping to strengthen coordination across government agencies concerned with social protection, agriculture and rural development.					2029
5.4	Work with the Government to support and institutionalize early childhood care and development food assistance as part of the primary school system in order to include the most vulnerable children.					2029

#	Recommendation	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
<b>6</b>	<b>Strengthen country office capacity to cover new roles while making the best use of limited resources.</b>					
6.1	In the next staffing review, ensure that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ core support services are aligned with internal and external demand ; and</li> <li>➤ technical services, including monitoring, evaluation and learning and gender, are adequately staffed.</li> </ul>	Operational	Country office	Regional bureau	High	2024
6.2	Invest in training country office staff in social protection and advocacy.	Operational	Country office	Regional bureau	High	2025
6.3	Ensure access to additional specialist expertise to support advocacy and systemic capacity strengthening, especially in fields such as nutrition, social protection and transformative gender approaches.	Operational	Regional bureau	Country office and headquarters (Human Resources Division)	High	2025



**Acronyms**

COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
CSP	country strategic plan
ECCD	early childhood care and development
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
IACOV	improving the adaptive capacity of vulnerable and food-insecure populations in Lesotho
T-ICSP	transitional interim country strategic plan
UNDAF	United Nations development assistance framework
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund