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

Summary report on the evaluation of WFP's emergency response to the prolonged crisis in the Sahel and other countries of Central Africa (2018–2023)

Executive summary

The evaluation covers eight countries in the Sahel and Central Africa (Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, the Niger and Nigeria) over the period from January 2018 to December 2023. It addresses WFP's capacity to anticipate, prepare for and respond to emergencies in the context of the humanitarian–development–peace nexus and how that capacity is manifested through WFP's direct response to emergency food and nutrition needs and its support for national crisis response, food and social protection systems, as well as the strengthening of the humanitarian ecosystem.

The evaluation concludes that WFP has provided strong and rapid support to populations affected by the many crises in the region while mobilizing its capacity to support the interventions of local, national and international actors. Despite effective implementation, the results against the indicators associated with WFP's emergency interventions are mixed. Notwithstanding its determination to provide a layered and sequenced response in the areas most affected by insecurity, WFP often encounters challenges in effectively supporting the recovery and resilience of conflict-affected populations. WFP has demonstrated its ability to innovate and invest in systems that support its emergency response. In a context of shrinking and politicized humanitarian space, WFP's diverse access strategies have proved effective. However, humanitarian principles insufficiently guide WFP's decision making. Moreover, WFP has diversified its strategic partnerships, emphasizing its added value, but its partnerships with local non-governmental organizations are too transactional and insufficiently focused on localization. WFP produces a great deal of data but not enough knowledge to guide emergency responses, facilitate work at the humanitarian–development–peace nexus or anticipate crises. Finally, while

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.

progress has been made in the areas of accountability to affected people, gender and protection, the cross-cutting themes of diversity and inclusion still receive little attention, starting with limitations in the integration of intersectionality into vulnerability analyses.

The evaluation recommends that WFP: i) strengthen the prioritization of the most acute needs in its emergency interventions as well as refine the design and implementation of its support to the recovery and resilience of populations affected by conflict; ii) promote a research agenda that supports the quality of emergency operations, the humanitarian–development–peace nexus, advocacy and risk management; iii) strengthen its capacity to address the dilemmas associated with humanitarian principles in the region and pursue its efforts with regard to access; iv) strengthen its partnerships relating to gender and inclusion, accountability to affected people, protection and social cohesion; v) ensure that corporate partnership management processes are compatible with WFP's global commitments to localization and include objectives on empowering local actors in existing regional strategies; and vi) broaden the scope of its support for the response strategies, mechanisms and instruments of regional institutions used to prevent and manage food and nutrition crises.

Draft decision[*]

The Board takes note of the summary report on the evaluation of WFP's emergency response to the prolonged crisis in the Sahel and other countries of Central Africa from 2018 to 2023, set out in document WFP/EB.2/2024/6-D and the management response set out in document WFP/EB.2/2024/6-D/Add.1 and encourages further action on the recommendations presented in the report, taking into account the considerations raised by the Board during its discussion.

---

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

Introduction

Evaluation features

1. The evaluation covers eight countries in the Sahel and Central Africa (Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, the Niger and Nigeria) over the period 2018–2023. It addresses WFP's capacity to anticipate, prepare for and respond to emergencies through direct response to emergency food and nutrition needs, support for national crisis response and social protection systems and the strengthening of the humanitarian ecosystem.

2. In addition, the evaluation looked at synergies with programmes designed to reduce structural vulnerability and build human capital, as well as interventions aimed at strengthening livelihoods and the resilience of food systems. Lastly, the evaluation addressed cross-cutting themes such as gender and inclusion, conflict sensitivity and protection of and accountability to affected people.

3. With the majority of country offices having recently undergone evaluations of their country strategic plans (CSPs), this evaluation offers a cross-cutting analysis at the regional level, building on and complementing the evaluations and studies carried out in each country. Each evaluation question was explored through four or five of the eight country visits. This approach has helped to deepen the analysis and reinforce the learning aspect of the evaluation.

Context

4. The Sahelian and Central African countries covered by this evaluation are characterized by high levels of vulnerability caused by structural factors such as chronic poverty, growing demographic pressure, overexploitation of natural resources and institutional fragility. The unequal distribution of wealth is exacerbated by high levels of public debt, which limits the fiscal space available to governments for basic social services and social protection systems.

5. This structural fragility, at the root of the crises that have battered the region, is linked to multiple factors, which are themselves sometimes intertwined: global crises (coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic; economic and political impacts of the conflict in Ukraine), armed conflicts, insecurity and violence affecting increasingly large areas, political and institutional crises in some countries and extreme climate-related events.

6. Seven of the eight countries covered are classified as "high or very high risk" in terms of the impact of climate change on the risk of humanitarian disasters.[1] Climate change undermines agricultural productivity,[2] food security and livelihoods, while increasing the risk of conflict and migration in the region.[3]

7. Since the late 1990s, the Sahel region (including the Lake Chad Basin) has seen a significant increase in conflict, communal violence and violent extremism. Between 2020 and 2023, coups d'état took place in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali and the Niger.

8. The intensification of conflicts is one of the causes of the sharp increase in forced displacement in the region. According to data from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the total number of refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced persons in the eight countries reached 9.8 million in 2023 (up from

---

[1] European Commission, "INFORM Risk Index". Very high risk: Chad, Central African Republic, Mali, Niger and Nigeria; high risk: Burkina Faso and Cameroon; medium risk: Mauritania.

[2] T.W. Carr and others. 2022. Climate change impacts and adaptation strategies for crops in West Africa: a systematic review. In Environmental Research Letters, 17(5), 1–24.

[3] Food Security Information Network. 2023. Regional overviews of food crises in 2022 – West Africa and the Sahel, and Cameroon.

5.1 million in 2018).[4] Conflict and population displacement are leading to escalating levels of sexual violence, domestic violence, child marriage and the sexual exploitation and abuse of girls and women, which were already very high in the region.[5]

9.   The region is one of the most vulnerable areas on the African continent in terms of food security. According to Integrated Food Security Phase Classification/Cadre Harmonisé (IPC/CH) analyses, the number of people in phase 3 (crisis) or above rose from 10.15 million in 2018 to 39.76 million in 2023 in the eight countries (see figure 1). The nutrition situation is also worrying: on average, 28 percent of children under 5 in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and the Niger are stunted, and 10 percent suffer from wasting.[6]

Figure 1: People in phases 3–5 according to Integrated Food Security Phase Classification/Cadre Harmonisé analysis
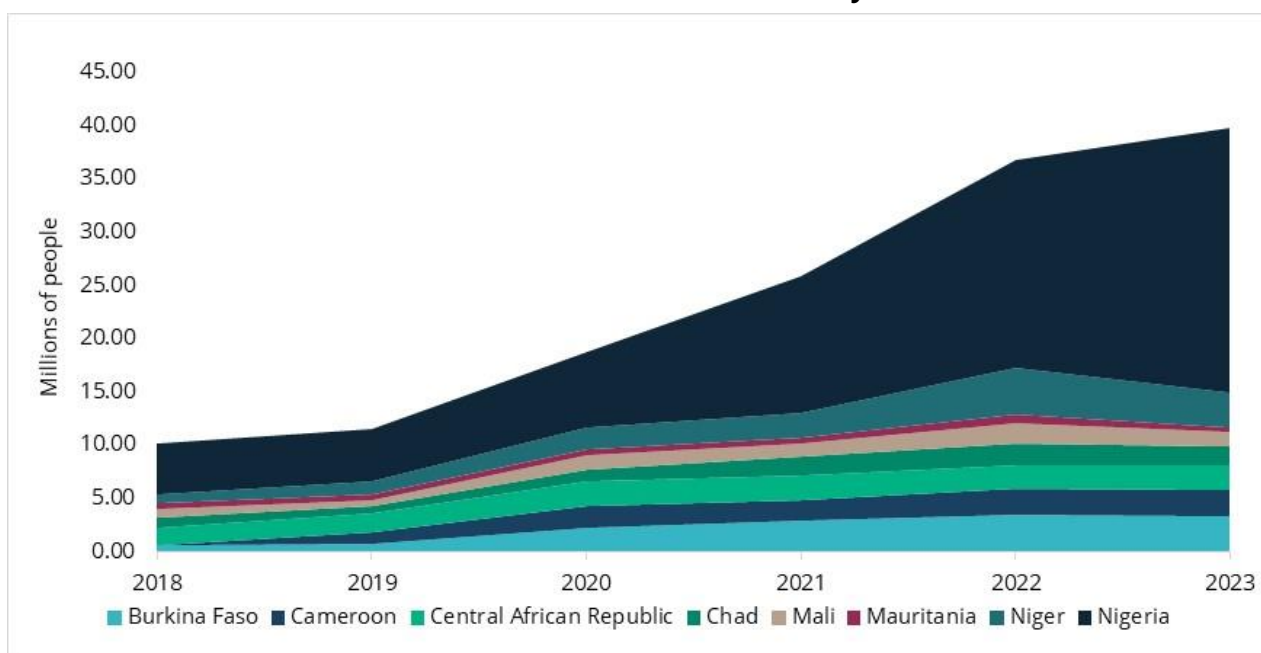
Source: IPC/CH data for 2018–2023, accessed on 8 February 2024.

WFP programmes

10.   Between 2018 and 2021, WFP – which operates in the eight countries through CSPs or interim CSPs (ICSPs) – responded to four crises classified as Level 2 emergencies and five Level 3 emergencies. Between 2022 and 2023, WFP responded to six crises designated as "corporate attention", most of which were protracted, large-scale and complex crises (see figure 2). [7]

---

[4] Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. 2024. Refugee Data Finder. Data for 2023 for Mauritania are not available.

[5] United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. 2022. *GBV AoR Response Monitoring – HRP 2023 – West and Central Africa Region (WCAR)*.

[6] FAO and others. 2023. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2023. Urbanization, agrifood systems transformation and healthy diets across the rural–urban continuum.*

[7] These classifications were introduced in Executive Director's circular OED 2023/003. Previously, crises were classified as emergency level 2 or 3.

Figure 2: Emergency classifications and CSPs in the eight countries (2018–2023)
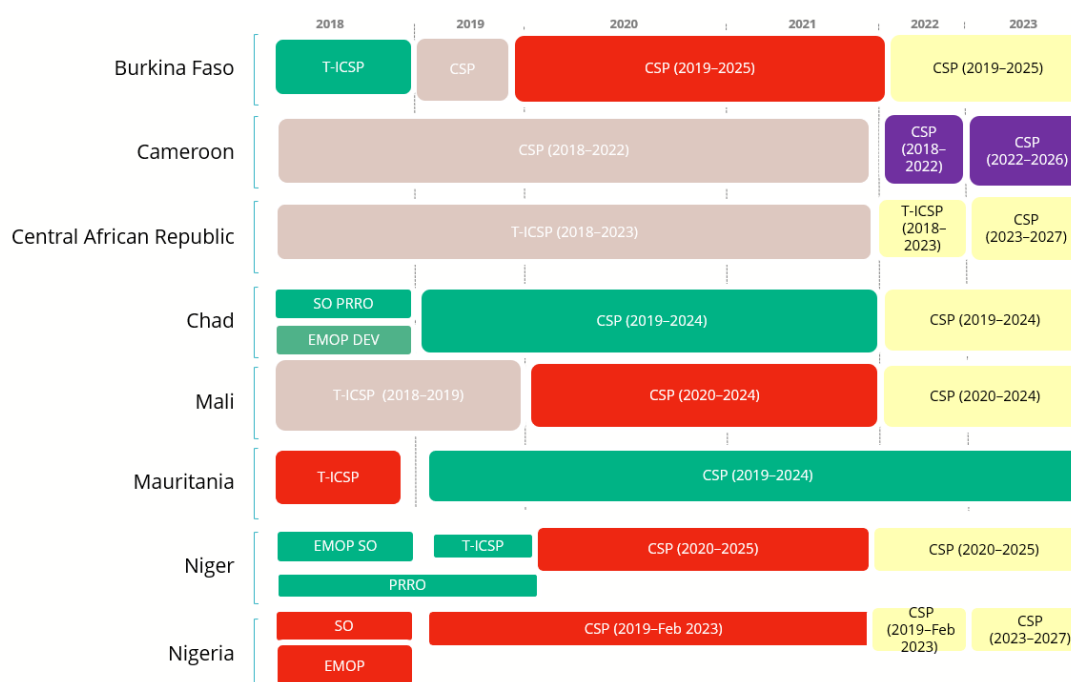
Legend: **green:** no emergency classification; **beige:** emergency Level 2 (under previous emergency protocol); **red:** emergency Level 3 (under previous emergency protocol); **yellow:** corporate attention; **purple:** early action and emergency response.

Abbreviations: DEV = development project; EMOP = emergency operation; PRRO = protracted relief and recovery operation; T-ICSP = transitional ICSP; SO = special operation.

Source: Evaluation team.

11. Over the period 2019–2023, the number of people targeted by WFP in the eight countries increased by around 74 percent[8] (from 11.2 million to 19.5 million), while needs-based plans more than doubled (from USD 1.3 billion to USD 2.7 billion) (see figure 3).

[8] WFP.2023. Data set: Country portfolio budget resources overview.

**Figure 3: Change in number of beneficiaries targeted annually and
needs-based plans in the eight countries (2018–2023)**
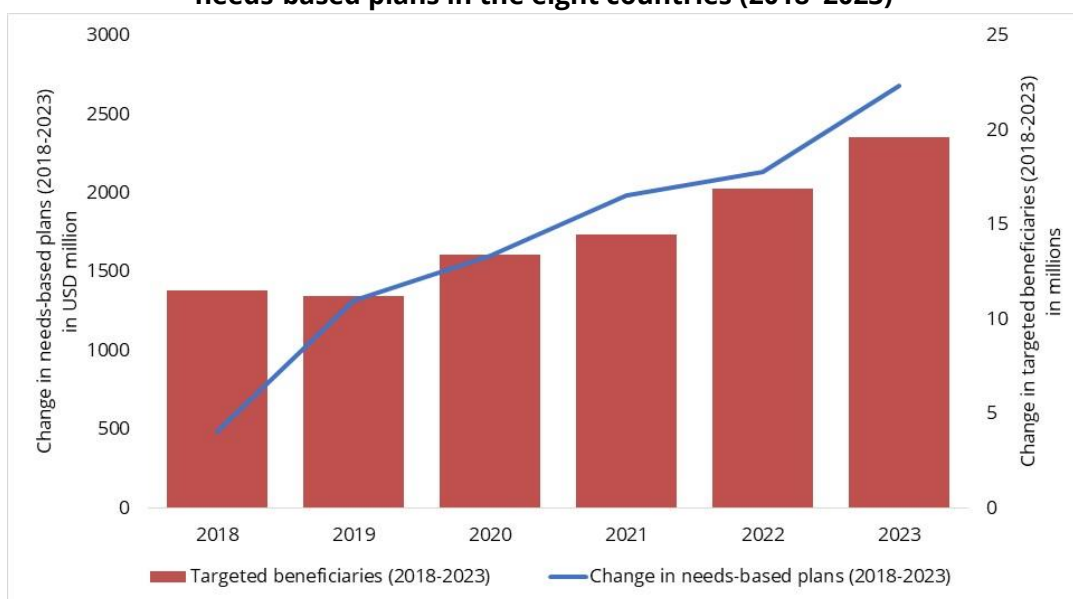
Source: COMET *CM-R01b 2018–2023* and *CPB Resource Overview Report.* Data obtained in April 2024. Data on the number of beneficiaries in 2018 are incomplete.

12.   The level of funding for all eight countries fell from 80 percent of the needs-based plans in 2018 to 43 percent in 2023, with two upticks in 2020 (73 percent) and 2022 (70 percent – see figure 4). Over 90 percent of contributions received by the eight country offices were earmarked. The amount of funds earmarked at the activity level increased by 85 percent between 2018 and 2023.

