



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

**Executive Board**  
Second regular session  
Rome, 18–21 November 2024

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Distribution: General	Agenda item 6
Date: 7 October 2024	WFP/EB.2/2024/6-C/3
Original: English	Evaluation reports
	For consideration

Executive Board documents are available on WFP's website (<https://executiveboard.wfp.org>).

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## Summary report on the evaluation of the country strategic plan for Mali (2020–2024)

### Executive summary

The evaluation of the country strategic plan for Mali for 2020–2024 and the preceding transitional interim country strategic plan for 2018–2019 was conducted between March 2023 and April 2024 and covered WFP's strategy, interventions and systems for the period from 2018 to June 2023. Taking a utilization-focused, consultative approach, the evaluation served both accountability and learning purposes and has informed the preparation of the country strategic plan for 2025–2029. The evaluation assessed WFP's strategic positioning, its contribution to outcomes, its efficiency in implementing the plans, and the factors that explain its performance.

The transitional interim country strategic plan and the country strategic plan marked a change in WFP's approach, from one focused on operation-based planning to one that emphasizes country-level strategic planning and aims to facilitate integration among programme pillars, with a view to responding to emergency needs while simultaneously addressing the root causes of food insecurity in Mali.

As a key partner of the Government of Mali, WFP is aligned with national efforts to work towards the Sustainable Development Goals and plays a crucial role in the humanitarian country team and the wider United Nations system. Informed by solid analysis, WFP successfully scaled up its food assistance programme in the face of a growing food security crisis and a highly complex operational environment. WFP prioritized the coverage of its assistance, reaching or surpassing its planned beneficiary numbers, sometimes at the expense of the duration and quality of the assistance provided.

*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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WFP made efforts to ensure the integration of resilience-building activities during the implementation of the country strategic plans, building on key partnerships with other United Nations entities developed through work on joint projects. Emerging evidence demonstrates that this approach has allowed WFP to deliver on the “changing lives” agenda in Mali, but the intended integration has not yet materialized, in terms of both operational arrangements and the visibility of results. In addition, the programmatic integration of the resilience and crisis response pillars remained weak, demonstrating the challenges of operationalizing the “nexus approach”.

WFP strengthened its efforts to reach its cross-cutting objectives, with the most visible progress achieved in the areas of accountability to affected people, access negotiations and the integration of a conflict-sensitive approach. The organization continued to pay attention to humanitarian principles throughout the implementation of the country strategic plans and supported efforts to ensure access to vulnerable people and communities. On the other hand, the evaluation noted opportunities for strengthening gender analysis and taking specific causes of vulnerability – such as disability, pregnancy and nomadism – into more explicit consideration.

Although funding has been tightly earmarked at the activity level, WFP successfully expanded its resource base until 2022, which was followed by a drop in funding in 2023. A reduction in the number of cooperating partners and the establishment of cash-based transfers as the default transfer modality have created cost efficiencies for WFP.

The evaluation made five recommendations: continue efforts to integrate WFP’s assistance portfolio into work at the humanitarian–development–peace nexus; strengthen the regional approach when responding to the humanitarian needs of people on the move; better structure and align the approach to planning for medium-to-long-term results, including by reviewing field-level agreements and capacity-strengthening approaches; strengthen partnerships with local actors, particularly local non-governmental organizations, private sector actors and research institutions; and strengthen practices for risk analysis and management with a view to ensuring accountability to affected people and reaching the most vulnerable people and communities.

## **Draft decision\***

The Board takes note of the summary report on the evaluation of the country strategic plan for Mali (2020–2024) (WFP/EB.2/2024/6-C/3) and the management response (WFP/EB.2/2024/6-C/3/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) for Mali for 2020–2024 was commissioned by the WFP Office of Evaluation. It serves both accountability and learning purposes and informs the design of the next CSP for Mali.
2. The evaluation covered the activities implemented by WFP under the transitional interim CSP (T-ICSP) for 2018–2019 and the CSP for 2020–2024. It was conducted between March 2023 and April 2024 by an external independent team using a theory-based, mixed-methods approach.
3. The main intended users of the evaluation are the WFP country office in Mali, the Regional Bureau for Western Africa, technical divisions at headquarters in Rome, the WFP Executive Board, the Government of Mali, partner United Nations entities, and donors. Other potential users include civil society and non-governmental organizations in Mali, the private sector, WFP's beneficiaries and the general population of Mali.

### Context

4. A land-locked country in Western Africa, Mali is characterized by its vast territory with a low population density, particularly in its northern desert regions. The diversity of Mali's population affects intercommunal relations, particularly regarding access to resources for agriculture and livestock rearing, which constitute the primary means of subsistence in rural areas.
5. Mali faces major human development issues and ranks 186th on the Human Development Index, with 19 percent of the population living under the international poverty line of USD 1.90 per person per day, and 68 percent considered poor according to the Multidimensional Poverty Index.
6. Since 2012, Mali has been engulfed by a complex security crisis, with an intensification of violence against its civilian population, starting in 2016, affecting the provision of basic services to the population, along with humanitarian access. The number of internally displaced persons has risen steadily, exceeding 440,000 in 2022, in addition to the 180,000 refugees in the country. Two coups d'état in 2020 and 2021 contributed to the international isolation of Mali and prompted the Economic Community of West African States and the European Union to impose sanctions.
7. Despite the great agricultural potential of the country, only 7 percent of arable land is cultivated. Climate change, soil degradation, conflict and poor infrastructure all contribute to the low performance and growth of Mali's agriculture sector. The number of people classified as living at crisis or emergency levels of food insecurity increased significantly over the course of the period evaluated, reaching a peak of 1.84 million acutely food-insecure people during the 2022 lean season. According to Cadre Harmonisé reports, the primary reason for this increase is insecurity, which leads to displacement, the loss of cultivable land, livestock rustling and the pillage or destruction of harvests. In addition, the population suffers from price inflation and increasingly unpredictable agroclimatic conditions.
8. In Mali, during the period evaluated, the proportion of children suffering from global acute malnutrition remained relatively stable at about 10 percent, and the chronic malnutrition rate hovered between 21 and 26 percent.
9. In 2019, the Government of Mali launched a national five-year strategic framework for economic recovery and sustainable development (*Cadre stratégique pour la relance économique et le développement durable*) for 2019–2023, with which all United Nations partners were requested to align their own strategies. The voluntary report on progress towards the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), published in 2022,

underlines Mali's regression under most SDGs, which is connected to the global coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, insecurity and the crisis that hit the Economic Community of West African States, despite the Government's efforts under SDG 17. Humanitarian response plans have increased steadily over the period evaluated, rising from USD 330 million in 2018 to USD 686 million in 2022, of which 40 percent has been funded.

TABLE 1: SOCIOECONOMIC INDICATORS			
	Indicator	Value	Year
	Population density (inhabitants/km <sup>2</sup> ) (1)	17	2023
	Human Development Index (rank) (2)	186 of 191	2022
	Income inequality: Gini coefficient (score and rank) (2)	0.6136 155 of 191	2021
	Agriculture as a percentage of gross domestic product (3)	35.7	2021
	Employment in agriculture (% of total employment) (4)	68.3	2021
	Population living below the national poverty line (%) (1)	19.1	2023
	Population living in multidimensional poverty (%) (5)	68.3	2021
	Prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity in the total population (%)	7	2020
	Height-for-age (stunting – moderate and severe), prevalence for <5 (%) (6)	21	2022
	Internally displaced persons (7)	440 000	2022
	Refugees (7)	181 266	2022
	Literacy rate >15 (%) (4)	21	2021

Sources: (1) World Bank. 2023. [The World Bank in Mali](#); (2) United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). 2022. [Human Development Report 2021/2022. Uncertain Times, Unsettled Lives: Shaping our Future in a Transforming World](#); (3) National Statistics Institute (INSTAT). 2021; (4) INSTAT. 2021. [Enquêtes modulaires et permanentes auprès des ménages \(EMOP\)](#); (5) UNDP. 2023. [Briefing note for countries on the 2023 Multidimensional Poverty Index – Mali](#) (figures for 2021); (6) INSTAT. 2022. [Enquêtes nationales nutritionnelles anthropométriques et de mortalité rétrospective Mali \(SMART\)](#); (7) International Organization for Migration. [Displacement Tracking Matrix – Mali](#).