**Figure 4: Value of needs-based plans, implementation plans, allocated resources
and actual expenditure for the eight countries (2018–2023)**
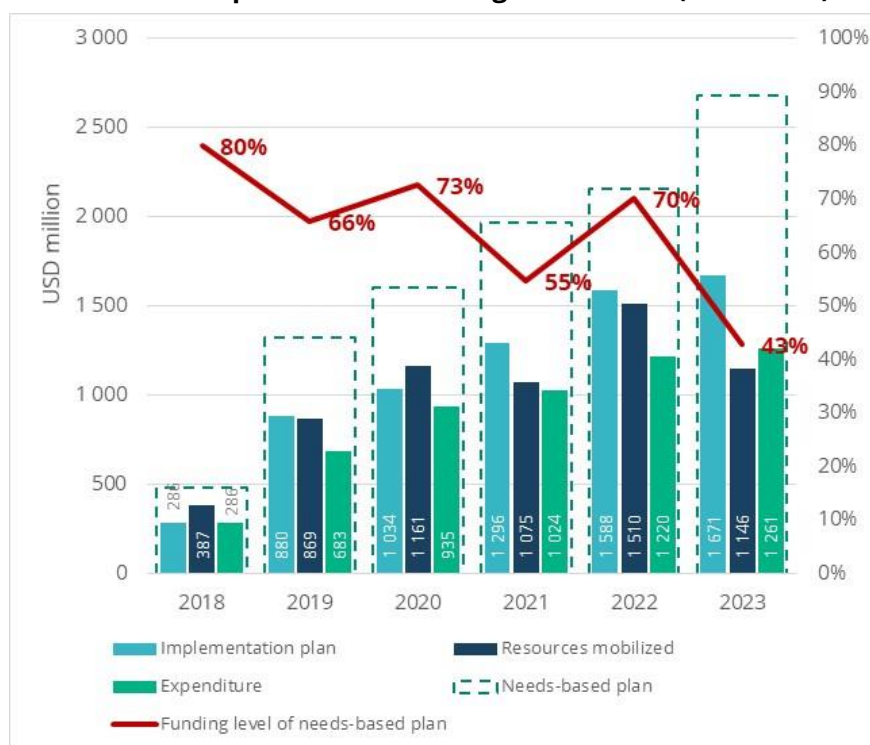
Source: CPB Resource Overview Report. Data obtained in January 2024.

13. In order to draw on a single frame of reference for all eight countries, the evaluation team reconstructed a theory of change in consultation with the regional bureau and country offices (see annex). WFP interventions are structured around five change pathways. The crisis response, national systems and humanitarian ecosystem pathways are priorities for this evaluation. The human capital and livelihoods pathways were addressed in terms of strategic and operational planning and the implementation of WFP's contribution to the humanitarian, development and peace nexus.

Evaluation findings

In a context of growing needs and funding shortfalls, to what extent has WFP endeavoured to respond to the recurrent and increasingly acute emergencies in the region in an integrated manner?

Layering and sequencing of emergency response interventions and efforts to build resilience

14. WFP has progressively increased the number of people targeted for emergency food assistance, in line with the growth in the number of food-insecure people (see figure 5). Given the inadequacy of resources mobilized (see figure 4) and the increase in the cost of operations in 2023, country offices developed strategies for prioritizing emergency interventions, which generally favoured maintaining a high level of coverage. Despite this choice, the actual coverage of WFP's response to emergency needs declined.

15. For its response to seasonal emergency needs and support for the resilience of rural households and communities, WFP has endeavoured to align with national priorities and to strengthen the geographic convergence of its activities, particularly in the Sahel. Its strategy of layering and sequencing activities is consistent with needs arising from structural vulnerability in rural Sahelian areas and with the expectations of national and local stakeholders. WFP has also mobilized its resilience package, facilitating geographic convergence and integration between different activities to contribute to shock resilience in "buffer zones" – areas without active fighting that are nonetheless affected by conflict and characterized by growing and prolonged humanitarian needs. Among the factors facilitating this work, the evaluation notes WFP's operational capacity to scale up emergency responses, as well as its acquisition of new skills that support its contribution to the humanitarian–development–peace nexus and food systems transformation.

16. However, the implementation of a strategy to integrate and layer activities is incomplete. In fact, the potential for planning and implementing multi-year resilience support strategies is undermined by the changing political and security situation and the growth in humanitarian needs, which limit the possibilities for the design and implementation of integrated activities in support of conflict-affected populations. In addition to unstable security conditions, the evaluation highlights a number of external constraints, including dependence on certain donors, increased earmarking of contributions at the activity level, a lack of sufficiently flexible multi-year funding to support the integrated resilience strategy, and unwillingness on the part of some governments to provide sustained support for the livelihoods of displaced populations. Internally, WFP is limited by its portfolio of interventions, which offers few options for supporting the resilience of populations who have restricted access to natural resources, as well as the persistence of internal organizational silos that hamper the coordination of crisis response, resilience and systems strengthening activities, which the CSP reform has not been able to eliminate.

Figure 5: Overall coherence of WFP programmes with the evolution of assessed needs[9]
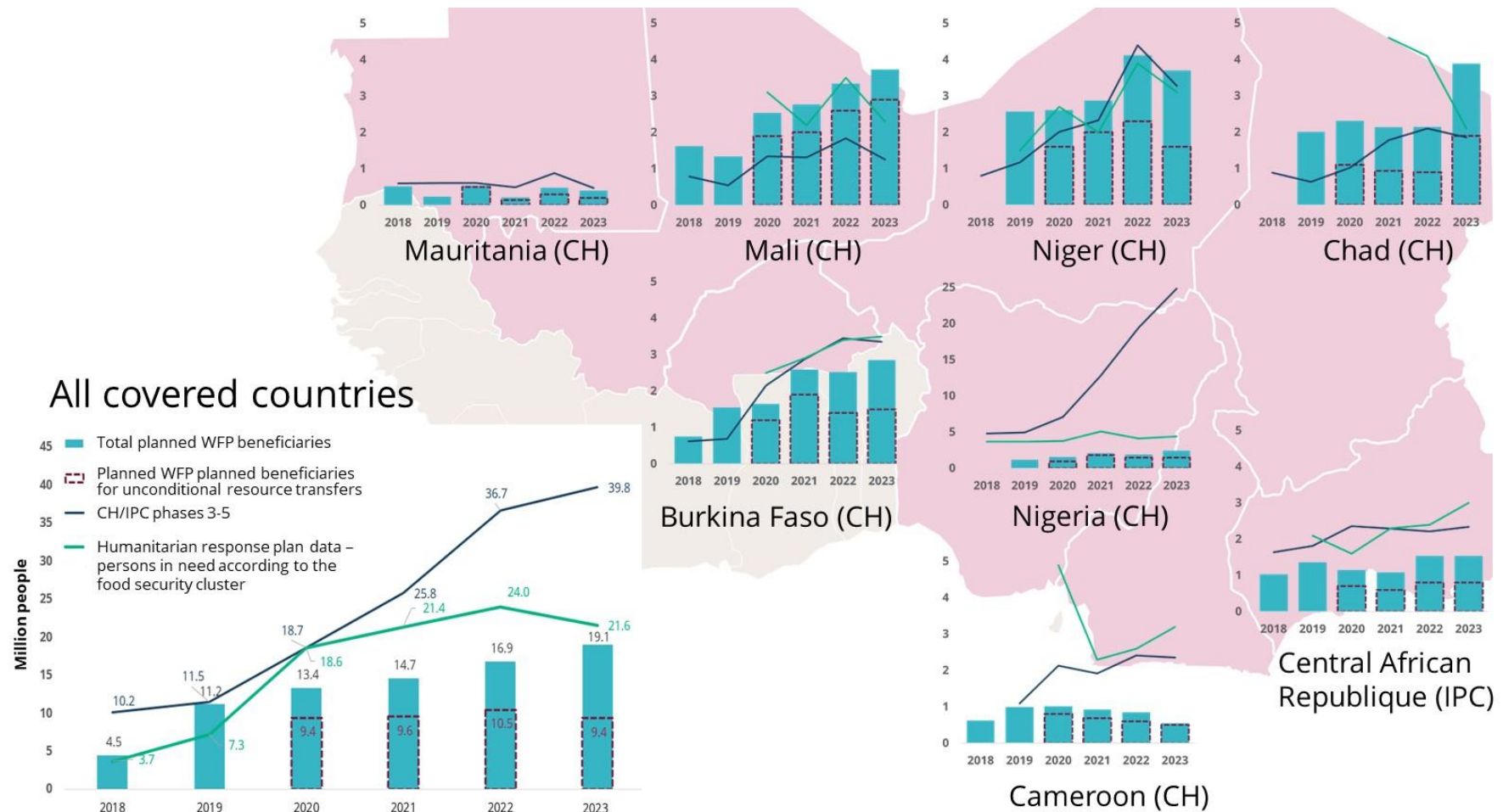
Source: WFP. 2023. COMET, CM-R022, CM-R023, CM-R024 and CM-R025. Data obtained in April 2024. IPC/CH data: https://www.foodsecurity.net et https://www.ipc.org.

The designations employed and the presentation of material in the map in figure 5 do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of WFP concerning the legal or constitutional status of any country, territory, sea area or frontier.

---

[9] Total beneficiary data for 2018 for Chad, the Niger and Nigeria and unconditional transfer beneficiary data for 2018–2019 for all countries are not available and therefore do not appear in the analysis.

Contribution to the strengthening of national emergency preparedness and response capacity and shock-responsive social protection systems

17. WFP has diversified its support, in particular its service provision, which has allowed the organization to respond to the institutional fragility in the countries. Although insufficiently based on analysis, some aspects of WFP support are appreciated by stakeholders, in particular with regard to the generation and analysis of data on food and nutrition insecurity. Other support, such as service provision (purchase and distribution of cereals), has met with mixed success. Since monitoring indicators provide little information on the quality and sustainability of support, it is difficult to assess WFP's contribution to capacity strengthening. As part of a joint programme to support social protection systems in the Sahel with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), WFP has adopted a regional approach to strengthening national social protection systems. In Mauritania, in a favourable national context and with a strong commitment from WFP, support has helped to enhance national early warning and response preparedness and planning systems by strengthening national leadership, increasing the responsiveness of the national system and supporting its coordination capacity. In many countries the scope for using national tools is limited by their lack of maturity, and WFP's strategies for supporting systems are focused entirely on alignment. Nevertheless, the case of Mauritania offers lessons for the rest of the region.

Adherence to humanitarian principles and humanitarian access in the region

18. Faced with a sharp deterioration in the security situation, WFP has adapted its work in the region since 2018, in particular by diversifying its access strategies, drawing on its legitimacy, its local networks and its logistical resources. These strategies have proved effective overall, although WFP's ability to provide assistance has been hampered in areas with a limited state presence and in landlocked zones with poor access. The regional bureau has prioritized investment in and support for access strategies and conflict sensitivity. WFP has sometimes facilitated access for other humanitarian actors. However, the division of roles between WFP and its cooperating partners is often unbalanced, particularly when it comes to access negotiations.

19. Seven of the eight countries present conflict situations that may give rise to dilemmas regarding adherence to humanitarian principles. For example, WFP's support to governments and their response strategies as part of its work on strengthening national systems could threaten its neutrality and operational independence – both actual and perceived – when these governments are party to the conflict. Limited dialogue with non-state armed groups may also, in certain contexts, risk undermining WFP's perceived neutrality, even though maintaining neutrality is a key condition for access to all affected communities.

20. Faced with these dilemmas, which affect all humanitarian actors, WFP is guided by the humanitarian principles as an operational and decision-making framework for determining which areas and populations to assist (within the limits of governments' access authorizations) and which partnerships to set up. Weaknesses emerge, however, in relation to: i) the recognition of dilemmas and the ability to take stock of them; ii) the level of guidance and control over WFP's positioning; and iii) collective thinking about solutions and the existence of internal and external platforms for discussion.

Effectiveness of WFP's interventions for affected populations

Crisis response

21. WFP assisted a large number of beneficiaries, reaching between 75 and 107 percent of those targeted. General food assistance is by far the largest part of the programme. In light of increasing funding constraints and a rise in operational costs linked to changes in the operating environment, the targets set for the volume of cash transfers and food assistance

distributed were not met (see figures 6 and 7). WFP had to prioritize the allocation of its resources to emergency response, often choosing to reduce rations or the duration of assistance in order to reach the greatest number of vulnerable people. When rations were cut, transfers did not cover the basic needs of the people targeted.

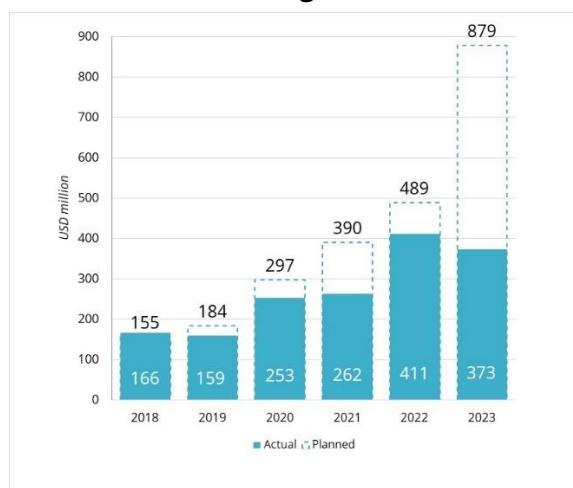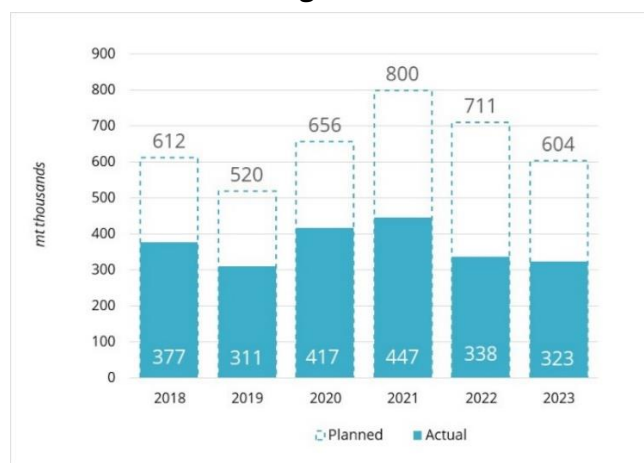**Figure 6: Planned and actual cash transfers in the eight countries**

Figure 7: Planned and actual food distributions in the eight countries

Source: WFP. 2023. COMET CM-R014_Food_and_CBT_v2.1_NEW_CRF. Data obtained in April 2024.

22.   Consequently, progress was variable on the indicators associated with the emergency response, in particular the food and nutrition security of the populations assisted, with the exception of the Niger and Mauritania where the results are more satisfactory. This trend also reflects the deterioration in the overall security and food situation, reduced access to basic services and sometimes very severe access constraints for humanitarian actors due to insecurity and political dynamics.

Strengthening human capital and improving livelihoods

23.   However, in Sahelian countries where the Sahel integrated resilience programme has been significantly scaled up, analysis of results documented through WFP monitoring systems has highlighted positive effects on food security and the reduction of household vulnerability to climate-related shocks.[10] Efforts are under way to develop a means of assessing the effects of the programme on the reduction of humanitarian needs. Initial results are promising. Several country offices have conducted or will conduct programme evaluations, and an impact evaluation in the Niger[11] highlights positive effects on household food security (more pronounced after the harvest season) and agricultural production. WFP has also endeavoured to strengthen its actions in support of early recovery and resilience and to support social cohesion in the so-called "buffer zones", which are threatened by the spread of insecurity and host a large proportion of those experiencing protracted displacement. However, the conditions necessary for implementing such strategies on a large scale are becoming more precarious in conflict-affected areas.