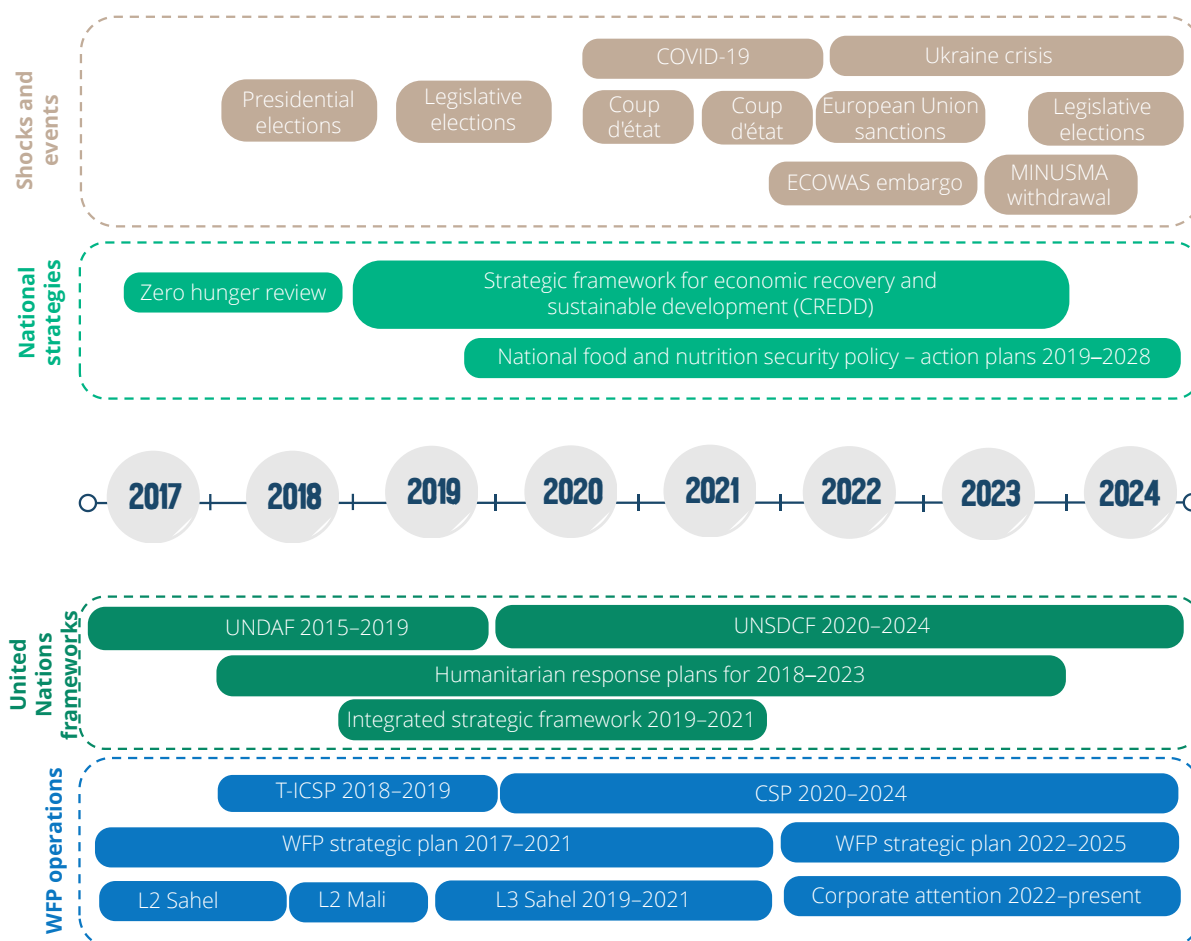
### Country strategic plans

10. Under the T-ICSP for 2018–2019, WFP intended to continue positioning itself as a leading actor in crisis response, implement a diverse range of resilience-building activities, support national counterparts and integrate cross-cutting dimensions into the T-ICSP activities.
11. The five-year CSP for 2020–2024 had a similar structure to the T-ICSP and was approved by the Board in November 2019. It had the aim of supporting the Government's efforts to achieve SDGs 2 on zero hunger and 17 on partnerships for the goals. It was in line with the

United Nations sustainable development cooperation framework for 2020–2024<sup>1</sup> and linked to the 2017 zero hunger strategic review<sup>2</sup> and the national strategic framework for economic recovery and sustainable development for 2019–2023.<sup>3</sup>

12. Figure 1 illustrates the evolution of key events, national strategies, United Nations frameworks and WFP's operations during the period evaluated. Throughout the period, WFP was operating under an emergency classification, first with a level 2 regional and country emergency response, then as part of the Sahel-wide level 3 emergency response, which started in 2019, and then, since 2022, under a "corporate attention" operation.

**Figure 1: Country context and WFP operational overview, 2017–2024**



*Abbreviations:* ECOWAS = Economic Community of West African States; MINUSMA = United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali; UNDAF = United Nations development assistance framework; UNSDCF = United Nations sustainable development cooperation framework

*Source:* Elaborated by the Office of Evaluation.

13. Both the T-ICSP and the CSP have been revised several times during their implementation, reflecting the increasing needs of the crisis response component. The total cost of the T-ICSP was initially estimated at USD 90 million, but after five revisions the final budget reached USD 260 million. The needs-based plan for the CSP increased from an initial USD 525 million to USD 1.32 billion following six budget revisions (figure 2). In parallel, the number of planned beneficiaries increased from 3.27 million to 12.12 million (figure 3). While the T-ICSP

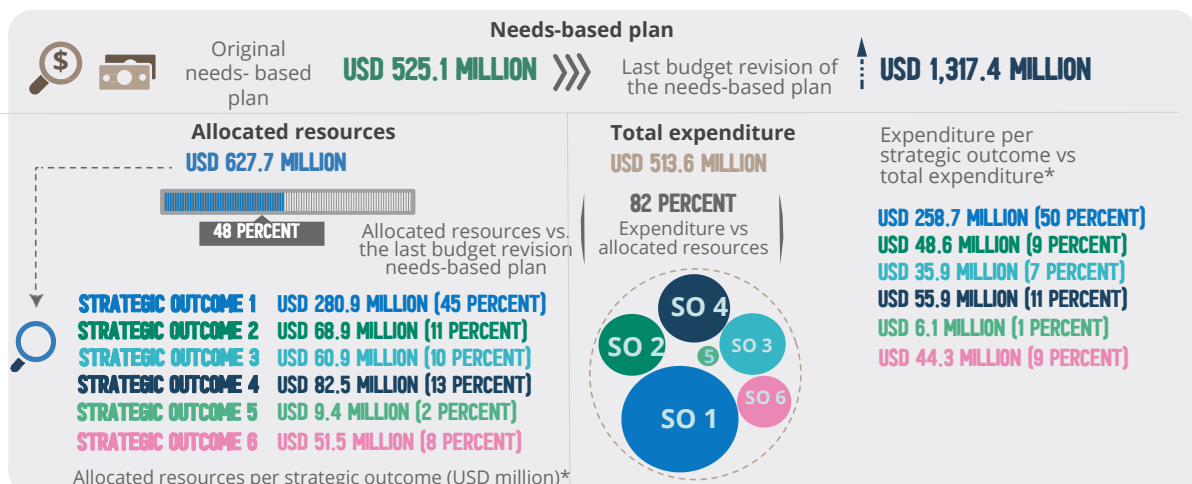
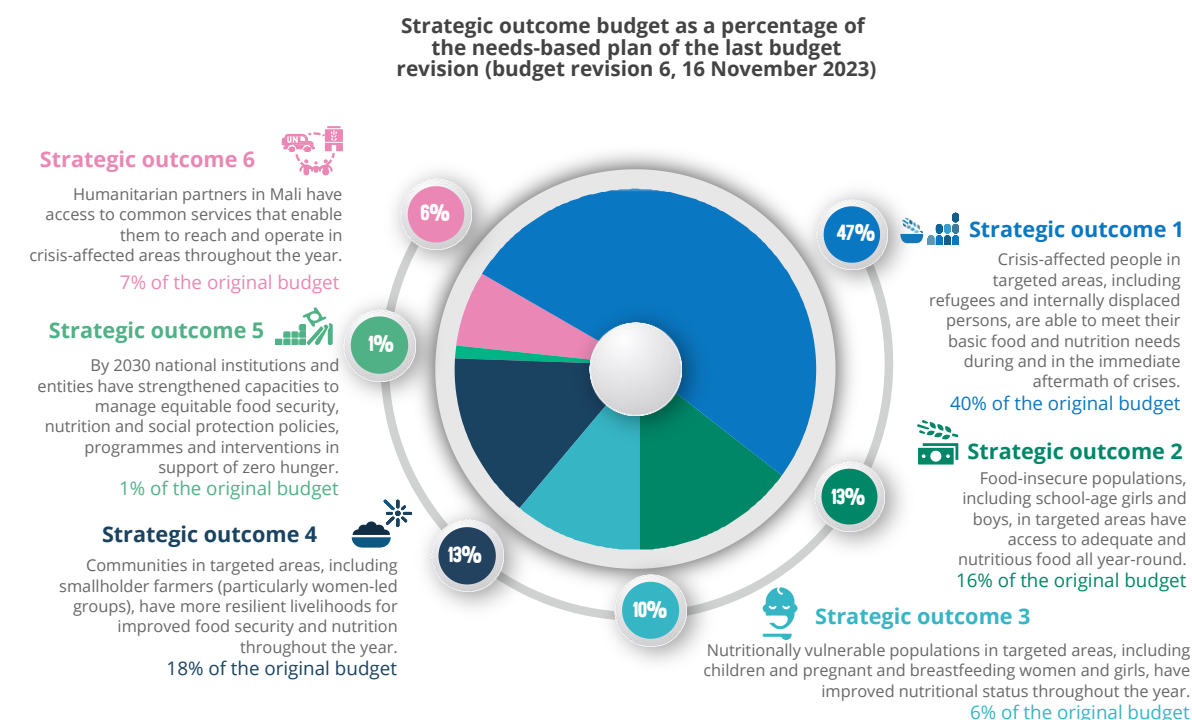
<sup>1</sup> United Nations. 2020. *Cadre de coopération des Nations Unies pour le développement durable (UNSDCF) 2020–2024 Mali*.