---

[10] WFP. 2023. *Evidence from WFP's Integrated Resilience Programme in the Sahel: Equipping Communities to Withstand Food Crises*.

[11] WFP. 2023. *Niger, Resilience Learning in the Sahel: Impact Evaluation Baseline Report*.

Strengthening the humanitarian ecosystem

24. WFP's capacity as an effective provider of common services for the collective response, notably through the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service and emergency logistics and telecommunications clusters, is widely acknowledged by its partners.

To what extent has WFP programming in the region incorporated cross-cutting concerns?

Inclusive approach

25. The regional bureau and country offices have strengthened gender mainstreaming by building internal and external capacity and making progress towards the target of ensuring that teams comprise at least 50 percent women.

26. Some programmes, especially nutrition and education programmes, have a strong focus on the specific needs of women and children, while food assistance for assets and unconditional transfers programmes incorporate gender sensitivity. Increasing women's participation, however, does not guarantee that their specific views and needs are taken into account. In addition, programming suffers from limited understanding of intra-family and conflict dynamics that could inform the design of interventions, particularly emergency interventions. As a result, opportunities to achieve a transformative effect on gender inequality through emergency response operations are underexploited.

27. Analyses in the area of inclusion that take into account constraints faced by young people, people with disabilities and people discriminated against on the basis of ethnic origin are embryonic and ad hoc. In these areas WFP has invested in its internal staff capacity but not enough in partnerships with specialized entities, sources of expertise or those directly involved with the populations concerned.

Protection and accountability to affected people

28. Since 2020, WFP has strengthened its capacity to integrate protection and accountability to affected people in terms of its tools, guidance and expertise, both internally and with its cooperating partners. Significant progress is widely recognized in the area of community feedback mechanisms, which have become more holistic, relying on several feedback channels and covering certain inaccessible areas.

29. Nevertheless, the data collected through these mechanisms tend to be used reactively rather than in a systemic way, though recent efforts on community feedback mechanisms in the region led Burkina Faso, Nigeria and other country offices to set up committees involving the programme teams to analyse monitoring data on a monthly basis. Major data protection risks have arisen in several countries, but these have been mitigated for the time being, with particular attention paid to sensitive complaints. The country offices have introduced protocols for protection against sexual exploitation and abuse, but their impact on risk management has not been measured. The level of information and participation of beneficiaries with regard to general food assistance remains insufficient. Decisions on targeting or duration of assistance are poorly understood or are communicated late. Better use could be made of innovative ways to communicate messages.

30. In addition, the eight country offices have adopted the principles of mainstreaming protection including "do no harm", developing checklists of protection measures to be taken and integrated into risk registers. More recently some country offices have carried out protection risk analyses in sensitive areas, but these analytical efforts are limited and have not yet been translated into programming.

Conflict-sensitive approach and contribution to peace

31. WFP is taking greater account of conflict sensitivity at the strategic, organizational and operational levels, in particular through specific analyses and participatory planning; this is

not systematic, however. Furthermore, WFP insufficiently draws from analyses carried out by other entities. WFP is however playing a key role in tackling crises by contributing to good governance through its support to basic services management . It also contributes to reducing the vulnerability of beneficiaries and supporting exchanges between social groups and improved resource management, thus limiting rural exodus and regional migration, a major vector of communal conflict. The evaluation notes certain short-term negative effects, in particular the prioritization of beneficiaries after registration, which sometimes creates unrest in communities and delegitimizes cooperating partners. Some stakeholders suggest that in the medium to long term aid dependency can complicate the transition to resilience activities. Negative or positive effects are not fully measured, so the benefits of "eating together" through group activities such as school canteens and the use of indirect approaches to peace building are not fully considered in programme design.

To what extent has WFP generated, used and shared data and knowledge for the benefit of affected populations in the region?

Producing and using data to inform programme strategies

32.   WFP has invested heavily in strengthening its food and nutrition security data collection systems, particularly in hard-to-reach areas, through information technology, partnerships and the strengthening of its research, assessment and monitoring teams. WFP's role in this area is seen by partners as vital, particularly in terms of providing inputs to the IPC/CH process. Some would like WFP to share data more systematically and to carry out more specific analyses to keep them informed of changes in the food security and nutrition situation.

33.   Estimates of overall needs and subsequent geographic targeting are based on analysis. In a context of increasing funding constraints, however, the use of data to prioritize programmes and beneficiaries is insufficient. Analyses of the effectiveness of targeting strategies (under way in Mali) or assessments of results differentiated by level of vulnerability (Mauritania) are interesting initiatives designed to inform context-specific decisions on the trade-offs related to targeting, prioritization and coverage.

34.   The geographic targeting carried out by WFP is generally based on solid evidence, although some actors may seek to politicize it. For household-level targeting, WFP has gradually introduced a targeting approach based on vulnerability rather than status. However, the definition of criteria sometimes suffers from a lack of detailed, intersectional analysis of food insecurity at the intra-household level. The UNHCR–WFP Joint Programme Excellence and Targeting Hub is a good example of inter-agency efforts to improve the effectiveness of targeting, particularly in Cameroon, Chad, Mauritania and the Niger.[12]

35.   WFP makes extensive use of community-based targeting to increase acceptance of the targeting process but has insufficient control over the associated risks. Meanwhile, the digitalization of registration processes for cash transfers makes it possible to improve the efficiency of targeting by reducing inclusion errors. Exclusion errors remain poorly assessed, however. Frequent confusion between targeting and prioritization undermines WFP's ability to communicate effectively with various stakeholders.

36.   The use of cash transfers has increased significantly in the region since 2018 and the modality is now being scaled up and institutionalized in all eight countries. Feasibility analyses guide the choice of modality for WFP emergency response. Unrestricted cash transfers promote financial inclusion, for women in particular. The use of cash transfers has also enabled WFP to become more agile. Barriers to the use of cash transfers increased in 2023, however, and are likely to grow in the coming years due in particular to regulatory

---

[12] WFP-UNHCR Joint Programme Excellence and Targeting Hub web page.

restrictions imposed by certain governments, the earmarking of funding for specific transfer modalities and the limited coverage of reliable financial service providers.

Anticipating future needs and risks and adapting programmes

37.   WFP has increasingly used its corporate emergency preparedness mechanisms, which have been instrumental in supporting its capacity to respond. This trend is seen in the growth in internal project lending and Immediate Response Account advances for the eight country offices between 2018 and 2022 (see figure 8).

**Figure 8: Annual allocations by advance financing mechanism
for the eight countries (2018–2023)**
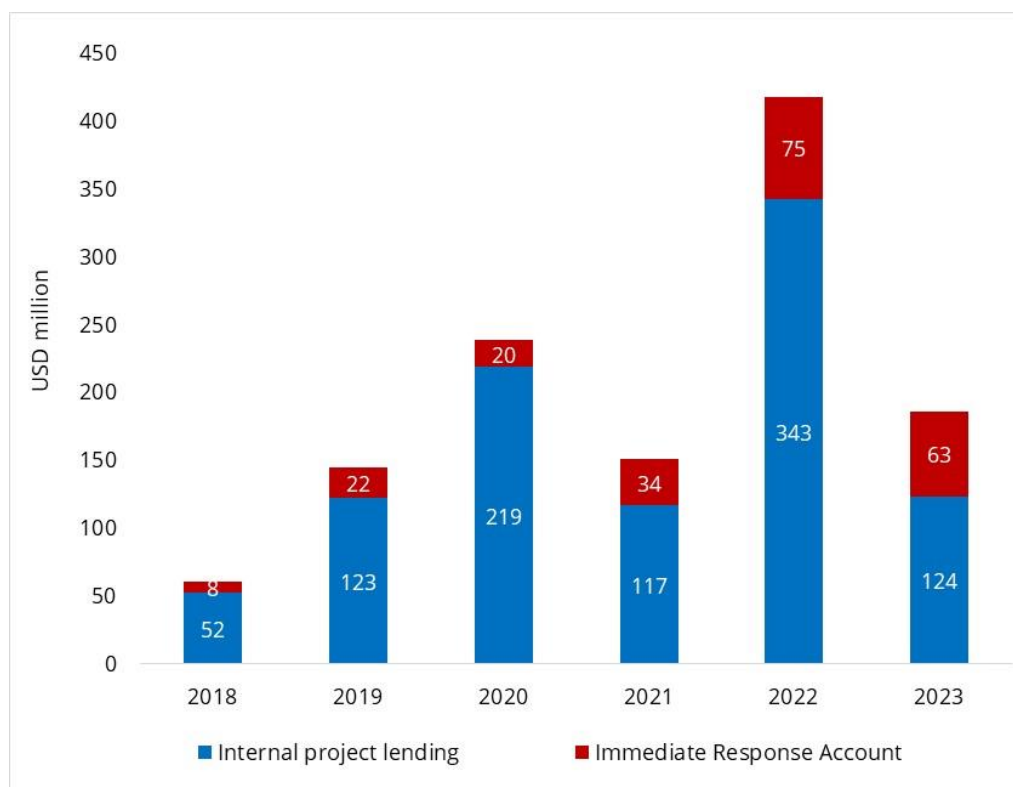
Source: WFP, Budgetary Policy and Strategic Financing Service. Data obtained in January 2024.

38.   Through its partnership with the African Risk Capacity, WFP has strengthened its early response capabilities along with those of some government partners. Given the need to address structural vulnerabilities through national policies and instruments, WFP has developed a long-term vision for future lean season responses that involves focusing its contributions to the implementation of national programmes that address needs associated with structural vulnerabilities and recurrent shocks through capacity strengthening and concentrating its own direct response on the needs of populations affected by protracted crises.

39.   The function of forecasting long-term risks is underdeveloped within WFP and suffers from a lack of clarity regarding the associated responsibilities. At the impetus of its headquarters and the regional bureau, however, WFP has begun to explore anticipatory action more systematically, supporting coordination efforts in the region and contributing to the scale up in Niger.

40.   Finally, measures to strengthen WFP's global risk management systems since 2018 have been widely applied in the eight country offices, most of which face very high levels of risk. Figure 9 below provides further detail on the main areas of risks in terms of frequency and severity for seven out of the eight countries covered by the evaluation. The very strong

support of the regional bureau within the framework of the global assurance project aimed at improving risk controls, the focus on managing aid diversion risk and the strengthening of targeting, registration, verification and reconciliation systems have all helped to clarify and refocus priorities.

Figure 9: Main areas of risk by average severity and frequency
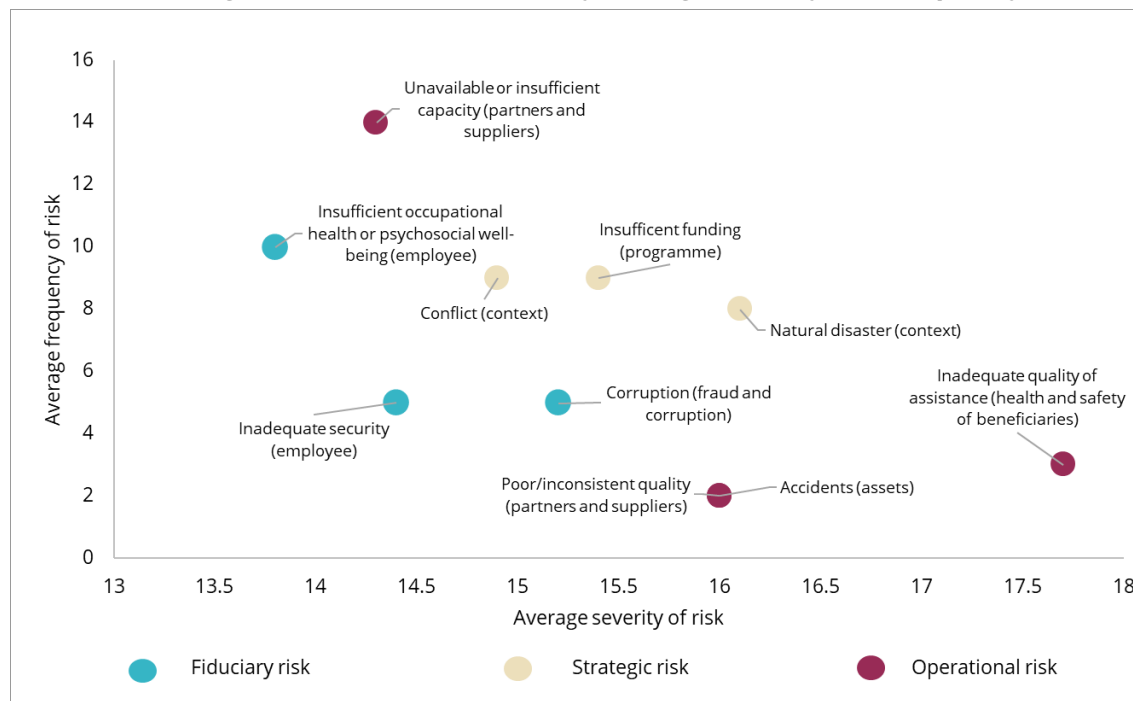
Source: WFP. 2023. Risk register synthesis for seven "high risk" countries (Mauritania is not included).

WFP regional strategies and approaches

41.   WFP has developed regional strategies and approaches covering multiple aspects of its work. They are strongly marked by the particularities of the Sahel region and the Gulf of Guinea and are structured more broadly around resilience and adaptive social protection than crisis response. They have been tailored to national contexts and are based on fruitful strategic partnerships. WFP has recently developed a regional research agenda in connection with the regional resilience strategy.

42.   While supply chains involve collaboration between countries to allow food to be imported into landlocked countries, the challenges faced for interventions in border areas are insufficiently taken into account in emergency response programmes, which reduces their pertinence. Among the factors that can address these issues, the evaluation cites partnerships with regional integration institutions and collaboration between entities facilitated by regional-level relationships. Finally, cross-border crises themselves have sparked a search for responses based on the pooling of resources between country offices to facilitate deliveries to areas cut off by insecurity or border closures.

To what extent has WFP worked in partnership to respond in a more systemic way to emergencies in the region?

Support to regional institutions

43.   WFP is involved in a variety of cooperative ventures with the actors of the Food Crisis Prevention Network and has strengthened its support, in particular for the Permanent Inter-State Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel and for the Economic Community of West African States. WFP's essential role in supporting regional institutions is recognized in terms of sharing regular and robust food and nutrition security analyses. WFP has contributed to

methodological developments in the Cadre Harmonisé and has the expertise to support its future development.

44. The strengthening of formal agreements, along with several joint advocacy initiatives, has reinforced the links between WFP and regional institutions. WFP's technical support capacity remains underutilized, however, and the organization could play a more active role in policy dialogue, given the convergence of strategic thinking with regional institutions.

45. WFP has diversified its ecosystem of financial, strategic and technical partners, with tangible results in terms of fund mobilization and the effectiveness of its emergency and resilience interventions. Partnerships with United Nations entities involved in crisis response, particularly UNHCR (Joint Programme Excellence and Targeting Hub) and UNICEF (integrated resilience strategy or adaptive social protection) have improved. These partnerships have made it possible to promote inter-agency strategic agendas and optimize WFP's emergency responses. WFP is also striving to strengthen partnerships with the United Nations Development Programme with regard to the humanitarian–development–peace nexus and has intervened as a service provider for projects supported by the World Bank within the framework of its crisis response "window". WFP has also developed a network of research partners, in particular with Sahelian universities. The regional bureau has played a key role in building these partnerships at the regional level and in supporting country office capacity.

46. Significant progress has been made in diversifying partnerships with funding institutions and the private sector. This progress needs to be qualified in view of: i) the recognized risk of country offices becoming overstretched; ii) partnership approaches that are pragmatic but sometimes considered insufficiently collaborative; and iii) staff rotation, which can hamper collaboration at times.

Working with local and national stakeholders and strengthening of their capacity

47. Partnerships with national non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which distribute a significant percentage of WFP food,[13] are a key success factor for WFP emergency operations, facilitating access and acceptance while reducing costs. Localizing aid also meets WFP's global commitments as a signatory to the Grand Bargain. Country offices have invested heavily in strengthening the capacity of national NGOs with a focus on risk management and improving service delivery rather than localization. The transfer of security-related risks is significant and at times weighs heavily on WFP's partners. In addition, the reputational and financial risks arising from partnerships with national NGOs are not always controlled, despite recent efforts and progress linked to the global assurance project. WFP's organizational framework and partnership management systems and processes, particularly financial, are still not conducive to strengthening the strategic and operational autonomy of local organizations.

Conclusions

48. Based on the findings, the evaluation drew eight conclusions about WFP's ability to prepare for and respond to crises in the eight countries.

49. **Conclusion 1: WFP responded rapidly to the many crises that caused a sharp deterioration in food and nutrition security in the region.** Among the factors that enabled WFP to scale up its emergency response, the evaluation noted the use of its corporate emergency preparedness mechanisms, its operational capacity, the diversification of its financial resources until 2022 and its leadership and responsiveness. In addition, the organization has become more agile through the evolution of its transfer modalities. As a result, WFP met or even exceeded its targets with respect to the number of

---

[13] National NGOs distributed 42 percent of WFP food over the period 2018-2023 in the eight countries.

beneficiaries it aimed to reach in the eight countries between 2018 and 2022. **Due to more acute funding shortfalls in 2023 and an increase in operational costs, WFP had to prioritize the allocation of its resources and, in order to reach the greatest number of vulnerable people, often chose to reduce rations or the duration of its emergency response activities. WFP also mobilized its capacity to support the collective response,** playing an important role in the availability of robust analysis of food and nutrition insecurity, as well as providing services to humanitarian actors and national systems. Finally, the regional bureau played a key role for country offices, providing strategic, technical and operational support.

50. **Conclusion 2: Despite WFP's effective implementation of emergency response operations, the results achieved against the associated indicators are mixed.** Notwithstanding its determination to provide a layered and sequenced response in the areas most affected by security crises, WFP often encounters challenges in effectively supporting the recovery and resilience of populations affected by security crises and conflicts. **At the same time, needs are growing beyond the capacity of regional, national and local institutions, operating environments are becoming more complex and funding is shrinking.**

51. **Conclusion 3: WFP demonstrated its ability to innovate and invest in systems to support its emergency response,** in particular with regard to the collection of food and nutrition security data, accountability to affected people, cash transfers and the digitalization of assistance. WFP has acquired new skills in order to support the implementation of the Sahel integrated resilience programme and adaptive social protection and develop a partnership with the African Risk Capacity, an innovative climate risk financing mechanism. However, not all innovations have been equally successful.

52. **Conclusion 4: WFP has had to adapt to deteriorating security situations,** where humanitarian space is shrinking and becoming politicized and where access issues are key. It diversified its access strategies, which proved effective in supporting its operations. However, WFP is walking an increasingly fine line between, on the one hand, a strong desire for partnership and support for national systems attached to governments that are sometimes parties to conflicts and, on the other, its commitment to adhering to the humanitarian principles. Faced with these dilemmas, which affect many actors, **the humanitarian principles and good practice in conflict sensitivity in programming insufficiently guide WFP's decision-making**.

53. **Conclusion 5: Over the period under evaluation, WFP organized and diversified its strategic partnerships, highlighting its added value,** in particular its ability to combine effective implementation at scale with capacity strengthening. While the current political situation is weakening regional institutions, WFP's technical support capabilities and added value are widely recognized. They remain underutilized, however, apart from food and nutrition analysis, in which it plays an essential role.

54. **Conclusion 6: Partnerships with national NGOs, a key factor in WFP's success,** must be put to greater use in the areas of protection and inclusion. Moreover, these partnerships are still too transactional and insufficiently focused on localization.

55. **Conclusion 7: WFP produces a great deal of data on food and nutrition security**, which it uses to determine the number of people and geographic areas targeted and to support advocacy and resource mobilization. **The analysis produced, however, does not sufficiently guide emergency response, work at the humanitarian–development– peace nexus or anticipatory action.** This is due to either the lack of a platform for discussion or key analyses' gaps.

56. **Conclusion 8: WFP has made significant progress in terms of accountability to affected people and gender and protection mainstreaming.** However, WFP lacks clear direction on the realistic and context-specific contribution that an emergency operation can make to gender inequality and protection issues. In addition, the cross-cutting themes of diversity and inclusion are insufficiently addressed or taken into account. Evidence on the effects of WFP emergency interventions on gender inequalities and protection as well as intersectional analysis of vulnerabilities to food insecurity would help inform such direction.

Recommendations

Recommendation	Recommendation type	Lead office or offices	Other collaborating entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
1: In a context of growing needs arising from increased conflict and political instability, combined with structural issues, the contraction of available funding requires WFP to strengthen the prioritization of the most acute needs in its emergency responses, as well as refine the design and implementation of its support to the recovery and resilience of populations affected by conflicts.	Strategic	Regional Bureau for Western Africa		High	
1.1: Support greater prioritization of the most acute needs in emergency responses, in particular by supporting: i) more dynamic vulnerability analysis; ii) more detailed analysis aiming at informing the trade-offs associated with greater prioritization of responses (see sub-recommendation 2.1); iii) country-specific versions of the prioritization guidelines developed by the regional bureau.		Regional bureau (programme and research, assessment and monitoring units)	Country offices (management, research, assessment and monitoring and programme units)	High	June 2025
1.2: In coordination with international actors (in particular other United Nations entities) and national actors, support the strengthening of the design and implementation of recovery and resilience interventions for populations with the most acute needs in areas heavily affected by security crises and conflicts.		Regional bureau (programme and research, assessment and monitoring units)	Country offices (programme unit) Headquarters (Programme Policy and Guidance Division)	High	December 2025
1.3: Encourage alignment of WFP actions with shock-responsive national social protection systems and prioritize complementarity with other stakeholders. While ensuring the protection of personal data, support existing platforms through a commitment to their development and use and provide technical support to strengthen the way in which these national systems handle issues arising from conflict, security risks and the needs of people experiencing protracted displacement.		Regional bureau (programme unit)	Country offices (programme unit) Headquarters (Programme Policy and Guidance Division)	Medium	December 2025

| Recommendation	Recommendation type	Lead office or offices	Other collaborating entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
2: In addition to the research programme associated with the integrated resilience programme and social protection, and in order to support the quality of interventions, advocacy and risk management, promote a regional research agenda focusing on emergencies, the humanitarian–development–peace nexus, anticipation, and an organizational culture of enhanced use of existing evidence.	Strategic	Regional bureau (research, assessment and monitoring unit)		High	
2.1: Promote a regional research programme, prioritizing the use of existing or regularly collected data, taking into account the circumstances of each country and focusing on crisis response and recovery.		Regional bureau (research, assessment and monitoring and regional evaluation units)	Country offices (research, assessment and monitoring and programme units) Regional bureau (programme unit) Headquarters (Programme Policy and Guidance Division; emergency preparedness and response unit)	High	December 2025
2.2: Clarify the objectives and means of anticipation (analysis of long-term trends and risks, scenario planning and forward thinking), specify the division of internal responsibilities at the regional and country levels and develop a dedicated partnership strategy.		Regional bureau (research, assessment and monitoring and programme units)	Regional bureau (management, partnerships unit) Country offices (research, assessment and monitoring and programme units) Headquarters (Analysis, Planning and Performance Division)	High	December 2025
2.3: Support the enhanced use of knowledge by systematically encouraging decision-making platforms within WFP and with cooperating partners to use WFP's research, assessment and monitoring products and by sharing information and knowledge more widely with government counterparts and other actors, particularly with a view to inform advocacy (for		Regional bureau (research, assessment and monitoring, programme and technology units)	Country offices (research, assessment and monitoring and programme units)	Medium	December 2025