<sup>2</sup> Examen stratégique de la sécurité alimentaire et la nutrition (Bamako, December 2017 – unpublished).

<sup>3</sup> Government of Mali. 2019. *Cadre stratégique pour la relance économique et le développement durable (CREDD 2019–2023)*.

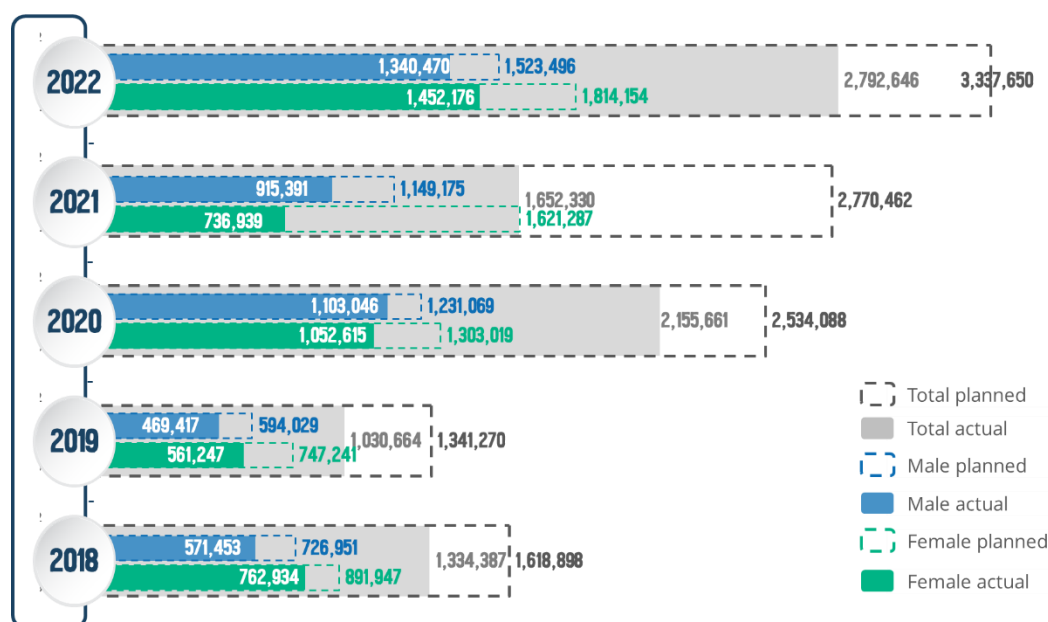
was 63 percent funded, receiving a total of USD 163 million, the overall funding level of the CSP as of September 2023 was 51.3 percent. Of the USD 592 million raised by that time, USD 476 million had been spent. The European Commission was the largest donor, followed by the United States of America and Germany.

**Figure 2: The Mali country strategic plan (2020–2024) strategic outcomes, budget, funding and expenditures**



\* Percentages of allocated resources and expenditures by strategic outcome do not add up to 100 percent because resources were also allocated to and spent on non-strategic outcome purposes.

Sources: Revision 6 of the Mali CSP (2020–2024) and country portfolio budget resources overview (extracted November 2023, internal document).

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

Sources: WFP. Mali, annual country reports for 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022. Available on [wfp.org](https://wfp.org).

## Evaluation findings

### To what extent is the country strategic plan evidence-based and strategically oriented to meet the needs of the most at-risk and vulnerable individuals?

#### Relevance to needs

14. WFP positioned itself to address the challenges facing Mali with regard to food and nutrition insecurity as identified in various data sources. Each strategic outcome of the CSP is informed by dedicated sectoral analyses, including macro-level joint exercises such as the zero hunger strategic review of 2017, biannual acute food insecurity analyses within the Cadre Harmonisé framework, repeated integrated context analyses to inform resilience programming, and community-based participatory planning. While various tools have been applied to support the integrated resilience pillar of the CSP, the plan lacks a holistic analysis to guide an integrated response between the emergency and resilience pillars.
15. While the Mali country office has increased its efforts to conduct and use conflict sensitivity analysis, the regional dimension of the crisis has only been analysed to a limited extent, particularly in relation to Malian refugees in neighbouring countries, the cross-border movements of those refugees, and the largely nomadic population in the centre and north of the country and in areas such as the three-border zone between Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger.

#### Alignment with national priorities

16. WFP supported the formulation and operationalization of various policies connected to the SDGs. As such, its interventions were aligned with the strategic framework for economic recovery and sustainable development for 2019–2023<sup>4</sup> and the national food and nutrition security policy.<sup>5</sup> WFP had a strong presence in Mali and played a key role in the implementation of national strategies.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Government of Mali. 2019. *Politique Nationale de Sécurité Alimentaire et Nutritionnelle (PoINSAN)*.

17. The involvement of national and local institutions in the elaboration of WFP's own framework documents was limited, but WFP conducted participatory planning sessions in targeted communities to ensure the alignment of its activities with the communities' priorities.

#### ***Coherence with United Nations partners***

18. WFP played a key role in the development and implementation of the United Nations sustainable development cooperation framework and the humanitarian response plans for Mali. WFP's wide reach and coverage in the country, particularly in the areas facing the most complex access and other challenges, gave it a recognized comparative advantage in the humanitarian community. However, opportunities for developing strategic and programmatic synergies, such as joint analysis in support of action at the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, have not been fully exploited.

#### ***Internal coherence and integration***

19. Under the Mali CSP, the country office has made major efforts to implement its resilience-building activities in an integrated manner, based on the underpinning theory that the results of the activities would mutually reinforce one another. However, in practice, this approach has not yet materialized, with planning, implementation and monitoring remaining largely sectoral. Linkages between the emergency and resilience pillars of the CSP need to be formulated more clearly, given WFP's comparative advantage in its ability to implement activities at scale in hard-to-reach locations. Certain assumptions underlying the logic of the CSP did not materialize, such as the flexibility of funding or a favourable security and economic environment.

#### ***Strategic positioning in an evolving environment***

20. WFP has adapted well to volatile conditions, prioritizing the basic needs of the Malian population when planning assistance. It revised its planning figures several times in line with the evolving vulnerability of people and communities and with the development of WFP's approaches to crisis response and resilience building.
21. The unique positioning of WFP's school-based programmes under the resilience pillar has been a missed opportunity for WFP to expand its crisis response package by including an education component. In addition, the need for annual lean season responses, which have repeatedly targeted the same geographical areas and population groups, constitutes a predictable or "chronic" emergency situation whose underlying causes have been addressed only marginally.

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

#### ***Contributions to strategic outcomes***

22. Overall, WFP has achieved strong output-level results, particularly in terms of numbers of beneficiaries in the emergency response component of the CSP. Faced by limited funding, WFP chose to maximize the beneficiary coverage of its emergency response, reducing ration sizes rather than beneficiary numbers when necessary.
23. The regional dimension of the crisis – which encompasses refugees, nomadic groups and people on the move in hard-to-reach regions on the border with Burkina Faso and the Niger – was not analysed sufficiently. As a result, despite the evident vulnerability of those population groups, the evaluation team could not identify any specific interventions to support them.



**Strategic outcome 1: emergency response**

24. WFP's emergency response in Mali has used unconditional resource transfers to respond to various types of vulnerability. The majority of those transfers have been distributed during the annual lean season under repeated responses for the resident population, with a smaller overall amount provided to internally displaced persons and refugees. WFP covered an increasing number of beneficiaries – rising from 696,307 in 2018 to 2,492,000 in 2022 – often with reduced rations, reflecting its prioritization of full beneficiary coverage over ration sizes.
25. Outcome-level results were uneven over the course of T-ICSP and CSP implementation, although evidence from informal exchanges with beneficiaries indicates that WFP's distributions helped to limit food insecurity.
26. Connected to the emergency response, WFP implemented a programme for the prevention and treatment of moderate acute malnutrition. While budget constraints and pipeline breaks limited the achievements under the prevention activity, the treatment activity generated consistently high recovery rates.

**Strategic outcomes 2, 3 and 4: resilience building**

27. During the implementation of the CSP, WFP promoted increased integration of its resilience activities into a package of interventions designed to address the complex vulnerabilities of targeted communities in a holistic manner. The effectiveness of the integrated programme in achieving improved outcomes was confirmed by the evaluation team through their interactions with beneficiaries, but so far the integration has consisted mainly of the geographical concentration of activities. An integrated approach to planning, partner engagement, targeting and monitoring was not achieved in the period evaluated.
28. WFP's school-based programmes under activity 3 have progressed steadily over the course of the CSP and play a crucial role in the country office's portfolio. However, overall coverage compared with the needs in the country remained limited. Enrolment and attendance rates in targeted schools have improved overall, except for during the COVID-19 pandemic. In practice, the evaluation found little evidence of the intended integration of school-based programmes into other resilience activities.
29. Under activity 4, WFP supported the national nutrition programme for the prevention and treatment of moderate acute malnutrition, which is integrated into WFP's resilience package. The evaluation could find no significant results achieved in terms of improved nutrition practices, but concluded that the interventions helped to maintain malnutrition rates below emergency levels.
30. As part of activity 5, and as a key component of the integrated resilience package, WFP implemented an asset creation programme based on food assistance for assets activities, and a smallholder farmer market access support programme. Over the course of the T-ICSP and the CSP, WFP reached a significant number of beneficiaries, averaging 170,000 per year, and contributed to the development of assets that helped communities to increase their agricultural productivity.
31. Despite these achievements, however, during the period under evaluation, challenges persisted in the coordination of the various stakeholders on the ground, owing to the complex operational environment in Mali. The integration of value chain approaches into resilience programmes targeting smallholder farmers also failed to materialize as planned.
32. Over the course of the CSP, as part of the resilience package, WFP launched social protection initiatives under activity 12 with a view to empowering the Government to play a stronger role in social assistance programmes. While this approach promoted the use and enhancement of the Government's unified social register for the enrolment of beneficiaries,

it was limited in scope and coverage, and gaps were found in the achievement of targets and cash-out rates.

#### ***Strategic outcome 5: capacity strengthening***

33. Although WFP is a key actor and partner of choice of the Government of Mali, its capacity strengthening approaches during the CSP period were poorly structured, and progress towards the autonomy of national structures was limited. The most developed and institutionalized capacity-strengthening initiative is WFP's support for the collection and analysis of food and nutrition security data in the Cadre Harmonisé framework. Other capacity-strengthening initiatives have been implemented as part of other activities but have not been planned and coordinated in a consolidated manner.

#### ***Strategic outcome 6: service provision***

34. WFP has enhanced its humanitarian air services over the course of the CSP, adapting to rapidly changing conditions and demand. WFP has also continued to lead the logistics cluster and provide on-demand services for humanitarian partners. Good collaboration with the authorities and the ability to adapt its services flexibly to evolving circumstances contributed to WFP's effectiveness in providing these services.

#### ***Indirect effects***

35. The evaluation found that CSP activities had significant indirect effects, which are neither monitored systematically nor documented as a contribution to knowledge management. On the positive side, the evaluation found what were likely to be the effects of WFP's interventions on improved social cohesion at the local level, reduced migration from rural areas, increased economic activity in the private sector, and improved access to health and education services. On the other hand, stakeholders mentioned a destabilizing effect arising from WFP's selection of intervention zones or its lack of continuous support for displaced people who had dropped out of the rapid response mechanism, which stimulated internal migration.

#### ***Cross-cutting issues***

36. Work on cross-cutting issues is guided by dedicated strategies and standard operating procedures with staff members at the country office responsible for ensuring that they are integrated throughout WFP's operations and the programme cycle. However, environmental concerns are not yet considered a cross-cutting issue.

#### ***Humanitarian principles, access and protection***

37. Challenges in the negotiation of humanitarian access have grown over the period under evaluation, prompting WFP to revise its access strategy and standard operating procedures, and underlining the importance of WFP's relationships with cooperating partners and communities in managing humanitarian access and risks in hard-to-reach areas. Over the course of the T-ICSP and CSP, WFP has made strong progress in promoting access to vulnerable people and communities in such areas.
38. WFP has maintained its focus on humanitarian principles, achieving a delicate trade-off between supporting the Government as part of its role in addressing food insecurity and ensuring a principled approach to vulnerability-based decision-making grounded in the comprehensive use of assessments. Nevertheless, cases of attempted interference in WFP's operations from a range of actors have been observed.
39. WFP manages the protection aspects of its activities in collaboration with its partners in the protection cluster. Over the course of the CSP, WFP has revised its practices for mainstreaming protection in a volatile and complex environment. This has reduced the risks for beneficiaries, but the protection risks for WFP's cooperating partners have remained high, with a lack of systematic support from WFP when incidents occur.

***Accountability to affected people***

40. WFP has reinforced its approaches to strengthening accountability to affected people through participatory approaches to decision-making and mechanisms for the exchange of information between WFP and affected communities.
41. The numbers of complaints received and managed through WFP's community feedback mechanisms have increased considerably in recent years. The mechanisms have been structured in accordance with standard operating procedures and strengthened by the roll-out of the corporate software for managing feedback and raising issues to be addressed at the appropriate levels of WFP's management. Despite the progress made, issues remain in ensuring equitable access to community feedback mechanisms regardless of the location and the ability of all the members of affected communities to use the channels provided to them.

***Gender equality and inclusion***

42. WFP takes into consideration the specific vulnerabilities of women, particularly in its nutrition interventions and as part of the resilience-building activities through which it seeks to strengthen women's socioeconomic autonomy. However, the evaluation found little analytical work on which WFP could base the design and implementation of programmes with a strong gender-transformative component.
43. With the lean season response focused on the resident population of smallholder farmers, there was also only limited attention directed to the specific vulnerabilities of marginalized population groups, particularly people moving through and within rural zones. The documentation and consideration of WFP's support for people with disabilities, older people and pregnant women and girls were limited.

***Sustainability of WFP interventions***

44. WFP mobilized targeted communities effectively during the planning stage of its resilience-building programmes and formed community management committees to manage the implementation of activities and the maintenance of the assets created. However, handover strategies were not clearly formulated as part of WFP's engagement with communities, and community members pointed to a need for assistance to last longer.
45. While crisis response and resilience-building activities show little integration and are currently implemented separately, the sustainability of results depends on WFP's ability to provide a continuum of interventions under the emergency and resilience pillars. In addition, WFP's success in generating sustainable results through its support for actors in the value chains for nutritional foods will depend on its engagement with the private sector.
46. The growing integration of activities into national systems increases the potential for sustainability. Examples include WFP's efforts to work through national social protection, nutrition and school meals programmes.

***Humanitarian-development-peace nexus***

47. While WFP has made efforts to reinforce the integration of activities, its approaches to the creation of linkages at the nexus of humanitarian, development and peacebuilding programmes are not clearly defined. Complementarities between WFP and key partners are also underdeveloped but are crucial for the strengthening of those linkages and the sustainability of interventions.
48. Large-scale food assistance programmes provide WFP with an entry point for supporting the "nexus approach" through the integration of food assistance into stabilization strategies that emphasize social cohesion at the community level. The evaluation found positive results in this domain, with WFP's support for equitable access to food generating positive interactions within and between communities, while reducing tensions.

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

### ***Timeliness***

49. Despite improvements in expenditure rates against confirmed contributions, delays in the delivery of assistance have occurred at several levels, with negative effects on beneficiaries. WFP has put in place several corrective measures, which have improved the timeliness of deliveries and include the digitalization of assistance management through WFP's digital beneficiary information and transfer management platform, SCOPE; improved management of local partners, ensuring continuous access to hard-to-reach locations; the opening of alternative logistics corridors; and the development of information systems for stock management.

### ***Targeting and coverage***

50. WFP has different targeting processes in place for the different activities under the CSP. The processes are based on guidelines for a step-by-step approach to targeting of the most vulnerable people and communities, with several levels of oversight through third-party monitors, WFP's own monitors and spot checks for verification.
51. WFP prioritized the number of beneficiaries reached, basing that number on the lean season figures reported in the Cadre Harmonisé because of the challenges of identifying the different levels of vulnerability within communities – challenges that the country office has documented in its verification exercises. The choice of broad beneficiary coverage but insufficient rations resulted in outcome-level targets being missed, raising the need for further prioritization to avoid spreading the assistance too thinly. Some population groups did not receive adequate attention, including schoolchildren in emergency settings, internally displaced persons in situations of protracted displacement and nomadic populations crossing borders.
52. Additional challenges affected the implementation of targeting exercises at the community level, particularly when resource constraints forced the country office to reduce beneficiary numbers even further. In addition, there was limited harmonization of targeting and registration approaches across different activities, limiting WFP's ability to track overlaps between activities and ensure the continuity of assistance at the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

### ***Efficiency and innovative approaches***

53. WFP's choice of modalities took into consideration feasibility, efficiency and effectiveness. With these parameters in mind, WFP significantly increased its use of cash-based transfers over the course of the CSP, making it the dominant transfer modality in Mali. This has led to a reduction in costs per beneficiary, although an analysis of beneficiaries' purchasing power from the transfers compared with the in-kind food basket has not been carried out.
54. While substantial post-delivery losses have been registered, particularly during the T-ICSP, the country office has reduced such losses in the latter years of CSP implementation. WFP strengthened its logistics management with improved warehousing practices and the use of the Logistics Execution Support System, which simplifies distribution planning. The costs of warehousing per unit have increased owing to the reduced overall tonnage resulting from the growing use of cash-based modalities, which suggests a need to revise WFP's warehousing and local procurement practices.
55. Innovative approaches have been key to WFP's efforts to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of its interventions over the course of the CSP. Most important among those approaches is the digitalization of payments, which has improved the transparency and security of transfers. The African Risk Capacity insurance scheme is another key approach developed during the CSP period to support the country office in managing risks related to

food security through an insurance scheme that provides timely payouts for relief from natural disasters such as droughts.

**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?**

***Funding***

56. Over the course of the period evaluated, until 2022 the overall funding base of the Mali country office increased in line with the rising food insecurity in the country. Since 2023, funding has decreased and become less predictable, partly owing to political developments in Mali. Most contributions come with tight spending windows and are earmarked at the activity level, which complicates the implementation of integrated approaches under the CSP. Donors appreciate the country office's proactive and transparent communications.

***Monitoring***

57. The monitoring and evaluation system of the Mali country office provides a comprehensive overview of the activities implemented under the CSP. Coverage in hard-to-reach locations is ensured through the use of third-party monitoring partners. Other innovative approaches have been developed to increase the visibility of results, including a regional approach to the monitoring and measurement of resilience and a system that uses satellite technology to monitor the impacts of assets.
58. Several shortcomings have been identified, including the lack of a system that consolidates the results of the integrated resilience package and demonstrates the effectiveness of the combination of activities. The evaluation was also not able to verify the levels of overlap in the numbers of beneficiaries receiving assistance under several CSP activities.

***Partnerships***

59. Following an internal audit in 2021, WFP reduced the number of cooperating partners from 44 to 28 over the course of the period evaluated. Although local non-governmental organizations are valued for their access to hard-to-reach communities, the reduction has generally favoured large international non-governmental organizations with stronger systems for ensuring accountability and risk management. The short duration of field-level agreements and the long approval processes for those agreements affected the continuity of assistance and reduced the likelihood of long-term transformative results.
60. Partnerships with other United Nations entities, particularly the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), have supported the effectiveness of interventions. Joint projects have fully exploited the complementary strengths of the agencies concerned. The partnership with FAO on value chain approaches could have been better exploited, and the partnership with UNICEF in supporting the regional response mechanism could have benefited from a more holistic approach.
61. The Government of Mali has been closely involved in WFP's interventions, and numerous memoranda of understanding attest to the institutionalization of WFP's relationships with national and local government counterparts. However, WFP's support for local government structures has remained limited, despite the key role of those structures in facilitating the implementation and sustainability of activities.

***Human resources***

62. Over the period evaluated, the Mali country office significantly increased its staffing levels, including in field offices, with many new positions created in response to the challenges identified in the 2021 internal audit. This has contributed to WFP's ability to scale up and strengthen its activities.

63. Many positions have proved difficult to fill, particularly in hardship duty stations outside the capital. In addition, despite investments in security measures and staff well-being, the retention of staff has proved challenging, with short rotation cycles and short-term contracts negatively affecting the retention of institutional knowledge.

## Conclusions

64. The evaluation team recognizes the significant efforts that WFP has undertaken to respond effectively at scale to a growing food security crisis in Mali since the start of the T-ICSP in 2018, maintaining a focus on reaching the most operationally complex areas in the country and diversifying its activity portfolio with approaches that increase the population's resilience to shocks.
65. WFP has prioritized the maintenance of its broad coverage of beneficiaries over the size of rations distributed, thereby compromising the achievement of long-term transformative results that would help the country to break out of the cycle of protracted crises. This effect was reflected in the need for repeated lean season responses to cover the needs of a significant proportion of the country's smallholder farmers. Some population groups with specific vulnerabilities and needs did not receive sufficient attention.
66. While the intervention logic underpinning the CSP and associated programme documents promoted the convergence and integration of activities at the conceptual level, at the field level each activity was implemented and monitored in isolation, which limited the achievement of sustainable results at the humanitarian–development–peace nexus.
67. WFP has taken steps to integrate the cross-cutting elements of the CSP into all activities, but its adherence to humanitarian principles required WFP to strike a delicate balance in challenging conditions. Accountability to affected people and the analysis of conflict sensitivity have been strengthened, with scope for further improvement. However, the analysis of gender-related vulnerabilities and opportunities for supporting beneficiaries with particular vulnerabilities was inadequate.
68. WFP has significantly developed its partnerships during the period evaluated, adapted to the operating environment and balanced the need for locally anchored interventions and the engagement of partners with the need for strong accountability systems. WFP also prioritized short-term engagements to retain flexibility. Despite the complex institutional environment, WFP has maintained its strong standing with government institutions, supporting the operationalization of national strategies at multiple levels of government, but with limited involvement of national and local government in key activities. WFP also remained a key actor in the United Nations system, participating in many joint initiatives, but not yet fully capitalizing on the opportunities for collaboration.
69. WFP has strengthened its processes for generating efficiency gains and cost savings, relying increasingly on cash-based transfers as the default transfer modality and reducing the overall number of its cooperating partners. However, WFP's planning approaches were prone to challenges, particularly its targeting approach. Delays at several stages of delivering assistance, coupled with shortcomings in WFP's communications with its cooperating partners, ultimately affected beneficiaries. The evolving challenges in the political sphere underline the necessity for WFP to retain and diversify its supply chain approaches – for example, through the use of local procurement and alternative corridors – in order to safeguard its ability to provide an effective humanitarian response in Mali.

70. The Mali country office gradually scaled up its financial and human resources during the period under evaluation, but failed to use those resources to support the integrated delivery of CSP activities. This weakness was reflected in the limited visibility of the results achieved from the integration of its activities, which was in turn reflected in the limited motivation for donors to fund nexus programming. In addition, the turnover of WFP's staff was a major challenge to the implementation of an integrated approach, while the strengthening of local partnerships and the use of internal staff promotions provide opportunities to address these issues.

## Recommendations

No.	Recommendation	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Priority	Deadline for completion
<b>1</b>	<b>Strengthen the integration of CSP activities, outputs and strategic outcomes in the planning and implementation stages as well as for monitoring and evaluation.</b>	Strategic	Country office (management; programme, and research, assessment and monitoring units)	High	December 2025
1.1	Reinforce mechanisms that link emergency response and resilience activities and ensure that monitoring systems capture the coherence of interventions.				
1.2	Continue to integrate school meals into emergency interventions, providing pathways to the establishment of permanent school canteens when conditions allow.				
1.3	Maximize the effects of food security programmes on social cohesion and stabilization based on a sound analysis of the sociopolitical and environmental context.				
1.4	Support joint advocacy targeting donors in order to mobilize resources for addressing the challenges related to work at the humanitarian–development–peace nexus.				
1.5	Support and clarify the role of partnerships with national actors and the country offices of other United Nations entities at the nexus.				
<b>2</b>	<b>Support the regional integration of efforts to address cross-border issues and foster synergies with country offices in Burkina Faso, Mauritania and the Niger.</b>	Strategic	Country office, regional bureau and other country offices (Mauritania, Burkina Faso and Niger)	Medium	June 2025
2.1	Reinforce synergies with other country offices in designing CSPs and activities.				
2.2	Coordinate with relevant country offices – prioritizing Mauritania for the monitoring of refugees in M'bera – and maintain joint oversight over at-risk border regions.				



No.	Recommendation	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Priority	Deadline for completion
2.3	Consider the specific food security challenges faced by nomadic groups and people on the move and integrate these groups into resilience-building and school meals programmes.				
<b>3</b>	<b>Strengthen planning and clarify CSP objectives and priorities during the CSP development process to facilitate mid- and long-term strategic alignment.</b>	Operational	Country office (management; and programme unit)	High	January 2025
3.1	Clearly articulate the different activities of the CSP, ensuring that field-level agreements and projects fall within the overarching CSP results framework.				
3.2	Review the targeting approach taking into account needs and available resources in order to tighten targeting and minimize post-targeting prioritization and reduce the scope of field-level agreements.				
3.3	Clarify the responsibilities, objectives and expected results of institutional capacity strengthening activities.				
3.4	Integrate sustainability considerations into the design of interventions, including through longer-term support that has the potential to transform livelihoods and infrastructure.				
3.5	Provide specific support for the most vulnerable population groups, taking into consideration gender issues and the victims of gender-based violence.				
<b>4</b>	<b>Support partnerships through capacity strengthening, localization and consideration of the various types of intervention and challenges faced on the ground in order to promote efficiency and sustainability.</b>	Operational	Country office (management; and programme unit)	Medium	June 2025
4.1	Continue to deliver and monitor capacity strengthening activities for community-based structures, and track the results of those activities.				
4.2	Continue to support value chains and the capacities of economic actors through programming.				

No.	Recommendation	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Priority	Deadline for completion
4.3	Consider entering into multi-year field-level agreements with cooperating partners integrating risk mitigation measures.				
4.4	Support the sharing of experience among cooperating partners, particularly for the implementation of interventions in similar geographical areas.				
<b>5</b>	<b>Strengthen collaborative risk analysis and management, including by improving work processes and expanding accountability to affected people.</b>	Operational	Country office (management; partnerships, field-level agreements, security, research, assessment and monitoring, and risk units)	High	June 2025
5.1	Support and leverage detailed analyses of contextual developments and challenges.				
5.2	Maintain logistics capacity and reinforce the monitoring of various types of risk and the access strategies of partners, traders and transporters by involving the appropriate units.				
5.3	Extend the mechanisms for providing accountability to affected people to cover all activities by consolidating the various feedback channels.				
5.4	Strengthen the capacities of WFP and cooperating partner personnel in relation to risk management tools and accountability to affected people.				