Recommendation	Recommendation type	Lead office or offices	Other collaborating entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
example, on the acceptance of cash-based transfers, resource mobilization, targeting and prioritization of responses).			Headquarters (Analysis, Planning and Performance Division)		
3: In view of WFP's commitment to humanitarian principles as well as the changing operating environment and related operational and reputational risks, strengthen WFP's capacity to uphold humanitarian principles in the region and continue its efforts in securing access.	Strategic	Headquarters (Office of the Deputy Executive Director and Chief Operating Officer)		High	
3.1: Establish a protocol that allows regional bureaux and country offices to request an official position and organizational support from headquarters when handling highly sensitive and high-risk dilemmas.		Headquarters (Office of the Deputy Executive Director and Chief Operating Officer)	Regional bureau (management, risk management and programme units) Headquarters (Programme Policy and Guidance Division; Technical Access Cell)	High	June 2025
3.2: For country offices and local actors, set up a programme of learning, dialogue and support on the humanitarian principles and access negotiations at the national and regional levels drawing from WFP internal tools and guidance		Regional bureau (programme unit)	Regional bureau (security, research, assessment and monitoring and risk management units) Country offices (programme, security, research, assessment and monitoring and risk management units) Design: Headquarters (Programme Policy and Guidance Division; Office of the Deputy Executive Director and Chief Operating Officer; Technical Access Cell)	Medium	December 2025

Recommendation	Recommendation type	Lead office or offices	Other collaborating entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
4: In a context in which commitments and requirements in relation to cross-cutting issues are multiplying and becoming more complex, strengthen the approach to issues related to gender and inclusion, accountability to affected people, protection and social cohesion by promoting partnerships and building on WFP's comparative advantages.	Strategic	Regional bureau (programme unit)		High	
4.1: Fulfil WFP's ambitious commitments in relation to gender equality and protection in emergency response by supporting the operationalization of these commitments by country offices.		Regional bureau (programme unit)	Country offices (programme unit) Headquarters (Programme Policy and Guidance Division; Gender, Protection and Inclusion Service; Programme Monitoring and Reporting Service	High	December 2025
4.2: At the regional level, guide the continuation and expansion of partnerships (with other United Nations entities and local associations and bodies in the countries) for: i) pooling community feedback mechanisms where appropriate; and ii) addressing matters associated with pastoralism, gender equality, disability, young people and protection.		Regional bureau (programme unit)	Country offices (programme and research, assessment and monitoring units) Headquarters (Programme Policy and Guidance Division; Gender, Protection and Inclusion Service)	High	December 2025
4.3: Support the use of new conflict sensitivity indicators in all countries.		Regional bureau (research, assessment and monitoring unit)	Country offices (research, assessment and monitoring unit)	Medium	December 2025
5: In view of the potential political benefits and possible gains in efficiency and effectiveness, ensure that the partnership management processes defined by headquarters are compatible with WFP's global commitments in terms of localization and include objectives for empowering local actors in existing regional strategies.	Strategic	Regional bureau (programme unit)		Medium	

Recommendation	Recommendation type	Lead office or offices	Other collaborating entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
5.1: As part of the development and implementation of the localization policy, review the processes for selecting and managing WFP partnerships to ensure that they are vehicles for localization.		Headquarters (Programme Policy and Guidance Division, Delivery Assurance Service, Supply Chain and Delivery Division	Headquarters (Legal Office)	Medium	December 2025
5.2: Include in existing regional strategies objectives for empowering local stakeholders in food crisis management.		Regional bureau (programme unit)	Country offices (programme unit) Headquarters (Operational Partners Unit, under Delivery Assurance Service, Supply Chain and Delivery Division)	Medium	June 2026
6: In an area where regional integration institutions play a recognized role, broaden the scope of WFP's support for the response strategies, mechanisms and instruments used by these institutions to prevent and manage food and nutrition crises.	Strategic	Regional bureau (management, research, assessment and monitoring, supply chain and programme units)	Headquarters (Programme Policy and Guidance Division, Supply Chain Delivery Division) Country offices (Nigeria, Niger and Burkina Faso)	Medium	December 2025

ANNEX

Simplified theory of change
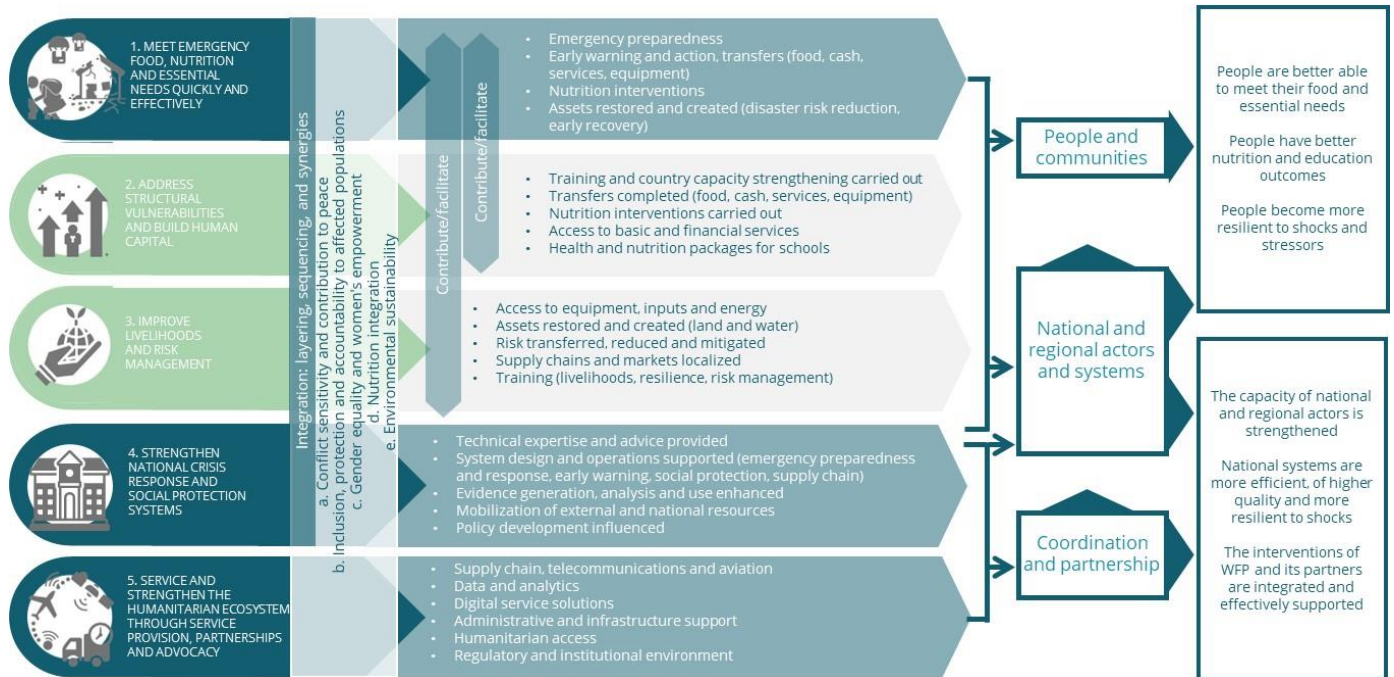
Source: Evaluation team in consultation with the regional bureau and country offices.

List of acronyms used in the present document

CH	Cadre Harmonisé
CSP	country strategic plan
ICSP	interim country strategic plan
IPC	Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
NGO	non-governmental organization
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund