



WFP EVALUATION



World Food Programme

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Evaluation of Tajikistan WFP Country Strategic Plan 2019-2024

Centralized evaluation report – Volume I

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Executive summary

INTRODUCTION

Evaluation features

1. Country strategic plan (CSP) evaluations are the main instrument for accountability and learning with regard to CSPs in accordance with the expectations of the WFP Executive Board and WFP management. They provide evidence of WFP's strategic positioning and results to inform the design of the next generation of CSPs and potentially to contribute to the design of United Nations sustainable development cooperation frameworks.
2. The evaluation covered the Tajikistan CSP for 2019–2024 together with the transitional interim CSP (T-ICSP) for 2018–2019 and was conducted between June 2021 and April 2022. The timing of the evaluation took into consideration the planned revision of the CSP and its budget, which provides for the CSP to end in December 2022.¹ It covered WFP's activities from 2018 to September 2021, assessing the quality of the activity design process, and progress towards strategic changes introduced in the CSP. Its main users are the WFP country office and internal and external stakeholders, including beneficiaries. The results of the evaluation informed the preparation of a new CSP for Tajikistan.
3. The evaluation adopted a theory-based mixed-methods approach, drawing on monitoring data, a literature review, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions with beneficiaries, site observations and an online survey. A gender approach was applied throughout the process. Because of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, the evaluation was conducted through a hybrid approach. The inception phase was conducted entirely remotely, while data collection included a mix of remote interviews and in-country field missions. Findings, conclusions and recommendations were discussed with internal and external stakeholders during two online workshops in January 2022.

Context

4. Tajikistan is a low-income, highly remittance dependent country with a population of 9.5 million.² Tajikistan is ranked in the “medium” human development category and in 2015 achieved lower-middle-income status; declining economic progress since then, however, led to its reclassification as a low-income country in 2018.³ The COVID-19 pandemic further slowed economic growth and together with reduced remittances reduced the prospects for poverty alleviation.⁴
5. The people of Tajikistan are more affected by hunger and malnutrition than are people in other Central Asian countries, and the number of households unable to afford quality nutritious diets has substantially increased during the COVID-19 pandemic.^{5, 6, 7}
6. Tajikistan's relative economic exposure to natural hazard losses and climate change is particularly high, as shown by extreme weather events such as floods, droughts, avalanches and landslides.⁸

¹ Budget Revision 03 to the Tajikistan CSP was approved in July 2022. The rationale for the budget revision was to reduce the duration of the existing CSP by eighteen months to align with the cycle of the UNSDCF 2023-2027 for Tajikistan.

² World Bank, [World Development Indicators \(WDI\) database](#).

³ United Nations Development Programme. 2020. [Human Development Report 2020. The next frontier: Human development and the Anthropocene](#).

⁴ World Bank. 2020. [Poverty in Tajikistan 2020](#).

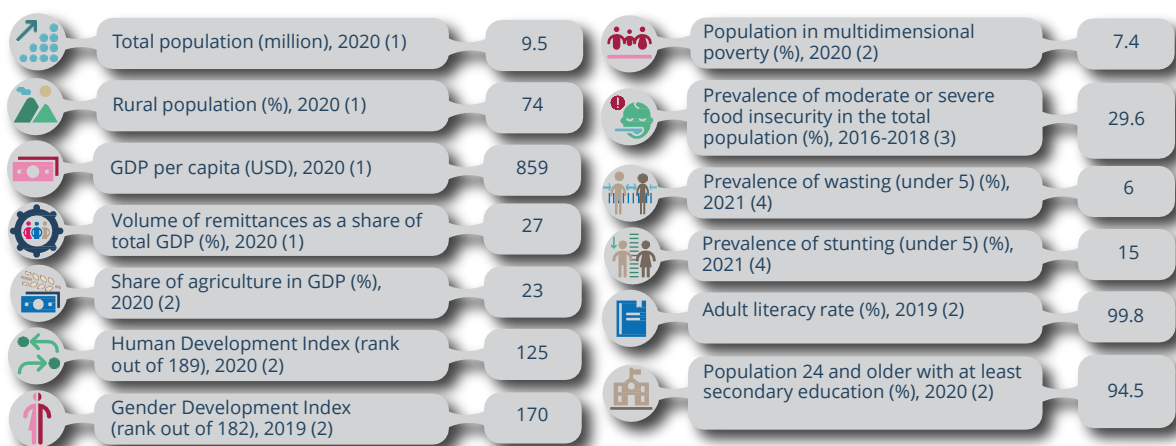
⁵ Global Hunger Index. 2021. [Tajikistan](#).

⁶ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and WFP. 2021. [Special Report 2020 FAO/WFP Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission \(CFSAM\) to the Republic of Tajikistan](#).

⁷ WFP. 2018. [Fill the Nutrient Gap Tajikistan: Summary Report](#).

⁸ Committee of Emergency Situations. 2021. [Overview of Emergency Situations in the Republic of Tajikistan for 2020](#).

Figure 1: Tajikistan socioeconomic indicators⁹



Sources: (1) World Bank, [World Development Indicators \(WDI\) database](#) and [country databank](#); (2) United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Reports 2019* and *2020*; (3) Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2019*; and (4) United Nations Children's Fund, *The State of the World's Children 2021*.

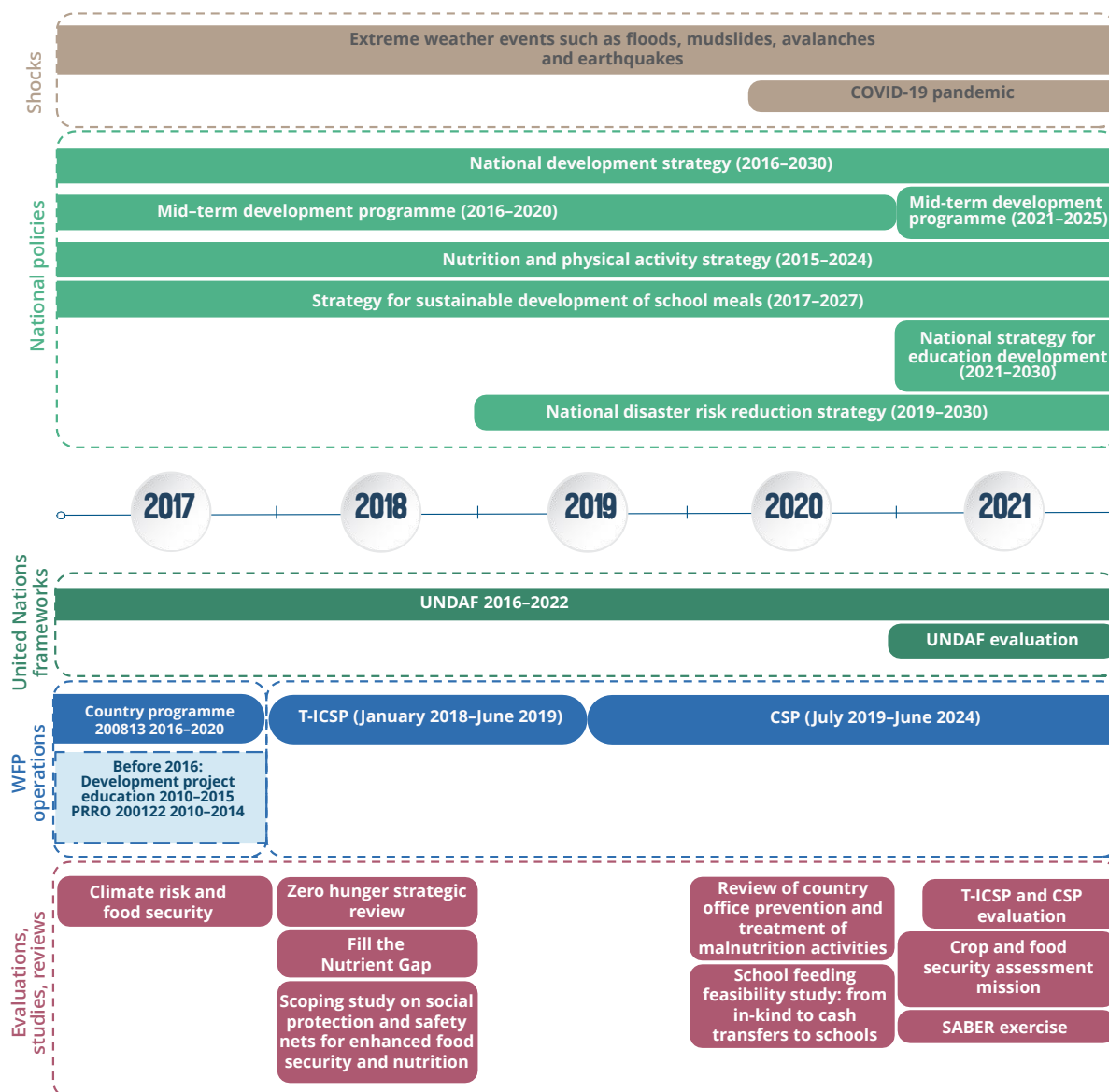
WFP country strategic plans

7. WFP's work in Tajikistan began in 1993 with an emergency operation during the country's civil war. The T-ICSP for 2018–2019 was focused on school feeding, food assistance for tuberculosis patients, treatment of moderate acute malnutrition (MAM), social and behaviour change communication (SBCC), asset creation, livelihood activities, disaster risk reduction and emergency preparedness. The CSP for 2019–2024 continued most of the T-ICSP activities supporting the achievement of sustainable development goal (SDG) 2 and in addition contributed to progress towards achieving SDG 17 through strategic outcome 4 on country capacity strengthening (CCS). While CSS activities were embedded in all strategic outcomes in the T-ICSP, the CSP grouped most of them under one dedicated strategic outcome with more substantial resources, reflecting WFP's strategic shift from direct implementation to enabling national and subnational institutions to design and deliver on their social protection and food security and nutrition priorities.

8. The T-ICSP was designed around four strategic outcomes and five activities, while the CSP was structured around five strategic outcomes and six activities. In order to better respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and with a view towards joint business operations among United Nations entities, the current CSP was revised to include a new crisis response strategic outcome (strategic outcome 5) and a new related activity. Activity modalities include cash-based transfers (CBTs), food transfers, capacity strengthening and service delivery.

⁹ The socioeconomic indicators have been updated to reflect the latest available data at the time of preparation of this summary evaluation report preparation in June 2022.

Figure 2: Country context and WFP operational overview of Tajikistan (2017–2021)



Source: Prepared by the Office of Evaluation based on the full report on the evaluation of the 2019–2024 CSP for Tajikistan.

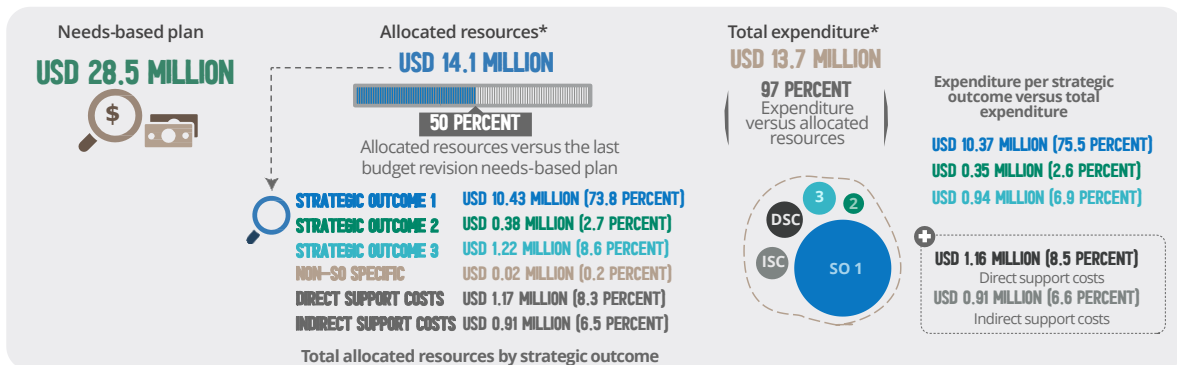
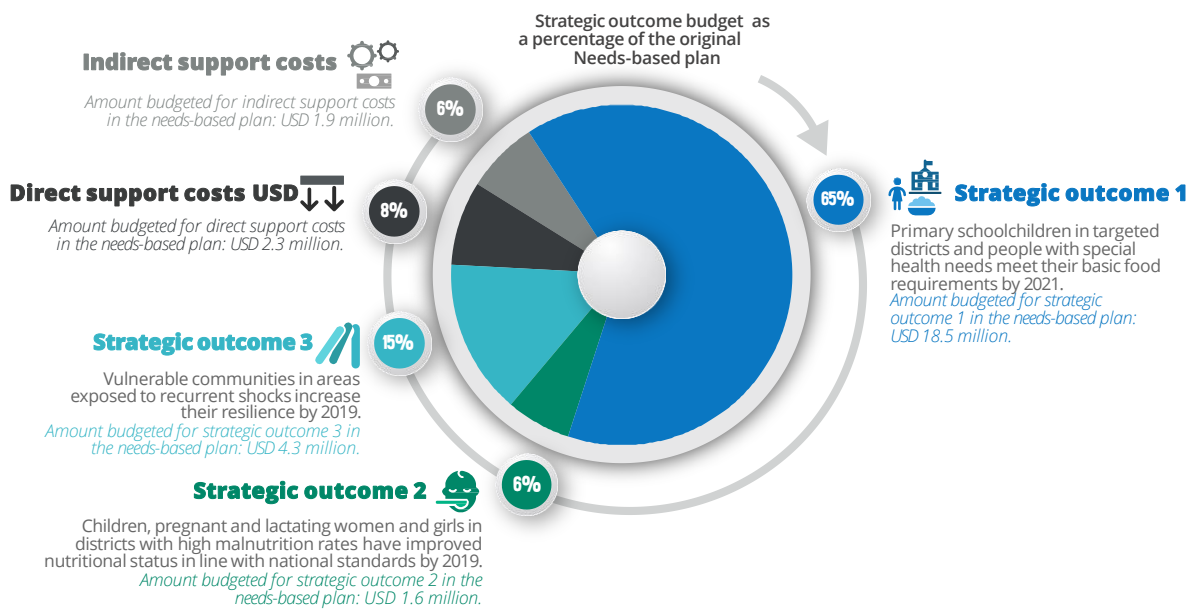
Abbreviations: PRRO = protracted relief and recovery operation; UNDAF = United Nations development assistance framework.

9. The T-ICSP had a total budget of USD 28,463,468 and a goal of reaching 539,550 direct beneficiaries through food and CBTs during its 18-month duration. The CSP budget was USD 82.04 million over five years for 933,900 direct beneficiaries through food and CBTs; the budget and number of direct beneficiaries were increased to USD 84,918,367 and 963,400 beneficiaries in September 2020 through the first revision of the CSP.

10. Total funding over the life of the T-ICSP was 50 percent of the budgeted amount. As of September 2021, 44 percent of the CSP budget (as revised) had been raised and allocated, and 47 percent of allocated resources had been spent.¹⁰

¹⁰ A second revision of the CSP and its budget introduced a new crisis response strategic outcome 6 and two new activities (7 and 8) in December 2021 while at the same time increasing the needs-based plan to USD 103,333,791 and planned beneficiary numbers to 1,051,713. These changes are beyond the scope of the CSP evaluation because they were introduced and implemented after data collection for the evaluation concluded in September 2021.

Figure 3: Tajikistan T-ICSP (2018–2019) strategic outcomes, budget,

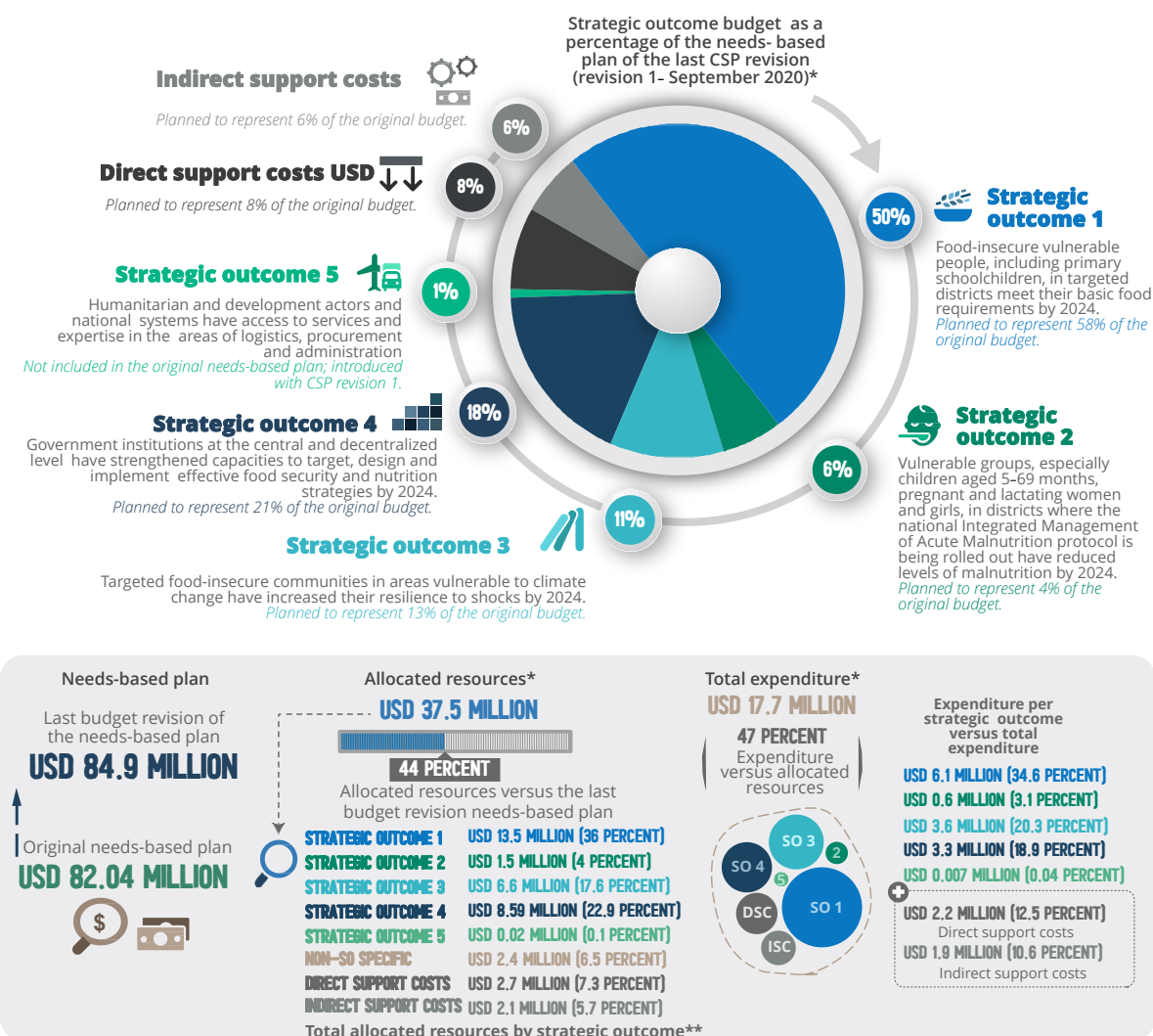


* Allocated resources and expenditures figures are cumulative, covering the period January 2018-June 2019.

funding and expenditures

Sources: 2018 and 2019 Tajikistan annual country reports.

Figure 4: Tajikistan CSP (2019–2024) strategic outcomes, budget, funding and expenditures

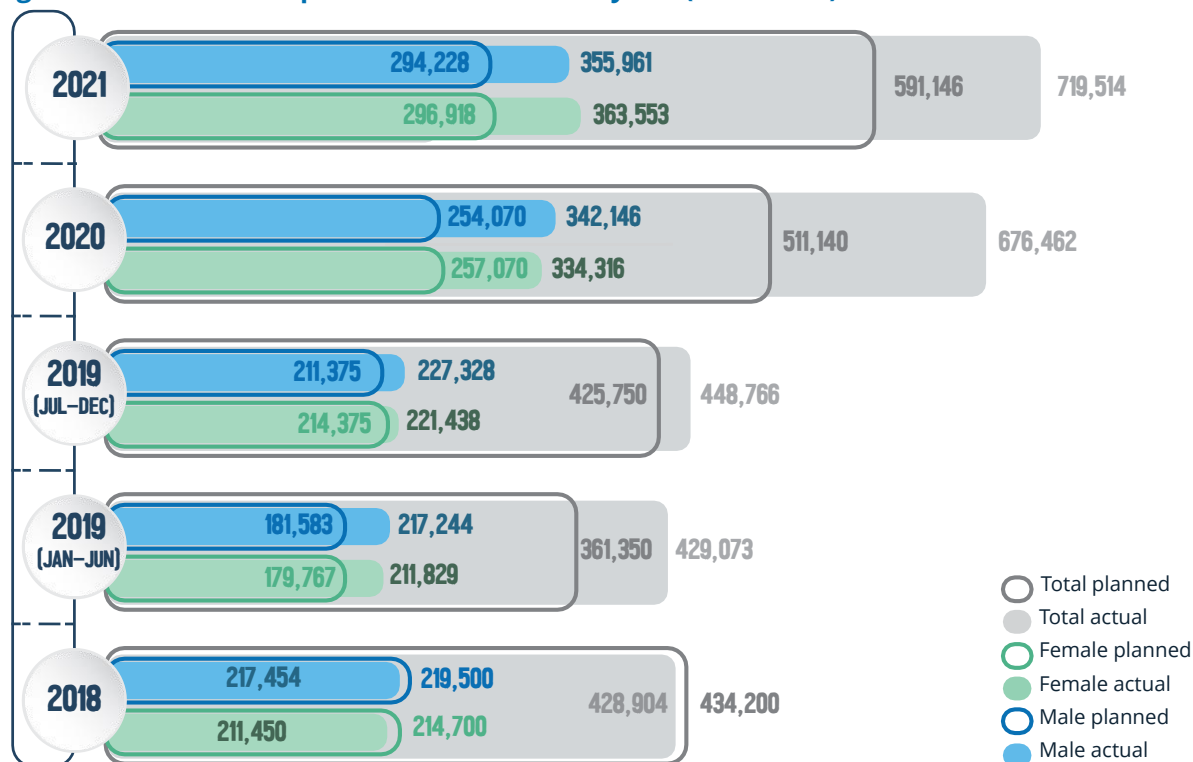


* Allocated resources and expenditures figures are cumulative, covering the period July 2019–September 2021.
 ** Allocated resources by strategic outcome do not add up to USD 37.5 million because resources were also allocated to non-strategic-outcome-specific purposes (USD 2.4 million), as well as to direct (USD 2.7 million) and indirect support costs (USD 2.1 million).

Sources: 2018–2020 Tajikistan annual country reports and Tajikistan country office for 2021 figures.

11. Apart from the first year under the T-ICSP, actual beneficiary numbers exceeded planning figures. For strategic outcomes 1 and 2 annual beneficiary planning figures were exceeded throughout 2018–2021. The number of actual beneficiaries receiving food under strategic outcome 3 was well below the target, while CBT beneficiaries exceeded targets under the CSP. School feeding beneficiaries constituted 90 percent or more of all beneficiaries across the review period.

Figure 5. Actual versus planned beneficiaries by sex (2018–2021)



Sources: 2018–2020 Tajikistan annual country reports and Tajikistan country office for 2021 figures.

EVALUATION FINDINGS

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

Relevance and alignment

12. The T-ICSP and CSP are relevant and well aligned with Tajikistan’s national development and sector priorities relating to food security and nutrition, education and disaster risk reduction. The country strategic plans are consistent with national SDG priorities and targets, particularly under SDGs 2 and 17. WFP’s contribution to SDG 4 is less evident in the context of almost universal primary school enrolment, but school feeding is seen as an important contributor to school attendance, in particular for girls, and thus also contributes to SDG 5.

Addressing the needs of the most vulnerable

13. The design of the T-ICSP and the CSP was informed by a scoping study on social protection, a Fill the Nutrient Gap analysis and a zero hunger review.¹¹ Extensive consultations with the Government, United Nations entities, cooperating partners and donors also helped to ensure that activities were responsive to the needs of the most vulnerable in food insecure and climate disaster prone areas. However, there was less evidence of consultations at the subnational level and with beneficiaries.

Strategic positioning

14. WFP is a key actor in food security, nutrition and resilience building activities. The implementation of flexible strategies allowed WFP to adapt to evolving local circumstances and ensure the continued relevance of its activities, as showcased by its response to COVID-19 and other emerging crises, including an

¹¹ WFP/UNU-MERIT/Maastricht University. 2018. *Scoping Study on Social Protection and Safety Nets for Enhanced Food Security and Nutrition in Tajikistan*; WFP. 2018. *Fill the Nutrient Gap Tajikistan: Summary Report*; Innovation Development Centre Republic of Tajikistan, 2018. *Republic of Tajikistan Country Strategic Review: Food Security and Nutrition*.

earthquake and floods. Despite its strong emphasis on CCS, WFP's role in humanitarian activities was more prominent.

Coherence and alignment with the United Nations cooperation framework

15. WFP interventions are well aligned and coherent with the United Nations development assistance framework and the organization has built strategic partnerships with other United Nations entities and development partners, utilizing its comparative advantage in Tajikistan.

16. There is need to further strengthen partnerships between United Nations agencies in the areas of school feeding and nutrition, building on each agency's capacities and comparative advantage. The United Nations Strategic Framework for Nutrition adopted by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Children's Fund, the World Health Organization and WFP in July 2021 constitutes a first step in that direction.

What are the extent and quality of WFP's contribution to country strategic plan outcomes in Tajikistan?

17. **Strategic outcome 1: School feeding** – The CSP was aimed at providing nutritionally-balanced school meals to children under strategic outcome 1. The school feeding programme is recognized as an important social protection mechanism, but its implementation was impeded by funding shortages and delays. WFP responded by maintaining coverage while reducing ration size and providing a less nutritious food basket, reasoning that local government entities and parent-teacher associations would complement WFP rations. While these important financial and in-kind contributions improved programme results and bode well for the future transition to a government- and potentially community-owned school feeding programme, available information does not allow assessment of the extent to which children received daily nutritionally-balanced meals.

18. Take-home rations provided to the most vulnerable families of schoolchildren in response to the COVID-19 pandemic were timely and are an example of the successful use of the school feeding programme as a shock-responsive safety net. However, the intervention was marked by an inclusion error whereby school management committee members benefited in addition to the targeted low-income households.

19. **Strategic outcome 2: Nutrition** – Strategic outcome 2 was aimed at reducing malnutrition in vulnerable groups by treating MAM in children age 6–59 months and implementing malnutrition prevention activities using SBCC while building the Government's capacity to manage nutrition programmes. The MAM treatment activity achieved high recovery rates through the provision of specialized nutritious foods coupled with nutrition counselling and SBCC and by strengthening the capacity of primary healthcare centre staff in the management of MAM. While beneficiary and commodity planning for MAM treatment assumed a treatment duration of four months, in line with Tajikistan's protocol for the integrated management of acute malnutrition, the actual treatment duration turned out to be shorter in many cases. This allowed coverage to be increased to include more beneficiaries, including beneficiaries in an additional district in 2018.

20. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, WFP in coordination with the Ministry of Health and Social Protection introduced a monthly (instead of weekly) supplementary food ration to minimize patient traffic in primary healthcare facilities, while caretakers were trained in at-home treatment monitoring.

21. A SCOPE CODA¹² pilot with primary healthcare medical staff and communities, facilitating digital registration and management for MAM treatment beneficiaries, faced implementation challenges because the system required continuous technical support and maintenance and because access to the internet was less than optimal in remote areas.

22. **Strategic outcome 3: Asset creation and resilience** – Under strategic outcome 3 WFP carried out climate adaptation, asset creation and livelihood activities aimed at fostering resilience in food-insecure communities and areas vulnerable to climate change and conducted early response activities in response to small-scale disasters. WFP's relief support through food assistance for assets (FFA) has had beneficial effects for targeted populations while remaining small in scope, partially due to delays in initiation of a

¹² SCOPE CODA is WFP's beneficiary and transfer management platform for tracking, monitoring and reporting on the MAM treatment process.

Green Climate Fund project. Where implemented, interventions resulted in improved food consumption and coping capacity and enhanced community infrastructure despite the negative socioeconomic impact of COVID-19. However, in some communities the sustainability of the community infrastructure was somewhat hindered by a lack of local governance mechanisms for asset maintenance.

23. **Strategic outcome 4: Capacity strengthening** – Strategic outcome 4 was focused on strengthening the capacity of government institutions and schools to implement social protection programmes and on providing policy advice and technical assistance to public institutions and private sector stakeholders involved in advocating and implementing food security and nutrition programmes.

24. WFP proactively supported the development of national policies, in particular those focusing on and ensuring the integration of school feeding and nutrition priorities into social protection, health and education,¹³ and facilitated the development and adoption of a resolution on the procurement procedure for school feeding in October 2019. WFP has been advocating the establishment of multisectoral coordination councils at the subnational level in order to facilitate the mainstreaming of school feeding into district development programmes, and a school feeding centre is being established in the Ministry of Education and Science. Parent-teacher associations are actively engaged in school feeding implementation, providing in-kind or financial support for school meals, but their contributions are variable and not yet formalized, and communities are rarely sufficiently engaged in deciding, managing and monitoring school menus and their quality. In order to develop a plan for sustainable resourcing, WFP recently proposed a public financing mechanism for school feeding.

25. School feeding policy changes are the most substantial achievement thus far, although their operationalization is still pending, and the selection of some policy alternatives has been directly attributed to WFP. The transition of the school meals programme and its handover to the Government has made slow progress since 2018, with further setbacks due to COVID-19 in 2020, despite sustained advocacy, policy dialogue and technical support efforts by WFP.

26. WFP's efforts to strengthen country capacity to target, design and implement effective nutrition strategies and effective emergency preparedness and disaster risk reduction strategies are only emerging, which results in modest outcome level results to date. WFP contributed to the development and adoption of the food fortification law and is undertaking assessments to facilitate its implementation.

27. Despite increasing investment in more upstream CCS work, operationalization of CCS efforts has been slow and focused on the central Government, with some limited and fragmented engagement at the subnational level. Although there have been tangible achievements in school feeding policy and the development of an enabling environment for food fortification, the evaluation found that in other thematic areas WFP's CCS contributions were mainly visible at individual and partially at the organizational levels. Overall WFP's profile is still more focused on direct implementation, and the organization is not yet perceived as an actor with CCS capacity in areas other than school feeding, where its position is visible and strong.

28. **Strategic outcome 5: Crisis response** – Strategic outcome 5 was added through the first revision of the CSP and its budget, which provided for on-demand service provision to government institutions, development actors and other partners in response to COVID-19, in addition to direct support for affected communities reported under other strategic outcomes. WFP's service provision (protective equipment, flights) was found to be appropriate and effective.

Cross-cutting aims: Humanitarian principles, protection, disability, accountability to affected populations, gender and equity considerations

29. WFP consistently applied humanitarian and protection principles in its activities. While WFP regularly informs beneficiaries about its activities and has implemented a community feedback mechanism since 2019, the evaluation noted some shortcomings in terms of the depth and breadth of consultations with affected populations, in particular for FFA activities.

¹³ These include the national strategy for education development for 2021–2030 and its mid-term action plan, covering 2021–2023; the national mid-term development programme for 2021–2025; and the national health and welfare strategy for 2021–2030. WFP is currently facilitating the work of a task force established by the interministerial coordination council with WFP impetus for the development of a national school meals policy/action plan.

30. Gender principles, gender equality and women's empowerment are reflected in the T-ICSP and CSP design, with evidence of their mainstreaming also in implementation. WFP's advocacy and awareness-raising efforts, both centrally and locally, include attention to gender and equity issues. However, WFP has done little to conduct more targeted training for women on climate change issues or resilience building or to invest in fostering women's participation not just in implementation or as beneficiaries of assistance but also in decision making processes.

31. Disability was considered as a targeting criterion for the second round of school feeding take-home rations in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. WFP's disability focus, however, was erratic and not consistently mainstreamed in the design or implementation of interventions.

32. WFP has taken environmental considerations into regard through environmental screenings for its asset creation activities, in-office energy and water saving and monitoring of greenhouse gas emissions to reduce its environmental footprint.

Sustainability

33. The demand-driven approach of the CSP helped deliver positive output level results. The evaluation found ample evidence of government ownership of results and programmes implemented by WFP.

34. Moderate prospects for sustainability were noted with regard to nutrition and resilience building. There is a need for more systematic efforts to integrate sustainability measures into FFA activities, as is evident by the persistent difficulty that communities have in sustainably managing and maintaining community assets created through these activities.

35. Sustainability prospects for school feeding are more promising. WFP engaged intensively with government institutions to establish sustainability mechanisms for the school feeding programme; the scale-up of this programme, however, is still vulnerable to many factors, notably financial and human resource availability. A restrained fiscal environment is expected to have repercussions for the transition to full national ownership of the school feeding programme

Humanitarian-development nexus

36. The T-ICSP and CSP do not include explicit strategic links between humanitarian and development work, although both were targeted in efforts to integrate CCS interventions. While WFP's shift to strengthening national and local systems to provide transparent and accessible essential services is relevant, progress remains slow within and outside WFP's activities in Tajikistan. WFP is still seen primarily as a leader in humanitarian assistance rather than CCS.

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

Timeliness

37. Resource allocation and timeliness in the implementation of activities and delivery of outputs was suboptimal across all thematic areas. This was mostly due to delays in funding and lengthy approval processes for new projects, most of which was beyond WFP's control. From 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic caused the cancellation, alteration or postponement of activities as well as some supply chain disruptions, with the impact of the latter partially mitigated by the distribution of fortified wheat flour to schools.

Appropriateness of coverage and targeting

38. While school feeding coverage and targeting were informed by food security assessments at the onset of the school feeding programme, targeting was not updated by a comprehensive situation analysis during the design of the CSP. Likewise targeting for nutrition interventions was appropriate but required updating, considering that more cases of malnutrition were reported in regions not covered by WFP activities since 2017. The coverage of nutrition interventions remained small-scale in relation to needs due to financial limitations.

39. Targeting in WFP's FFA interventions was needs-based and overall adequate, but the evaluation found an uneven approach to consultations with affected populations in the emergency response initiatives.

40. CCS activities focused almost entirely on central government institutions; CCS engagement at the subnational level was narrow, limited to some schools or primary healthcare centres, and was undertaken without a systematic plan of engagement.

Cost efficiency

41. WFP's activities were implemented relatively cost-efficiently, and cost per beneficiary was lower than planned. MAM treatment activities resulted in lower cost per beneficiary because the duration of treatment in many cases turned out to be shorter than originally planned, allowing for an increase in coverage. The lower cost per beneficiary in school feeding was related to the reduced ration provided by WFP, the impact of which was partially mitigated by the supplementation of school meals through parent-teacher associations. Using bank transfers for CBTs resulted in cost-efficiencies.

Alternative cost-effectiveness measures

42. WFP worked with the Government on potentially more cost-effective alternatives to Super Cereal Plus and embarked on a feasibility study for wheat flour fortification and local production of a specialized nutritious food.

43. WFP conducted a feasibility assessment for CBTs as an alternative modality for school feeding, and the country office is considering linking schools to women's agricultural production groups, which, it is assumed, will in the future be able to provide school meals more cost-effectively.

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

Evidence-based programming and results-based management

44. The T-ICSP and CSP design, implementation and adaptation were informed by WFP-led studies and other analyses. The design and implementation of CCS, however, was affected by a lack of systematic needs assessment and definition of capacity strengthening needs.

45. The evaluation found gaps in the logic of intervention, particularly in the case of resilience building activities. Moreover, shortcomings in the CCS monitoring framework limited WFP's ability to demonstrate contributions to national capacity.

Adequate, predictable, and flexible resources

46. In the implementation of the T-ICSP and the CSP in its early years, overreliance on a narrow donor base in combination with conditions imposed by those donors relating to food procurement and service provider contracting affected programme implementation. Since 2020 the country office has achieved more diversification of its donor base.

47. Multi-year contributions allowed the country office to plan activities adequately. The evaluation found that under the school feeding programme community resource mobilization was well organized and that the programme benefited from private sector resources.

Partnerships

48. WFP is a flexible and open partner to other United Nations entities, the Government and other development actors in Tajikistan and an active member of United Nations thematic groups while leading the coordination of the cash transfer working group in cooperation with the United Nations Children's Fund and co-chairing the food security and nutrition working group under the Development Coordination Council.

49. WFP's engagement with the Government is strong and based on a long-term partnership. The Government values WFP's efficiency and timely support at times of crisis and its open and consultative processes. However, the engagement with the Government often happened in silos, thus diminishing the potential to leverage political support across sectors. School feeding is considered an exception, as it is seen as a multisectoral programme.

50. WFP's engagement with the private sector has been essential for optimizing school feeding, and public-private partnerships are being set up in relation to local food fortification and production of specialized nutritious foods.

Flexibility in dynamic operational contexts

51. There is ample evidence confirming that WFP's CSP approach constitutes a stronger strategic framework for WFP operations and its engagement with the Government, as compared to its previous project-based system. The CSP approach facilitated strategic engagement, which in turn helped WFP to

flexibly adapt and respond to a dynamic operational context. It also helped to minimize fragmentation and the volatility of resource mobilization.

Country office structure and staff skills

52. The structure of the country office is solid, and geographic coverage through field offices assisted implementation of the programme. There has been significant turnover of staff, however, especially in the area of resilience building. The evaluation also found something of a silo approach to implementation, and efforts to achieve synergies and develop more coherent approaches, in particular between school feeding, nutrition and FFA activities, have been insufficient. The evaluation also revealed difficulties in vertical and horizontal communication between field offices and the country office. Finally, the evaluation found that the match between the skills of country office staff and the growing role of CCS to be suboptimal.

CONCLUSIONS

53. WFP's strategic direction under the T-ICSP and CSP was highly appropriate, relevant and well aligned with Tajikistan's national development and sector priorities and remains so in the light of Tajikistan's macroeconomic status and socioeconomic challenges. Nonetheless, the shift from discrete interventions towards more integrated strategically coordinated programming has not yet fully materialized. Neither the T-ICSP nor the CSP includes explicit strategic links between humanitarian and development work, although this is targeted through efforts to integrate CCS interventions. WFP's role remains more prominent in the humanitarian domain, which may affect its strategic positioning on CCS in the forthcoming CSP cycle.

54. Interventions under the T-ICSP and CSP broadly responded to the needs of the most vulnerable populations. Targeting of groups most vulnerable to disasters, climate change or the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic was appropriate and took into account the varying needs and challenges encountered by communities in disaster prone areas. School feeding and MAM treatment targeting, however, was guided by outdated assessments, while more recent data suggested a need to review the current geographic coverage of interventions to address potential exclusion errors.

55. WFP adhered to humanitarian and protection principles, maintaining a neutral and impartial stance in providing services and responding to crises. Gender issues received strong attention and gender equality and women's empowerment were mainstreamed throughout implementation, although there is room for WFP to improve consultation with and accountability to affected populations regarding the provision of FFA activities, as well as the focus on disability in its interventions.

56. While the strategic shift towards CCS is relevant, WFP's capacity to implement CCS activities beyond the individual level is still emerging. WFP's CCS strategy was not informed by a comprehensive assessment of needs and gaps and lacked an activity logic building on WFP's comparative advantage. CCS activities yielded positive policy level results for school feeding. CCS interventions in nutrition and resilience building were limited to a narrow group of predominantly national-level institutions. The current monitoring framework, moreover, does not allow WFP to meaningfully demonstrate its contribution to national capacity. These shortcomings, coupled with the country office's emerging CCS expertise, have hindered WFP's support from translating into improved institutional capacity and a better enabling environment.

57. WFP's direct delivery of services (in school feeding, nutrition, disaster risk reduction and COVID-19 emergency response) generated positive output-level results and confirms WFP's strength and value added, while contributions to outcome-level results show a mixed performance, particularly in terms of scalability and sustainability. Local government entities and parent-teacher association contributions to school feeding bode well for a future transition to a government- and potentially community-owned school feeding programme and reflect the overall more promising prospects for the sustainability of school feeding, while the sustainability potential of nutrition and resilience building remains moderate.

58. WFP's work under the T-ICSP and CSP built on positive momentum characterized by perception by the Government itself, development actors and donors that the Government should take ownership of the school feeding programme and should more fully engage in responding to natural disasters. Programme efficiency, however, was affected by staff turnover and funding shortages and delays. Weaknesses in CSP activity design, reliance on a narrow base of donors who impose conditions, limited absorption capacity on the Government side and the COVID-19 pandemic further affected the implementation of activities. WFP's

collaborative and flexible programme approach helped the organization to maximize its potential despite these challenges.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluation made six recommendations. The recommendations focus on seeking a stronger, more realistic focus, with efforts to develop strategic partnerships. Recommendations are directed mainly to the country office, but also call for contributions by headquarters divisions and the regional bureau.

#	Recommendation (specific steps for implementing the recommendations are outlined in the sub-recommendations following each recommendation)	Level/nature	Responsibility	Other contributing entities	Priority	Action deadline
1	The logic of intervention under the next country strategic plan should ensure deep interlinkages between humanitarian assistance and development activities, capitalizing on the added value of WFP's corporate capacity and its strategic shift towards country capacity strengthening to maximize its delivery of more sustainable results in line with its commitment to working in the humanitarian-development nexus.	Strategic	Country office	Regional bureau	High	March 2023
	1.1 Devise activities based on evidence of approaches that are proven to produce results; on lessons learned from implementation of this cycle of the country strategic plan and outstanding gaps within WFP's thematic areas. The new country strategic plan activity logic should take into account what can realistically be achieved based on expected resource mobilization and credible assumptions in order to curtail unrealistic ambitions.					March 2023
	1.2 Devise and integrate sustainability measures across all thematic areas, fully considering risks and mitigating factors. In particular, sustainability measures for asset creation interventions such as support for local governance and maintenance or mobilization mechanisms should be conceptualized and implemented.					March 2023
	1.3 Continue to invest in consultation mechanisms to promote participatory decision making in the design of WFP programme activities by strengthening mechanisms for reaching out and consulting affected populations in targeting for food assistance for assets activities and other relief and development activities, as well as the complaint and feedback mechanism.					March 2023
	1.4 Integrate gender equality and women's empowerment, disability and accountability to affected populations principles into country strategic plan design and implementation.					March 2023

#	Recommendation (specific steps for implementing the recommendations are outlined in the sub-recommendations following each recommendation)	Level/nature	Responsibility	Other contributing entities	Priority	Action deadline
2	<p>Develop and implement a country capacity strengthening strategy focusing on areas where WFP can add value</p> <p>The Tajikistan country office should assess its strategic positioning and opportunities as a provider of country capacity strengthening in the context of school feeding, nutrition, climate change and resilience. The assessment should serve as a basis for articulating a sound country capacity strengthening activity logic with strategic vision and direction for at least a 5–10-year horizon.</p>	Strategic	Country office	Regional bureau	High	June 2023
	2.1 Conduct an assessment of the country capacity strengthening needs of government institutional partners at the national and subnational levels with regard to the five policy pathways, collecting data on capacity gaps, needs and priorities. Functional and/or fiscal analyses could be considered as useful tools for such an assessment, as exemplified by the school feeding public financing analysis.					March 2023
	2.2 Based on the findings of the assessment in 2.1, conceptualize Tajikistan-specific country capacity strengthening approaches for the five policy pathways. Include WFP's main partners (the Government, cooperating partners, donors, etc.) in the consultation on country capacity strengthening approaches and their conceptualization.					March 2023
	2.3 Mainstream country capacity strengthening activities across all WFP thematic activities. The new country strategic plan should have country capacity strengthening fully (and visibly) mainstreamed into all thematic activities, with clear country-specific capacity strengthening activities, outputs and outcomes.					March 2023
	2.4 The country capacity strengthening monitoring framework should include a set of intermediate objectives, baselines, process milestones and targets, along with their accompanying qualitative and quantitative indicators. The indicators should go beyond WFP's corporate indicators to include country-specific indicators, to help WFP to understand the effectiveness, impact and sustainability of country capacity strengthening efforts in Tajikistan.					March 2023
	2.5 Implement country capacity strengthening efforts in conjunction with national entities, applying a cascade approach to transfer information to the sub-national level as appropriate.					December 2023

#	Recommendation (specific steps for implementing the recommendations are outlined in the sub-recommendations following each recommendation)	Level/nature	Responsibility	Other contributing entities	Priority	Action deadline
3	<p>Support government fiscal planning and optimization processes for school feeding and resilience building.</p> <p>In the light of the fact that budget and fiscal planning issues are obstacles to implementation of the school feeding programme, WFP should consider expanding its country capacity strengthening interventions to support the Government in terms of fiscal planning in targeted sectors, building upon the currently ongoing school feeding public financing analysis.</p> <p>As school feeding demands the inclusion of and collaboration with various sectors (education, social protection, finance, etc.) and entities (national and regional planning entities), WFP should assist the Government in reinforcing and optimizing national institutional structures to ensure that results (particularly policy and institutional mechanisms and models) are implemented for the benefit of the most in need populations in Tajikistan. Such support could be operationalized through the provision of expertise and international best practices in the optimization of fiscal planning, organization and implementation of school feeding and disaster risk reduction activities.</p>	Operational	Country office	Regional bureaux	High	December 2023
4	<p>Develop, in close consultation with the Government and other key stakeholders, a school feeding transition and handover plan for gradual transfer of direct implementation and oversight responsibility to national and subnational authorities and parent-teacher associations. The plan should include priority objectives, time-bound targets, activities and responsibilities and should clearly define the scope of and modalities for WFP assistance throughout the transition process and after handover.</p>	Operational	Country office	Regional bureau	High	June 2023
	<p>4.1 <i>Phase 1</i>: Assist the Government in finalizing the national school feeding policy and plan of action, ensuring that it meets the five Systems Approach for Better Education Results goal standards in terms of a stable funding mechanism; oversight, management and coordination; adoption of a contextually relevant school feeding model or models based on well-defined criteria; establishment of a monitoring and evaluation system; and institutionalization of the role and contribution of communities and other stakeholders.</p>					March 2023
	<p>4.2 <i>Phase 2</i>: Conduct an assessment of capacity gaps (see recommendation 2.1) and develop a capacity strengthening strategy geared towards building national and subnational management, resourcing and monitoring and evaluation for the school feeding programme based on the Systems Approach for Better Education Results goals pathways and continue to strengthen and systematize the role of parent-teacher associations to ensure full and coherent empowerment of community members enabling them to contribute to local decision making.</p>					June 2023

#	Recommendation (specific steps for implementing the recommendations are outlined in the sub-recommendations following each recommendation)	Level/nature	Responsibility	Other contributing entities	Priority	Action deadline
5	Continue to reorganize the country office structure to optimize delivery of stronger, integrated results. WFP should consider further reorganizing the country office to ensure that the key cross-sectoral priority areas are adequately integrated and thus ensure stronger synergies, leverage and the catalytic potential of results, particularly in the light of the cross-cutting nature of food security and country capacity strengthening interventions.	Operational	Country office	Regional bureau	High	December 2022
	5.1 Enhance country capacity strengthening expertise in the country office by including specific country capacity strengthening positions that will ensure that WFP's corporate perspective is incorporated into programme design and implementation. Consider providing further learning opportunities to existing staff and/or bringing in (or outsourcing) such expertise for the short, medium and long term.					December 2022
	5.2 Reinforce the country office structure to enable synergies and more coherent and holistic delivery of the programme. Apply further efforts to seek synergies and enhance coherence across thematic interventions and thus ensure that the programme maximizes its results within resource limitations and that the entire team is on-board with changing WFP's corporate focus (including country capacity strengthening).					December 2022
6	Continue strengthening strategic and operational partnerships and efforts to diversify the donor base.	Operational	Country office	Regional bureau, headquarters	Medium	June 2023
	6.1 <i>School feeding</i> : Undertake with various government bodies (e.g., the Ministry of Agriculture) ¹⁴ and United Nations entities joint assessments to identify needs and design joint and complementary activities for safeguarding and promoting healthy school environments and access to nutritious, safe and affordable diets in schools.					June 2023
	6.2. <i>Nutrition</i> : Establish partnerships with other United Nations entities, cooperating and development partners and private sector entities in order to scale up malnutrition prevention and moderate acute malnutrition treatment in line with relevant national strategies (e.g., "First 1,000 days of a child's life" and the multisectoral plan of action for nutrition for 2021–2025) and the 2021 United Nations strategic framework for nutrition.					June 2023

¹⁴ The purpose of working on assessments with the Ministry of Agriculture would be to promote increased local production, adequate storage and processing of diverse and nutritious food and access by, among others, horticultural farmers to local institutional markets such as school feeding.

1 Introduction

1. This document represents the evaluation of the World Food Programme's (WFP) Tajikistan Transitional Interim Country Strategic Plan (T-ICSP 2018-2019) and Country Strategic Plan (CSP 2019-2024). This evaluation serves the dual objectives of accountability to WFP stakeholders and learning for better WFP strategic decision making in Tajikistan (Annex I). The evaluation was conducted in the period June 2021-March 2022 (Annex II), and comprised a document review, primary data collection (individual and group interviews) and an online survey. The evaluation was commissioned by the WFP Office of Evaluation (OEV) and funded by the WFP Tajikistan country office (CO).

2. The immediate users of the evaluation findings and recommendations include the country office, the regional bureau in Bangkok (RBB) and the regional bureau in Cairo (RBC), headquarters (HQ) technical units and senior management, and the Executive Board (EB), the Government of Tajikistan, WFP partner civil society institutions, donors and the United Nations Country Team (UNCT).

1.1 EVALUATION FEATURES

3. The evaluation aimed to provide an assessment of the entirety of WFP work in Tajikistan, including strategic outcomes, outputs, activities and inputs included under the T-ICSP¹ and the current ongoing CSP,² and the budget revision (BR) 01 in September 2020.³ The end of September 2021 was the cut-off date for the evaluation data collection. The evaluation assessed all WFP thematic interventions, with a focus on country capacity strengthening (CCS) interventions covered under strategic objective 4 (SO4), and country capacity strengthening cross-cutting efforts.

4. Budget revision 02, in December 2021 introduced a new crisis response strategic outcome 6 and two new activities (7 and 8) in order to enable WFP to respond to a potential refugee crisis and assist vulnerable members of the host community. Through BR02, the total needs-based plan (NBP) was increased from USD 84,918,367 to USD 103,333,791 and the number beneficiaries increased by 75,600 to 1,051,713. These substantial changes through BR02 could not be covered by the evaluation considering that the data collection had been finalized three months ahead of BR02.

5. In line with WFP evaluation guidance and standards, cross-cutting dimensions and principles, such as gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE), and compliance with humanitarian and accountability to affected population (AAP) principles were assessed. The evaluation also assessed WFP support to the most vulnerable, from the perspective of targeting and coverage in terms of efficiency, effectiveness and equity criteria (including focus on equity issues affecting persons with disability, women and men, girls and boys, and other most vulnerable groups).

6. The evaluation followed a theory-based, mixed-methods approach (Annex III). Due to COVID-19, the inception phase was conducted remotely, while the primary data collection process was conducted in a hybrid manner, whereby national consultants conducted face-to-face interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs) and field observations in-country, while international consultants conducted interviews remotely.

7. The evaluation process started with an in-depth review of documents, and first rounds of interviews with selected stakeholders from WFP headquarters, regional bureaux and country office, and a comprehensive stakeholder analysis to inform the preparation of a theory of change (ToC) for the CSP and the design of the evaluation. The evaluation inception period was used to fine-tune the evaluation scope in close consultation with the country office and the evaluation manager (EM). The draft theory of change was discussed in an inception workshop with the country office in July 2021 to validate the proposed scope and methodology (Annex IV). An evaluation matrix was prepared (Annex V) around four standard evaluation questions (EQs) and a series of subquestions, lines of inquiry, indicators, data sources and data collection techniques.

¹ WFP. 2017. Tajikistan Transitional Interim Country Strategic Plan (2018-2019).

² WFP. 2019. Tajikistan Country Strategic Plan (1 July 2019-2024). WFP/EB.A/2019/8-A/10.

³ WFP. 2020. Tajikistan Country Strategic Plan. Revision 01.

8. The hybrid field mission (September-October 2021) included interviews with a range of stakeholders from WFP, government, donors, non-governmental organization partners, United Nations agencies and other development actors. National experts conducted in-person interviews, focus group discussions and site observations in Tajikistan's capital, Dushanbe, the Sughd region, the Khatlon region, the Gorno-Badakshan Autonomous region (GBAO), Rasht Valley and Districts of Republican Subordination (DRS) (Figure 26). A total of 60 key informant interviews⁴ and 20 focus group discussions, as well as numerous site visits were conducted (Annex VI and Annex VII).

9. The e-survey was conducted with national stakeholders and development partners to elicit their views on WFP engagement over the CSP period. Eighteen out of 52 WFP partners responded to the survey (that is, the response rate was 35 percent (Annex VIII)). The e-survey supplemented data collected through document review, interviews and focus group discussions and yielded insights into the relevance of WFP engagement and the main results of WFP support to Tajikistan and other cross-cutting issues.

10. In line with the principle of participation, an interactive process was maintained throughout the evaluation. Operational briefings included inception briefings in July 2021, an exit debriefing with the Office of Evaluation and country office in October 2021, followed by a preliminary findings debriefing workshop in October 2021 and a stakeholder workshop in January 2022. These briefings served to share the evaluation outputs with external and internal stakeholders, and key issues were taken into consideration in the finalization of this report.

11. The evaluation followed the WFP Centralized Evaluation Quality Assurance System.⁵ Evaluation findings were triangulated within and between different data collection sources. An internal database of interview notes and additional evidence was used to identify answers to evaluation questions. The draft report underwent internal quality assurance before submission. The report presents the findings per each key question.

12. The evaluation was conducted according to the 2020 United Nations Evaluation Group Ethical Guidelines and Code of Conduct and Guidance on Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluation. Gender considerations, and principles of inclusion, participation and non-discrimination were included in the design, questioning, data collection and reporting. The evaluation team (ET) ensured ethics at all stages of the evaluation through detailed protocols for interviews and field visits. Ethical issues, risks and safeguards were adhered to throughout the evaluation.

13. The evaluation faced some limitations and challenges. Regarding data availability, WFP experienced substantial staff turnover, which induced challenges with baselines and availability of data against set indicators, in particular for country capacity strengthening. The online meetings faced certain limitations with regard to levels of nuance in comparison to in-person interviews when it came to discussing WFP approaches and their performance. The e-survey response rate by government stakeholders was low (three respondents). However, this limitation was mitigated by interviewing a wide range of stakeholders who were also invited to participate in the e-survey.

1.2 CONTEXT

General overview

14. Tajikistan is a mountainous, landlocked country in the heart of the Central Asia Region (CAR). The country population amounts to slightly over nine million (4.6 million men and boys and 4.5 million women and girls)⁶ with more than one third of the population aged 0-14 years old.⁷ Around 74 percent of the population live in rural areas. In 2018, life expectancy at birth was 68.7 years for men and 73.2 years for women. Tajikistan is a multi-ethnic country: Tajik (84.3 percent), Uzbek (12.2 percent), followed by Kyrgyz,

⁴ UN, bilateral donors, NGOs, international/national organizations, civils society organizations (CSOs) and the private sector.

⁵ WFP. 2021. *Country Strategic Plan Evaluations: Guidance for Process and Content*. Centralized Evaluation Quality Assurance System. WFP: Rome, January 2021.

⁶ Population of Tajikistan, Statistical Yearbook 2019. Accessed on 03/12/2021. https://stat.wv.tj/publications/July2019/macmuai_sumorai_aholi_to_1_anvari_soli_2019.pdf

⁷ World Bank. 2020. Life expectancy in Tajikistan, accessed on 13 July 2021. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.LE00.IN?locations=TJ>.

Russian, Turkmen and Tatar.⁸ In 2020, the fertility rate for Tajikistan was 3.6 and the adolescent birth rate corresponded to 54 births per 1,000 girls aged 15-19.⁹

15. Following the civil war (1992-1997), Tajikistan made continuous progress in economic growth and poverty reduction. The country was upgraded to a lower middle-income country in 2015, but reclassified to low-income country in 2018, due to the recent decline in economic progress. The COVID-19 pandemic created major social and health sector pressures in the country. Restrictions on labour mobility and economic activity resulted in a decrease in migrant remittances, weaker consumer demand and reduced investments.¹⁰

National policies and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

16. In 2015, Tajikistan adopted the United Nations 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda). The key instruments for mainstreaming the Sustainable Development Goals into national development policies are the National Development Strategy for the period up to 2030 (NDS-2030) and Mid-Term Development Programme of Tajikistan for 2016-2020 (MTDP-2020). At the time of the evaluation, the MTDP 2021-2025 is being finalized.¹¹

17. NDS-2030 is structured around four strategic goals: (1) ensuring energy security and efficient use of electricity; (2) moving out of the communication deadlock and the transformation of the country into a transit country; (3) ensuring food security and access of population to quality nutrition; and (4) expanding productive employment. In addition, human capital development is put in the NDS-2030 as an integrated, intersectoral priority encompassing education, health and social protection.

18. The National Strategy for Education Development (NSED 2021-2030) aims at: (1) ensuring equal access and participation in education at all levels for all throughout life; (2) improving the quality and relevance of education at all levels; and (3) strengthening effective governance of the education sector.¹² The Nutrition and Physical Activity Strategy (NPAS 2015-2024) was developed to support coherence, continuity and coordination in the area of nutrition through intersectoral actions.¹³ In 2017, a Strategy for Sustainable Development of School Meals (SSDSM 2017-2027) formulated by a dedicated Interministerial Coordination Council was approved by the Government. The Multisectoral Plan of Action for Nutrition (MPAN 2021-2025) was developed to: (1) create an enabling political environment for improving nutrition; (2) improve the quality and coverage of nutrition-specific interventions; (3) improve the quality and coverage of nutrition-sensitive interventions; and (4) establish a mechanism for the ongoing collection, analysis and comparison of nutrition information for multiple sectors.

19. Tajikistan's progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals is presented below (Figure 1). Challenges include: coordination for Sustainable Development Goal implementation, elaboration of sectoral policies with Sustainable Development Goal consideration, and development of a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system as well as funding and implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals at the local level.

⁸ UN. 2020. International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. CERD/C/TJK/12-13.

⁹ World Bank. (n.d.). Country profile 2020.

https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfile&Id=b450fd57&tbar=y&d=y&inf=n&zm=n&country=TJK.

¹⁰ World Bank. 2020. Poverty in Tajikistan, accessed on 13 July 2021.

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.LE00.IN?locations=TJ>

¹¹ Ministry of Economic Development and Trade of the Republic of Tajikistan. 18 March 2021. Round table on presentation of the draft "Mid-Term Development Programme of the Republic of Tajikistan for 2021-2025".

¹² Republic of Tajikistan. 2020. National Strategy for Education Development of the Republic of Tajikistan for the period until 2030.

¹³ Republic of Tajikistan. 2014. Nutrition and Physical Activity Strategy for the Republic of Tajikistan 2015-2024.

Figure 1: Progress under the Sustainable Development Goals in Tajikistan, June 2021



Source : Snapshot from <https://dashboards.sdgindex.org/profiles/tajikistan>

Natural disasters, climate change and vulnerability

20. The cumulative effects of climate-related disasters impact poverty-stricken, vulnerable populations in particular in rural areas with high rates of labour migration and poor provision of services, leading to limited coping capacity. Tajikistan's relative economic exposure to natural hazard losses is particularly high and has been calculated at over 20 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP).¹⁴ Predicted increases in temperature will lead to a higher risk of drought with agriculture yields expected to drop by up to 30 percent by 2100 in some areas of the country.¹⁵

Food and nutrition security

21. The population of Tajikistan is still comparatively more affected by hunger than other countries in the Central Asia Region. The Global Hunger Index shows an improvement in the hunger situation since the 1990s, when the country had an alarming hunger situation, towards being classified as "moderate" in the 2021 Global Hunger Index.¹⁶ Figure 46 shows the prevalence of food insecurity by livelihood zone in Tajikistan in 2017. The 2020 Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)/WFP Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission (CFSAM) found that the number of households unable to afford quality nutritious diets has substantially increased due to the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on employment, income, remittances and food market prices.¹⁷ The most recent food security assessment conducted by WFP in September 2021 showed that 23 percent of surveyed households across Tajikistan were classified as food insecure, primarily because of economic vulnerability and adoption of livelihood-eroding coping strategies. It also noted that almost two-thirds of the households were adopting coping strategies to fill the food gap, while 33 percent had to spend their savings to buy food to ensure adequate food consumption.¹⁸

22. Malnutrition is widespread across Tajikistan. The national prevalence of stunting among children under 5 years of age dropped from 29 percent in 2009 to 17.5 percent (medium public health significance) in 2017, while regional prevalence varies widely. National-level prevalence of wasting was at 5.6 percent (medium public health significance) in 2017, and was highest among children under 6 months.¹⁹ A United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) national nutrition survey carried out in 2016 shows no significant differences between boys and girls in the prevalence of underweight (1.7 percent of girls were underweight in comparison to 1.6 percent of boys). However, the prevalence of underweight is significantly higher among children living in rural areas (6.4 percent) than for those living in urban areas (4.4 percent). Most undernourished children live in the rural areas of the districts of Republican Subordination and Khatlon,

¹⁴ Committee on Emergency Situations and Civil Defence (CoES). 2021. CoESCD Yearbook – Overview of Emergency Situations in the Republic of Tajikistan for 2020.

¹⁵ Republic of Tajikistan. 2018. Tajikistan Zero Hunger Strategic Review: Food Security and Nutrition.

¹⁶ Global Hunger Index. 2021. Tajikistan; <https://www.globalhungerindex.org/tajikistan.html> accessed on 2 December 2021.

¹⁷ FAO & WFP. 2021. Special Report 2020 FAO/WFP Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission (CFSAM) to The Republic of Tajikistan.

¹⁸ WFP. 2021. Food Security Assessment September 2021.

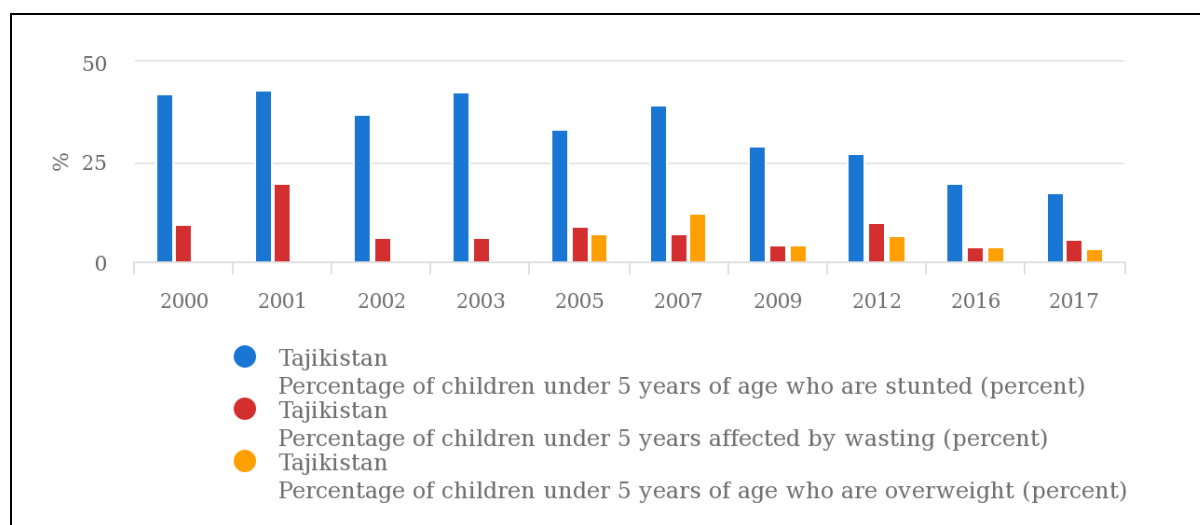
¹⁹ WFP. 2018. Fill the Nutrient Gap Tajikistan.

followed by the rural areas of the Sughd region. The GBAO region has a smaller population than the other regions, but has a relatively high rate of childhood stunting.²⁰

23. The proportion of underweight women aged 15-49 decreased from 11 percent in 2012 to 7 percent in 2017, while the proportion of those overweight and obese (body mass index or BMI ≥ 25.0) increased from 30 to 37 percent.²¹

24. Micronutrient deficiencies remain widespread, with anaemia ranging between 25 (moderate prevalence) to 42 percent (severe prevalence) for women and young children.²² According to the World Health Organization (WHO), vitamin A deficiency is a severe public health problem. Iodine deficiency affects more than 50 percent of women and children. Progress in reducing malnutrition has been hampered by various factors including seasonal fluctuations in agricultural production and incomes, lack of knowledge and awareness on nutrition, inadequately diverse agricultural production and diets, dependency on imported foods, price fluctuations, climate change (CC) and insufficient availability of nutritious foods.

Figure 2: Percentage of child (under 5 years old) malnutrition in Tajikistan (2000-2017)



Source: FAOSTAT (extracted on 16/12/20).

25. Tajikistan is a food-deficit country, highly dependent on food imports and thus vulnerable to food price fluctuations. Prices of wheat flour increased slightly in Tajikistan but remained near the generally high levels reached after having increased steeply between March and May 2020 in response to a spike in consumer demand triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic. The depreciation of the local currency (Tajikistan Somoni - TJS) also contributed to the year-on-year higher prices. Prices of potatoes, another staple food in the country, have declined.²³ In 2016 households spent on average 55.5 percent of their consumption expenditure on food and the cost of food as a share of total household consumption has been increasing since 2010.²⁴ The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 affected food security and household spending. The findings of the World Bank Listening 2 Tajikistan survey indicate that in August 2020, more than 41 percent of households reported reducing their consumption of food (up nearly 10 percentage points over 2019).

²⁰ World Bank. 2018. *Addressing Childhood Malnutrition and Stunting in Tajikistan*.

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/tajikistan/publication/addressing-childhood-malnutrition-and-stunting>.

²¹ Tajikistan Demographic Health Survey 2012. Statistical Agency under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, the Ministry of Health and MEASURE DHS. 2012 and Tajikistan Demographic Health Survey 2017

²² WFP. 2018. *Fill the Nutrient Gap Tajikistan*.

²³ FAO. October 2021. *Food Price Monitoring and Analysis (FPMA) Bulletin #8*.

²⁴ Tajstat. 2017. *Socioeconomic situation in Tajikistan for 2016*. Dushanbe: Tajstat.

Agriculture

26. While agriculture is the main economic sector, accounting for about 20 percent of gross domestic product in 2018 and almost 50 percent of employment, agricultural productivity is low.²⁵ Only 5 percent of land is arable, of which 97 percent is subject to soil degradation.²⁶ Most agricultural output is produced on households' plots, with own production generating half of rural household income.²⁷ Cotton and wheat are the main cash crops, cultivated on 70 percent of the cropped area, with cotton being the main agri-commodity amounting to 19 percent of the total country's export in 2018.²⁸

Education

27. Free and compulsory general basic education is guaranteed by Tajikistan's Constitution. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute of Statistics, the net enrolment ratio in primary education in 2016 was 96.6 percent (96 percent for girls; 97.1 percent for boys) and 98.3 percent in 2017 for both sexes. UNESCO data from 2017 shows that 0.5 percent of primary school aged children and 3 percent of lower secondary aged children were out of school (4.6 percent for girls, compared to 1.5 percent for boys). Once enrolment is no longer mandatory, the gender discrepancy becomes more pronounced. The out-of-school rate for upper secondary school age girls is 37.3 percent against 18 percent for boys. In 2019, 94.5 percent of the adult population (ages 25 and older) had at least secondary education and the adult literacy rate was 99.8 percent.²⁹

28. Total education expenditure in Tajikistan has steadily increased: from 3.9 to 5.7 percent of gross domestic product between 2011 and 2019.³⁰ This is above the average education expenditure in the Central Asia Region countries (4.46 percent of gross domestic product).

29. The outbreak of COVID-19 in the spring of 2020 affected education, as all educational institutions were closed on 27 April 2020. Nationwide school closure was extended until 17 August 2020, when the new academic year commenced, two weeks before it traditionally starts on 1 September.³¹

Gender

30. In 2019 the Human Development Index for women in Tajikistan was 0.586 in contrast with 0.712 for men, resulting in a Gender Development Index value of 0.823, placing the country well below the other countries in the region. The Government adopted a gender strategy to address gender inequality, but only limited steps have been taken to implement it.

31. In 2020, only 24 percent of parliamentary seats were held by women, while the labour force participation rate was estimated at 31.3 percent.³² As a result of labour migration, many left-behind or abandoned wives are becoming de-facto heads of households (Figure 47) responsible for generating family income despite limited access to education, resources and employment, particularly in rural settings. In some regions, school-aged girls are put under pressure not to attend school in favour of domestic work, due to labour migration by men.³³

32. According to data from the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), 19 percent of women and girls aged 15-49 years reported in 2017 that they had been subject to physical and/or sexual violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months.³⁴ Although marriage below 18 years is officially outlawed, 13 percent of 15-19 year old girls were

²⁵ World Bank. (n.d.). Data Tajikistan.

²⁶ WFP. Tajikistan CSP (2019-2024).

²⁷ WFP. 2017-04. Climate Risks and Food Security in Tajikistan - full report.

²⁸ WFP. 2018. Scoping Study on Social Protection and Safety Nets for Enhanced Food Security and Nutrition in Tajikistan.

²⁹ UNESCO Institute for Statistics. (n.d.). Tajikistan. <http://uis.unesco.org/en/country/tj>.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ UNDP. Sept 2020. Impact of COVID-19 on lives, livelihoods and MSMEs (Assessment Report).

³² World Bank. (n.d.). Data Tajikistan.

³³ UN Women. (n.d.). Tajikistan – Europe and Central Asia.

³⁴ UN Women. (n.d.). Data Hub Country Fact Sheet.

married in 2017 and the adolescent birth rate per 1,000 girls aged 15-19 was 54 in 2020 constituting the highest rate in Eastern Europe and the Central Asia Region.³⁵

Migration, refugees and humanitarian protection

33. Tajikistan currently hosts the largest number of refugees in the Central Asia Region, originating primarily from neighbouring Afghanistan. As of July 2021, the population of concern consisted of 17,287 individuals, of which 7,073 were refugees, 3,975 asylum seekers and 6,239 stateless persons.³⁶ In the spring of 2021, a dispute over irrigation water and use of land caused several clashes between the population residing on the border of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. In April 2021 the clash escalated into a military conflict claiming the lives of more than 40 people from both sides.³⁷

34. Tajikistan is one of the most remittance-dependent countries in the world. Since 2006 this dependency, measured as a share of gross domestic product has been among the highest in the world, accounting for over 40 percent of the nation's gross domestic product for several years. About half a million people, mainly men (85.5 percent in 2019) from rural areas leave for employment abroad. The Russian Federation is the main destination country for migrants (97.6 percent in 2019). Unskilled men labourers are mostly attracted to the construction sector and migrant women are in the service sector. The economic crisis brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic has halted international migration flows and the lack of remittances affects the population dependent on remittances.³⁸

1.3 SUBJECT BEING EVALUATED

Strategic focus of the country strategic plan

35. WFP presence in Tajikistan started in 1993, with an emergency operation to provide life-saving assistance during the civil war. Operations preceding the T-ICSP include a protracted relief and recovery operation (PRRO)³⁹ and a development project in support of education.⁴⁰ Both of these were superseded by the Tajikistan country programme (CP 2016-2020). The country programme was followed by the T-ICSP (2018-2019), which did not result in strategic changes. As shown in Table 1 the T-ICSP focused on three strategic outcomes (SOs) of the WFP Strategic Plan (2017-2021) in support of SDG 2 - zero hunger: SO1 everyone having access to food (SDG target 2.1); SO2 no one suffering from malnutrition (SDG target 2.2); and SO3 achieving food security (SDG target 2.4).⁴¹ The CSP continues to support the achievement of SDG 2 and in addition contributes to progress towards achieving SDG 17 (SDG target 17.9) through SO4 - country capacity strengthening. Grouping country capacity strengthening, which was embedded under SO1, SO2 and SO3 of the T-ICSP, into one strategic outcome with dedicated and more substantial resources reflects a strategic shift on the part of WFP from direct implementation to enabling national and subnational institutions to design and deliver on their social protection and food security and nutrition priorities through policy advice and capacity strengthening.

³⁵ Tajikistan Demographic Health Survey 2017. Statistical Agency under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, the Ministry of Health and MEASURE DHS. 2017.

³⁶ UNHCR. September 2021. Tajikistan Fact Sheet.

³⁷ USIP, "Border Clash Between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan Risks Spinning Out of Control."

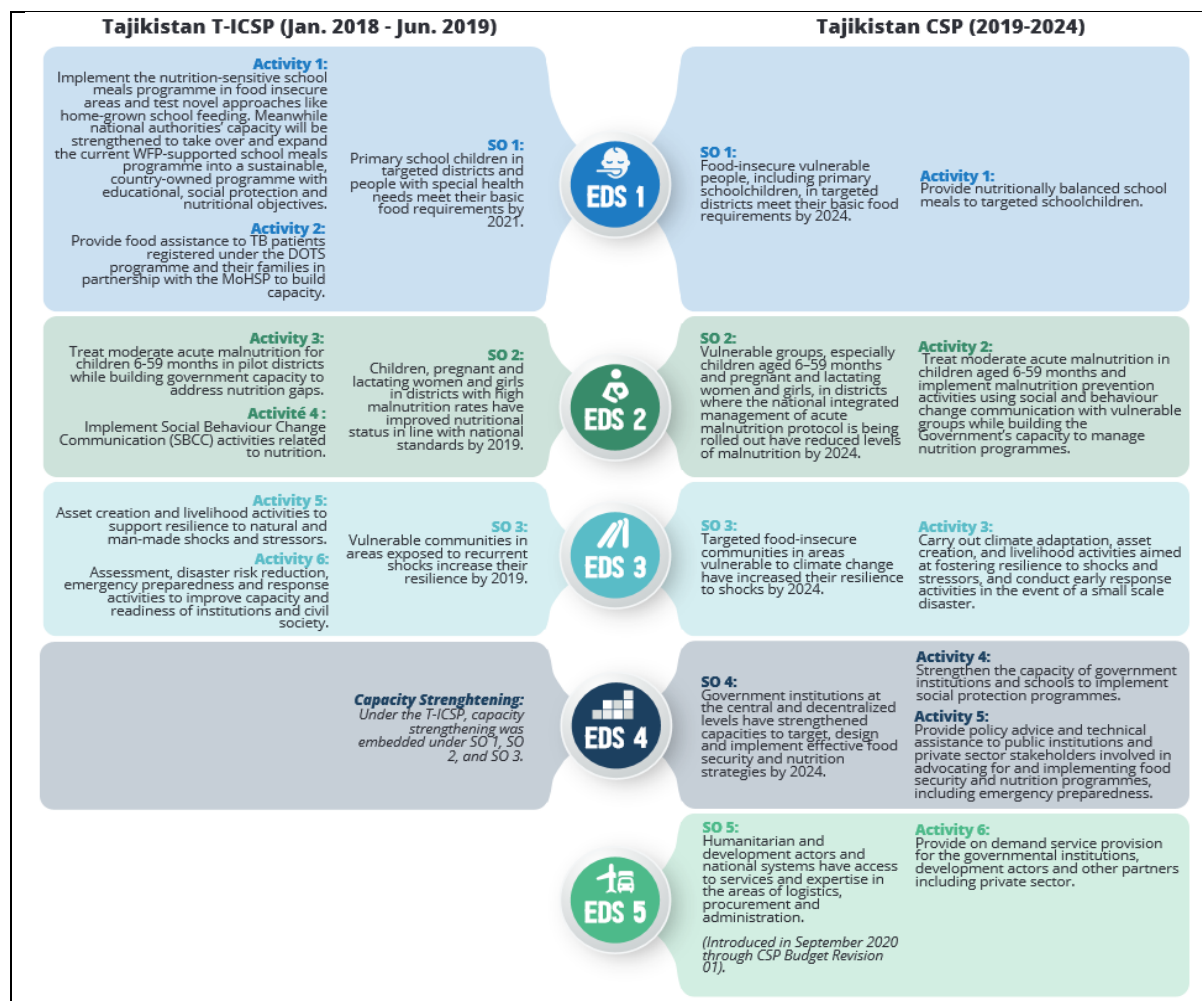
³⁸ ADB. 2020. Strengthening Support for Labour Migration in Tajikistan.

³⁹ WFP. 2010. PRRO 200122 (2010-2013). Restoring sustainable livelihoods for food-insecure people.

⁴⁰ WFP. 2020. Development Project Tajikistan 200120 - Supporting Access to Education for Vulnerable Children (2010-2015). WFP/EB.A/2010/9-A/2.

⁴¹ WFP. 2016. "WFP Strategic Plan (2017-2021)". WFP/EB.2/2016/4-A/1/Rev.2*.

Table 1: Overview of strategic outcomes and activities of the Tajikistan transitional interim country strategic plan and country strategic plan and their linkages to the WFP Corporate Strategic Framework



Source: CSP Tajikistan (2019-2024) and BR01.

36. While building on the T-ICSP, the CSP design was informed by the PRRO evaluation conducted in 2014, which recommended the need for greater gender-sensitive approaches, an expansion of cash-based transfers (CBT) and the development of a more comprehensive capacity strengthening plan for the Government's social protection system.⁴² The design of the Tajikistan CSP (2019-2024) was further informed by two reviews and one study conducted in 2018 - the scoping study on social protection, the Fill the Nutrient Gap (FNG) analysis and the Zero Hunger Strategic Review, which identified the need to strengthen national capacity as a key priority at policy, strategy and programme implementation levels in food security, nutrition and social protection.⁴³

37. Key assumptions underpinning the work of WFP in Tajikistan along the pathway from inputs to outputs and to outcomes and ultimately impact are presented in Table 2.

⁴² WFP Office of Evaluation. 2014. Operation Evaluation Tajikistan Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation PRRO 200122 Restoring Sustainable Livelihoods for Food Insecure People October 2010-December 2014.

⁴³ WFP/UNU_MERIT/Maastricht. 2018. University Scoping Study on Social Protection and Safety Nets for Enhanced Food Security and Nutrition in Tajikistan; WFP. 2018. Fill the Nutrient Gap Tajikistan. Summary report; Republic of Tajikistan, 2018. *Tajikistan Zero Hunger Strategic Review: Food Security and Nutrition*.

Table 2: Key assumptions underpinning WFP work in Tajikistan

Key assumptions from Inputs and Activities to Outputs (within sphere of WFP control)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Proactive engagement from government stakeholders – Availability of financial and human resources – Uninterrupted pipeline, and sufficient funding available – Ability to deliver food (all commodities and in the right quantities) and cash in a timely manner – Availability and sufficient capacity of cooperating partners – National commitment and openness to capacity strengthening initiatives – Mutual interest in partnership building between the government, WFP, partners and donors
Key assumptions from Outputs to Outcomes (within sphere of WFP direct influence)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Government allocates necessary financial resources at different levels to implement new knowledge and capacities – Government translates acquired knowledge and capacity into policy and operational decisions ensuring that the needs of vulnerable populations are met in times of crises and in line with the priorities of promoting resilience – WFP systems and processes are adapted and transferable to government-led processes and arrangements – Provided knowledge triggers change in behaviour amongst children and their parents – Community ownership, engagement and willingness to make contributions to increased food security and nutrition – Knowledge acquired by caretakers triggers change in infant and child feeding practices and prevention of malnutrition – Selected assets have positive influence on productivity (e.g. increased output per hectare, increased hectares under production, increased hectares irrigated, diversification to higher value crops, increased agricultural and forest biodiversity etc.) and on improvements in livelihoods options
Key assumptions from Outcomes to Impact (within sphere of WFP indirect influence)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Government demonstrates political commitment to increase evidence base, to design and adopt necessary legal and institutional frameworks and adequate national resourcing to: i) implement the school meals programme at scale and ii) integrate the SCOPE CODA platform into the national IMAM programme; and iii) to develop and implement evidence based coherent emergency preparedness and disaster risk reduction measures – Government demonstrates the required commitment and capacity to allocate funding from its national budget for adopted programmes – Levels of political stability that do not deteriorate, no national disasters or other types of disruption

Source: evaluation team.

Key changes in the external and internal environment

38. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, a crisis response strategic outcome (SO5) was introduced through a budget revision in September 2020 to ensure the provision of on-demand services to partners starting from September 2020 until the end of the CSP duration, contributing to SDG 17 (enhancing global partnerships/SDG target 17.6). The on-demand services include but are not limited to: procurement, administration of common premises, fleet management, logistics, and supply chain. In view of the socioeconomic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, WFP provided food assistance for assets (FFA) interventions (in the form of cash or food transfers) to affected populations in urban and peri-urban districts of GBAO to improve their access to diverse nutritious foods available in local markets (29,000 additional beneficiaries).

39. Other events (extreme weather events and natural disasters) as well as changes in the policy environment (both national and WFP corporate policies) that occurred before and during the period covered by the evaluation (also discussed under context) are displayed in Figure 48.

Budget and funding

40. The T-ICSP had a total budget of United States Dollars (USD) 28,463,468 and aimed at reaching 539,550 direct beneficiaries through food and cash-based transfers during its 18-month duration. The CSP budget was USD 82.04 million over five years, aiming at reaching 933,900 direct beneficiaries through food and cash-based transfers; the budget and number of direct beneficiaries were increased to USD 84,918,367 and 963,400 beneficiaries in September 2020 through BR01.

41. As shown in Table 3, SO1 (school feeding (SF)) absorbs the largest share of the total budget. SO2 (moderate acute malnutrition (MAM) treatment) accounts for 7 percent of the total budget under both the T-ICSP and CSP. The share of resilience building (SO3) in the total budget decreased from about 18 percent in the T-ICSP to 13 percent in the CSP. Under the T-ICSP, the budget for country capacity strengthening is incorporated into the budget of SO1, SO2 and SO3. In the CSP, capacity strengthening (SO4) and crisis response (SO5) absorb 21 percent and less than 1 percent of the total budget respectively.

Table 3: Tajikistan Transitional Interim Country Strategic Plan (2018-2019) and Country Strategic Plan (2019-2024) budget by strategic outcome (USD)

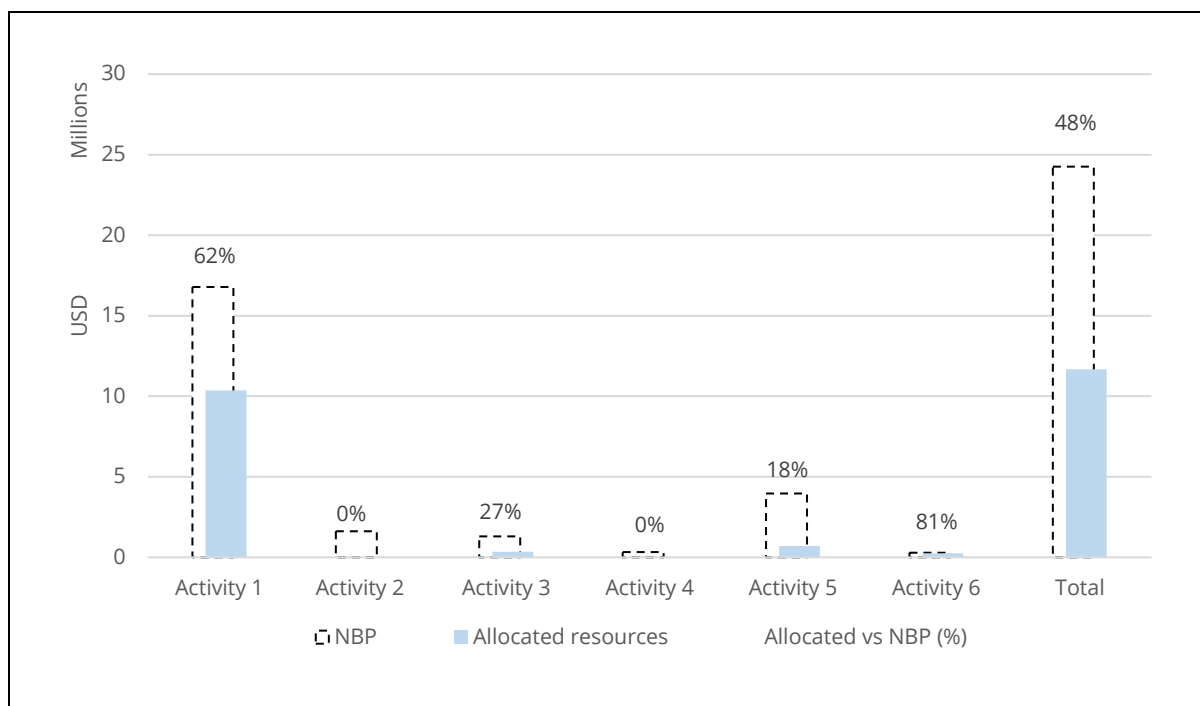
	SO1	SO2	SO3	SO4	SO5	
Focus area	Root causes	Root causes	Resilience	Root causes	Crisis response	Total
Total T-ICSP 2018- June 2019	21,579,240	1,888,255	4,995,973			28,463,096
Share of each SO over total country portfolio budgeting	75.8%	6.6%	17.6%			100%
Total CSP July 2019-2024	49,395,831	6,048,232	10,991,164	17,897,329	585,811	84,918,367
Share of each SO over total country portfolio budgeting	58.2%	7.1%	12.9%	21.1%	0.7%	100%

Source : WFP.2017.Tajikistan T-ICSP (Year 2018-2019) ; Tajikistan CSP (2019-2024) (WFP/EB.A/2019/8-A/10)

42. The funding level for the T-ICSP was 48 percent at the end of the cycle. As of 15 November 2021, allocated resources for the CSP (2019-2024) amounted to USD 37,476,024 (44.13 percent of the total CSP budget of 84,918,367 as per BR01).⁴⁴ This figure is higher, reaching 86 percent, when comparing allocated resources with the NBP for the period 1 July 2019-end 2021 (See Figure 4 – this is discussed in more detail under Section 2.4.2).

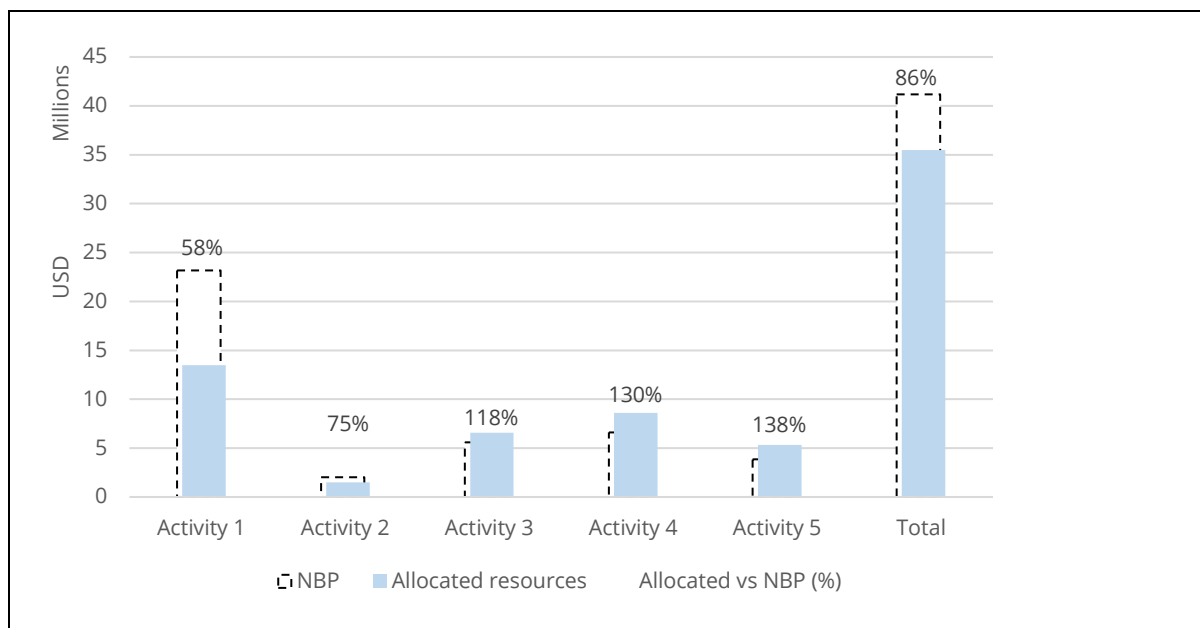
⁴⁴ WFP. 2021. Tajikistan Resource Situation. 01/11/2021 extracted on 24 November 2021.

Figure 3: Tajikistan Transitional Interim Country Strategic Plan (2018-2019) cumulative financial overview



Source: T-ICSP Annual Country Report (ACR) 2018-2019.

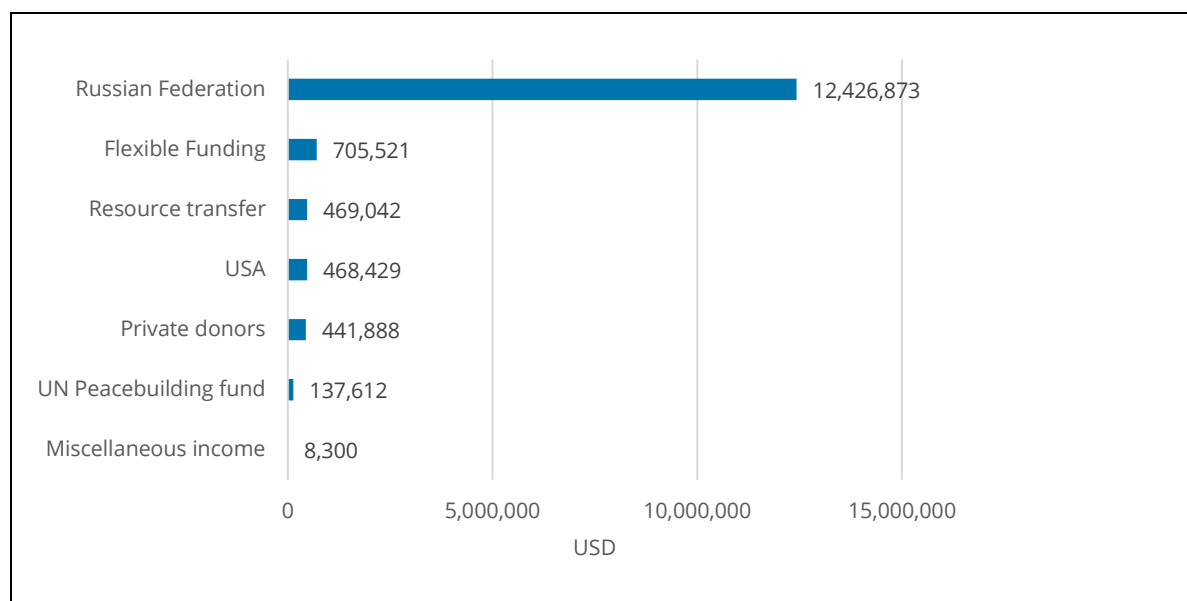
Figure 4: Tajikistan Country Strategic Plan (2019-2024) financial overview the period 1 July 2019-2021



Source: TCSP ACR 2019-2020; Data for 2021 (up till August) provided by CO

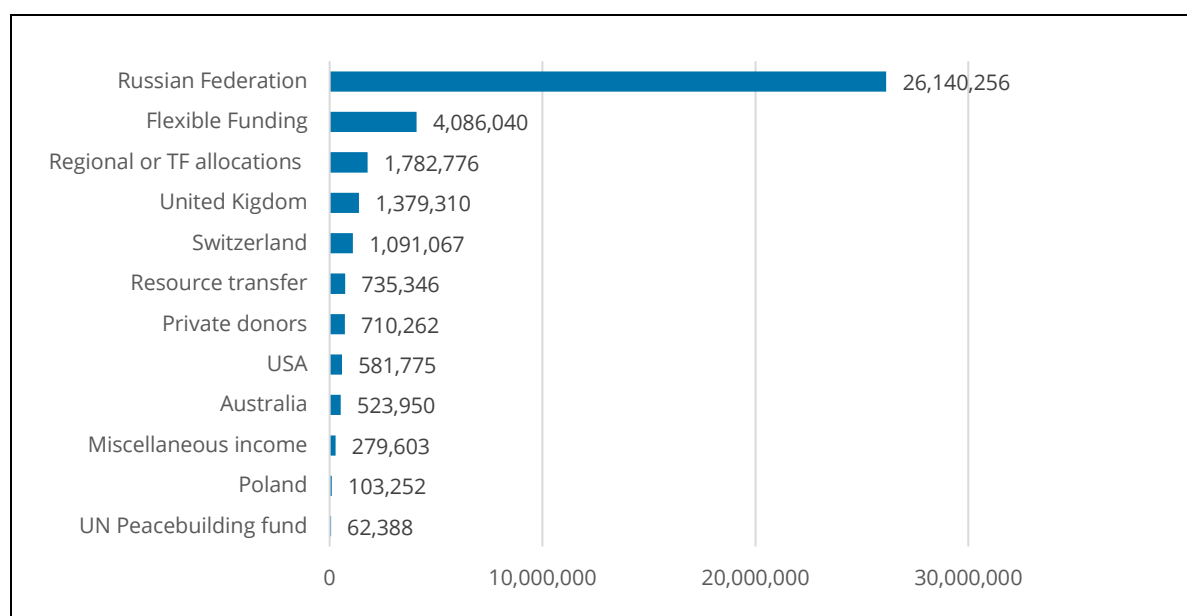
43. The Russian Federation remains the main donor, providing 84.8 percent of total contributions of the T-ICSP and 72 percent of the CSP. Flexible funding increased from 4.8 to 10.9 percent. Additional donors to the CSP as compared with T-ICSP include Switzerland, Australia, Poland and the United Kingdom, the United States of America (USA) and other multilateral, private donors and funds also contributed to the WFP programmes as presented in Figures 5 and 6.

Figure 5: Donors to the Tajikistan Transitional Interim Country Strategic Plan (2018-2019)



Source: Tajikistan T-ICSP resource situation as of 31 August 2020

Figure 6: Donors to the Tajikistan Country Strategic Plan (2019-2024)



Source: WFP. FACTory, Resource Situation Report, data extracted on 15 November 2021

Gender and accountability to affected populations

44. The T-ICSP and CSP design were informed by a gender analysis conducted by WFP in 2016.⁴⁵ The T-ICSP was given a Gender Marker of 2A, indicating that gender equality is a significant objective and the CSP a Gender and Age marker of 3, indicating that it fully integrates gender. The CSP document noted that WFP would use gender and protection analyses to inform implementation of the CSP and to ensure a gender-sensitive and a “do no harm” approach throughout the portfolio. The CSP is also guided by WFP protection policy and guidelines and committed to accountability to affected populations, such as through the creation of community feedback mechanisms (CFM), aimed at strengthening community engagement, promoting participatory decision making and informing programme design.

⁴⁵ WFP. 2019. “Tajikistan Country Strategic Plan (2019–2024)”. (WFP/EB.A/2019/8-A/10).

Transitional interim country strategic plan and country strategic plan beneficiaries

45. The total number of planned beneficiaries increased between 2018 and 2020, peaking at 511,141 in 2020. The proportion of girl and women beneficiaries remained relatively constant around 50 percent. Primary school-age children (5-11 years) constitute the largest share of planned beneficiaries: 83 percent in 2019 under the T-ICSP and up to 95 percent in 2020. An overview of the yearly breakdown of planned and actual beneficiaries by gender and activity is presented in Figure 49 and discussed in greater detail for each activity under EQ2.

WFP Tajikistan country office analytical work

46. WFP country office undertook three studies in 2018 (Fill the Nutrient Gap, the Zero Hunger Strategic Review and Social Protection Scoping Study), and a formative research on the behaviours of school-aged children regarding healthy eating and hygiene in 2019, followed by “nimble” trials in 2020.⁴⁶ These helped identify the most relevant mix of social and behaviour change communication (SBCC) interventions in schools and a feasibility study on the use of cash-based transfer as part of the school feeding programme. In 2020, WFP conducted a desk review on the potential socioeconomic consequences of COVID-19 in order to identify vulnerabilities and target areas for response and developed a proposal for food assistance for assets activities using cash-based transfers.

47. Studies completed in 2021 include: SBCC formative research and nimble trials (February 2021) and the Moderate Severe Malnutrition Treatment Review (April 2021); others are underway (list included in Annex XI) covering various issues (such as privacy impact assessment, needs gaps assessment) and thematic areas such as: school feeding, nutrition, food security (such as the FAO/WFP 2021 CFSAM), emergency preparedness, gender and social protection.

⁴⁶ Nimble trials: testing different intervention mixes to identify what works best in different contexts

2 Evaluation findings

48. This chapter presents the evaluation findings against four key questions and subquestions. The responses are based on document analysis and information received from various stakeholders to the maximum extent possible.

2.1 EQ1: TO WHAT EXTENT IS WFP'S STRATEGIC POSITION, ROLE AND SPECIFIC CONTRIBUTION BASED ON COUNTRY PRIORITIES AND PEOPLE'S NEEDS AS WELL AS WFP'S STRENGTHS?

Relevance of transitional interim country strategic plan and country strategic plan to national policies, plans and strategies, including achievement of the national Sustainable Development Goals

Finding 1: WFP country strategies are aligned with Tajikistan's national development and sector priorities relating to food security and nutrition, education and disaster risk reduction (DRR). Selection of some policy alternatives in these areas can be directly attributed to WFP, notably in school feeding. (This is discussed further in EQ 2.)

49. A comparative review of the national strategic framework pertaining to thematic areas of the focus and coverage of WFP shows strong alignment of the organization's interventions with national priorities. The findings of the review are corroborated by stakeholder interviews and an e-survey,⁶¹ which confirm WFP efforts to consider government priorities and contribute to them through: 1) implementing some of the sector priorities (for example, school feeding, nutrition and disaster response); or 2) advisory and technical assistance contributing to the design of some government priorities. The latter is still limited to the central level and to a selection of government institutions, with more diverse and uneven subnational level engagement.

50. The overarching country development framework is outlined in NDS-2030 (see paragraph 16) and MTDP-2020.⁶² All WFP thematic interventions, in particular in food security and nutrition, are aligned with and contribute to government priorities as envisaged in these strategies. The focus of WFP on vulnerable groups, including schoolchildren, pregnant and lactating women and children 6-59 months, as well as populations affected by natural disasters or emergencies, has been relevant and contributes to the NDS-2030 priorities. Stakeholder interviews confirm that such a specific and targeted approach provides for appropriate use of available resources in line with country priorities.

51. WFP engagement in resilience building was based on the existing agreement with the Committee on Emergency Situations and Civil Defence (CoES). The agreement was amended and extended in order to establish and advance the systems, modalities and procedures for knowledge and information sharing on climate change (CC) adaptation, disaster risk reduction and effective natural disaster response management in line with the National Disaster Risk Reduction Strategy (2019-2030).

Finding 1.1: The T-ICSP and CSP are aligned with government priorities on school health and nutrition and more specifically school feeding. WFP school feeding interventions have been comprehensive and aligned with the SSDSM 2017-2027, however a national school feeding policy action plan (under development) and definite stable funding have not yet materialized.

52. The very comprehensive school health and nutrition policy analysis in Tajikistan conducted by the regional bureau in Bangkok in 2021⁶³ identified many direct and indirect references to school health, nutrition and school feeding in national strategy documents, such as: school feeding as part of targeted

⁶¹ See **Error! Reference source not found.** with Survey results (Question 5).

⁶² Government of Tajikistan. 2017. Tajikistan Voluntary National Review, 2017.

⁶³ WFP. 2021. Policy Analysis for School Health and Nutrition Tajikistan.

social welfare packages being among key areas identified under the education focus area of NDS-2030;⁶⁴ limited access to quality and safe nutrition recognized as a factor affecting access to education (NSDE 2021-2030);⁶⁵ the potential contribution of school feeding to healthy diets recognized in NPAS 2015-2024, as also recommended by the Fill the Nutrient Gap analysis;⁶⁶ and reaffirmation of the joint Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Health and Social Protection's (MoHSP) responsibility for the normative regulations regarding organization of school feeding as outlined in the SSDSM (MPAN 2021-2025).⁶⁷

53. As noted by the regional bureau in Bangkok, the SSDSM 2017-2027 includes key elements of what is expected in a strategy document (such as the gradual transition towards a nationally owned and implemented school feeding funded by the state budget; key interventions; responsibilities of different actors and phases of implementation). However, it lacks information on key issues such as guiding principles, scope, coverage and budget, all of which would normally be provided in a national school feeding strategy. There is no school feeding policy document yet, but the evaluation team was informed by interviewees that a school feeding policy/action plan is being developed by a task force nominated by the interministerial coordination council, which is expected to be approved in 2022. This forthcoming document will constitute a solid policy framework within WFP support under which the next CSP can be organized and implemented.

Finding 1.2: The T-ICSP and CSP are aligned with government priorities on food security and nutrition, and assisted the Government in their implementation, particularly at the subnational level.

54. WFP strategic engagement on nutrition and moderate acute malnutrition treatment (SO2) contributes to the achievement of the third objective of NDS-2030, which aims to ensure food security and people's access to good quality nutrition. The National Communication Programme for the "1000 days of the child's life in the Republic of Tajikistan for 2020-2024" and MPAN 2021-2025, further reaffirm the commitment of the Government and other key stakeholders to achieve prevention through ten behavioural results (including those related to nutrition of children aged 6-24 months) as well as improving the quality and coverage of nutrition-specific interventions including the scale-up of the integrated moderate acute malnutrition (IMAM) programme in high-burden districts to achieve 100 percent coverage by the end of 2025.⁶⁸ Activities implemented under SO2 are in line with the priorities defined in these two aforementioned documents. Stakeholder interviews revealed that SBCC activities implemented by WFP are aligned with wider government commitment to make changes in nutrition approaches in Tajikistan.

55. There are linkages between WFP interventions and the National Health Strategy for the period until 2030 (approved in September 2021). WFP nutrition support services contribute to the health strategy's aim to reduce all forms of malnutrition specifically among children and women of reproductive age.

Finding 1.3: The T-ICSP and CSP are aligned with the Government's priorities on disaster risk reduction.

56. WFP emergency relief and disaster risk reduction activities have been tailored in alignment with the National Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction in the Republic of Tajikistan for 2019-2030. WFP collaboration with the CoES is based on the bilateral memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed in 2017, to ensure a coordinated response to disasters, in line with national priorities as set out in the strategic framework but also responding to the needs in the field. Throughout the reference period, WFP supported the response to localized disasters, as well as the work of national platforms and inter-agency efforts on emergency preparedness and disaster risk reduction in coordination with national actors and in line with the National Disaster Risk Reduction Strategy. WFP capacity strengthening also included support to the CoES and the Agency of Statistics, in response to their needs. The evaluation found evidence of efforts from WFP and government stakeholders to shift towards emergency preparedness and disaster risk management,

⁶⁴ Government of Tajikistan. 2016. National Development Strategy of the Republic of Tajikistan for the period up to 2030, p. 48.

⁶⁵ Government of Tajikistan. 2014. Nutrition and Physical Activity Strategy (2015-2024), p. 10 & 15.

⁶⁶ Government of Tajikistan. 2020. National Strategy for Education Development (2021-2030), p. 8.

⁶⁷ Government of Tajikistan. *MPAN (2021-2025)*, p. 9.

⁶⁸ Government of Tajikistan. *MPAN (2021-2025)*, p. 22.

including strengthening the Government's prevention and mitigation processes and investing in building strengthening measures that help minimize disaster risk.

Finding 1.4: The WFP shift towards country capacity strengthening reflects the national humanitarian-development nexus context. Such efforts are still only slowly emerging and could have benefitted from more attention in the design of WFP interventions.

57. A gradual shift from direct implementation to capacity strengthening was already built into the T-ICSP with relevant activities embedded under SO1, SO2 and SO3. Grouping country capacity strengthening activities under SO4 with dedicated resources reflects the reaffirmation by WFP of its strategic shift in Tajikistan from direct implementation to enabling national and subnational institutions to design and deliver on their social protection and food security and nutrition priorities. Having a separate capacity strengthening outcome was also meant to provide the country office with more flexibility in seizing opportunities and responding to emerging needs. However, this approach did not result in more resources, mainly due to a lack of understanding of the country capacity strengthening role of WFP by donors and the Government - a situation that arose from limited showcasing of such services. The WFP country office's country capacity strengthening ability is still limited: country capacity strengthening activities lack consistent needs assessment or a conceptual framework of what country capacity strengthening means in Tajikistan's context. This results in merely emerging and unsystematic country capacity strengthening activities, which focus mainly on central level government.

Finding 2: The respective designs of the T-ICSP and CSP were informed by evidence collected through analytical studies initiated by WFP in consultation with central government. The quality and depth of consultations with subnational government and communities is less visible.

58. The designs of the T-ICSP and CSP have been informed by analytical reports, such as the evaluation of the PRRO undertaken in 2014, as well as various reviews and studies conducted in 2018 (see paragraph 35). Key recommendations of such reports were integrated in the design of the WFP strategic framework.

59. WFP engaged proactively in consultations with the Government, United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations and WFP cooperating partners and donors to design and adapt its interventions. Stakeholders noted that inclusive consultation processes helped WFP align its interventions to national priorities and gaps in service provision, and also with the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) and donor agenda. The approach of WFP to consultations with subnational and local-level authorities varied, depending on the issue at hand or the urgency of response required. The evaluation team noted criticisms by some stakeholders that WFP tends to consult mainly with central-level government and often information or consultations do not trickle down to subnational levels. This affects the quality of operationalization of agreed frameworks at subnational/local level and with final beneficiaries (for more details, see Finding 21 below). A good example was found in the organization of the food assistance for assets in GBAO. This included cooperation with the Aga Khan Agency for Habitat (AKAH), the Mountain Societies Development Support Programme and Rural Aid, which worked closely with the local communities (village organizations) to identify needs and mobilize communities to set up project implementation committees. WFP has also been providing support for the establishment of intersectoral councils at regional and district levels to promote their involvement in the implementation of the SSDSM 2017-2027 and mainstream school feeding into regional and district development programmes. However, progress in establishing such councils has been uneven (for example, there has been slow progress in GBAO and Sughd) and among those councils established in some regions, not all are functional, as their capacity is overstretched by multiple engagements.

Finding 3: The T-ICSP and CSP are consistent with national Sustainable Development Goal priorities and targets, particularly within SDG 2 (zero hunger) and SDG 17 (partnerships).

60. Tajikistan adopted the United Nations 2030 Agenda in 2015, and further operationalized and mainstreamed the Sustainable Development Goals into the NDS-2030 and the MTDP-2020 (see Section 1.2 Context for further details). The T-ICSP and CSP have maintained focus on the achievement of SDG 2 (zero hunger) by addressing the root causes of food insecurity and malnutrition and building resilience through three of the WFP Strategic Plan (2017-2021) strategic results: 1 (access to food), 2 (end malnutrition), and 4

(sustainable food systems). Specifically, the WFP focus on school feeding aligns with SDG 2/target 2.1 but also aims to contribute to SDG 4 on ensuring quality education. (There is no Sustainable Development Goal target specified in the CSP document).⁶⁹ WFP contribution to SDG 4 is less evident in the context of free and almost universal primary school enrolment in Tajikistan. Most stakeholders at school level (parents and education staff) perceive school feeding as an important contributor to school attendance, in particular for girls (hence also contributing to SDG 5 achieving gender equality) and to better learning by alleviating short-term hunger. Although not explicitly mentioned in the T-ICSP and CSP documents, school feeding contributes to Target 2.3 (agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale producers, in particular women) through its testing of school feeding models such as home-grown school feeding (HGFSF).

61. While linkages and alignment of WFP strategic results to SDG 2 are explicit, the linkages to SDG 17 are less explicit. WFP work on sustainable food systems included proactive efforts to align with SDG 17 government priority targets, while WFP is undergoing a shift in Tajikistan from direct implementation towards enabling and strengthening national and subnational institutions' capacity to deliver on food security and nutrition priorities. Despite these efforts, as mentioned in Finding 1.4 above, WFP focus on country capacity strengthening is still underdeveloped and not fully instrumental to contribute to SDG 17 beyond the school feeding programme.

62. In line with SDG 17, WFP invests efforts in building partnerships with other development partners active in the country. There is consistent evidence of proactive and positive WFP partnership and engagement with development partners, notably United Nations agencies, in the respective areas of intervention (see more in [Finding 37 in EQ4](#)).

Responsiveness of the transitional interim country strategic plan and the country strategic plan to the needs of the most vulnerable people to ensure that no one is left behind

Finding 4: The T-ICSP and CSP addressed the needs of the most vulnerable through targeting food insecure and climate disaster-prone areas. There is a strong and maintained focus on addressing gaps in services and unmet needs of schoolchildren, pregnant and lactating women and children 6-59 months and other vulnerable groups (such as populations affected by natural disasters or COVID-19, populations living in isolated and disaster-prone areas, etc.) when it comes to nutrition and school feeding and disaster risk reduction.

63. WFP informs its programme through extensive evidence and lessons learned from previous interventions and assessments and studies.⁷⁰ Such studies were useful in identifying the main bottlenecks in the Government's response and service provision in food security, nutrition and disaster risk reduction and the main challenges and unmet needs of the most vulnerable groups. For instance, the selection of target groups for WFP support to school feeding and nutrition was informed by food security assessments, such as the WFP Food Security Monitoring System⁷¹ and the findings of democratic and health surveys conducted in 2012 and 2017. These assessments informed the selection of regions, districts and schools.

64. In contrast to school feeding, the coverage of moderate acute malnutrition treatment is very limited – it amounts to about 250 primary healthcare centres (PHCs) in four districts of Khatlon and one district in Sughd. These districts were selected in 2012 based on malnutrition prevalence indicators. None of the interviewed stakeholders challenged this choice, but noted that other regions and districts would also be eligible for support should resources be available to expand this activity. In terms of individual targeting, criteria are rightly based on national/international guidance.⁷²

⁶⁹ WFP. 2019. "Tajikistan Country Strategic Plan. (2019–2024)" (WFP/EB.A/2019/8-A/10) p.12.

⁷⁰ For instance, studies such as *Zero Hunger Strategic Review*, *Fill the Nutrition Gap*, *The 2017 Review of climate risks and food security in Tajikistan*; situation analyses focusing on socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 pandemic, etc. were prepared and used to inform WFP strategies.

⁷¹ WFP. 2010. Development Project Tajikistan. 200120 (WFP/EB.A/2010/9-A/2), paragraph 31;RBB. 2021. *Regional Review of school feeding evaluations conducted between 2010 and 2020*, p. 57.

⁷² MoHSP. 2017. National Guideline on Treatment of Severe and Moderate Malnutrition.

65. The evaluation found that targeting of the groups most vulnerable to disasters, climate change or to socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 pandemic was appropriate, and took into account the different needs and challenges encountered by communities in disaster-prone areas. Some stakeholders noted that WFP could have done more to elaborate its consultation approaches with local communities and affected groups in its disaster response. Such measures would have assisted WFP in ensuring an adequate response to distinct needs, requirements and vulnerabilities of affected populations in disasters (see Finding 21 and [Finding 1](#)).

66. Survey results show that almost 50 percent of surveyed WFP partners see WFP interventions as greatly responsive to the needs of the most vulnerable groups, while an additional 35 percent consider WFP to be responsive to the needs of the most vulnerable to some extent (see Figure 29).

The strategic positioning of WFP and its continued relevance considering changing contexts, national capacities and needs in Tajikistan in particular in response to the COVID-19 pandemic

Finding 5: There is evidence showcasing the ability of WFP to adapt to the evolving local context and needs throughout the T-ICSP and CSP implementation, pointing to continued relevance of the chosen strategies and interventions.

67. WFP implemented a variety of adaptive and flexible strategies and activities aimed at addressing food security, nutrition and disaster risk reduction needs and challenges. Within disaster risk reduction, WFP is increasingly investing in emergency response system solutions as well as wider reforms to ensure that the Government is more ready for similar or other types of disasters and emergencies. The work on this area was envisaged in WFP planning documents pertaining to the approval of funds from the Green Climate Fund (GCF), which was significantly delayed. Since the initiation of the Green Climate Fund project, the focus of WFP on system solutions is more pronounced, but is yet to yield first results as evidenced by this evaluation. A good example of the ability of WFP to adapt to evolving contexts and respond to the unmet needs of the most vulnerable groups has been its rapid response to localized disasters in 2020 and 2021. WFP, in partnership with the Rapid Emergency and Assessment Coordination Team (REACT) chaired by CoES, responded to the consequences of mudflow and floods in Khuroson and Vahdat districts in May 2020, by using its contingency food stock to distribute a one-off emergency entitlement (fortified wheat flour) to 272 affected households, reaching some 1,200 beneficiaries. In response to the earthquake of magnitude 5.8 that occurred in Rasht Valley in July 2021, WFP, in cooperation with CoES and the public organization "*Markazi Dastgirii Gharm*",⁷³ supported the construction and rehabilitation of 70 houses that were completely or partially destroyed.

68. WFP engagement in the COVID-19 response resulted from an influx of USD 1.1 million from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) in 2020 and 2021, aiming to address the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic. WFP conducted a study of the vulnerability impact chain, which helped assess the root causes of vulnerabilities to food insecurity in the light of the pandemic, informing the COVID-19 response action such as food assistance for assets activities in GBAO. The support reached 15,000 beneficiaries, assisting resilience building through rehabilitation of community assets, but also to meet the beneficiaries' immediate nutritional needs.⁷⁴ This study was also helpful to other United Nations agencies and development partners, which confirmed having used the information generated by WFP in planning their own response to the pandemic. WFP shifted its own school feeding intervention in light of COVID-19 towards organizing take-home ration (THR) distribution to vulnerable families (see detailed overview of the WFP COVID-19 response measures under EQ2).

69. WFP efforts to support other development partners in their response to the COVID-19 pandemic were relevant and confirmed the added value of WFP in terms of enabling prompt response and relief in such situations. Stakeholder interviews with development partners, notably United Nations agencies, showed the timely support of WFP in procurement and delivery of personal protective equipment (PPE), which was not otherwise available in Tajikistan at the onset of the pandemic. United Nations agencies appreciated the availability of the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) managed by WFP to assist United

⁷³ WFP. 2021. WFP Tajikistan Country Brief August 2021.

⁷⁴ WFP. 2020. Proposal: Cash for Work in Response to COVID-19 Socioeconomic Shocks.

Nations agency staff who needed to go in and out of the country in the absence of available commercial airline traffic during the lockdown in 2020. Some stakeholders raised concern with high costs associated with such flights and some operational and registration issues. This feedback indicates that some interlocutors did not fully understand the purpose of such a service, pointing out also that WFP could have done more to promote the purpose and funding of such support.

70. WFP field presence was crucial for timely and thorough analyses of situations in the field both in times of crises (localized disasters, COVID-19, and influx of refugees from Afghanistan), helping to inform the organization's adaptation but also in terms of other United Nations agencies' programmes, as confirmed through document review^{75,76} and stakeholder interviews. The findings of the study on the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 informed WFP efforts to design and launch an online platform to follow COVID-19 data, which helped timely information sharing but also helped reconfirm the position of WFP as a relevant first responder in times of crises.

Coherence and alignment of the transitional interim country strategic plan and the country strategic plan with the United Nations framework, and investment in strategic partnerships based on the WFP comparative advantage in Tajikistan

Finding 6: T-ICSP and CSP are aligned with the wider United Nations development framework.

71. The UNDAF initially covered the period from 2016-2020 and was further extended until 2022 to support achievement of Tajikistan's development priorities. The UNDAF contains six strategic outcomes. WFP aligns with and contributes to Outcome 3 "People in Tajikistan benefit from quality, equitable and inclusive health, education and social protection systems" through school feeding interventions; and, through moderate acute malnutrition interventions, to Outcome 4 "the nutritional status of the people in Tajikistan is improved through stable access to sufficient, appropriate and safe food, improved child feeding practices, better water and sanitation and improved access to quality health care". WFP also contributes to and is aligned with UNDAF Outcome 6: "People in Tajikistan are more resilient to natural and manmade disasters and benefit from improved policy and operational frameworks for environmental protection and management of natural resources." Interviewed stakeholders confirmed that WFP alignment and contribution to these outcomes, particularly outcomes 3 and 4, have been essential.

Finding 7: WFP engages in strategic partnerships with other United Nations agencies and development partners, utilizing and building on its comparative advantage in Tajikistan.

72. WFP is actively engaged with the United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office and a wide range of United Nations agencies, including UNICEF, FAO, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and WHO. United Nations partners reported having very good and collaborative relationships with WFP. In the area of nutrition, WFP, UNICEF and WHO collectively supported the development of guidelines such as the National Guideline on Treatment of Severe and Moderate Malnutrition, and strategies such as the MPAN. WFP and UNICEF collaborate closely in implementing IMAM through a well-established referral system whereby beneficiaries graduating from UNICEF-supported outpatient treatment of severe acute malnutrition (SAM) are enrolled in WFP-supported treatment of moderate acute malnutrition. WFP has been partnering with FAO to establish gardens and greenhouses in school premises.⁷⁷

73. WFP is an active member of various United Nations platforms dealing with humanitarian and developmental issues. As noted above, WFP has been an active member of the REACT group, which focuses on emergency management, chaired by CoES and co-chaired by the United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office. WFP engagement in the COVID-19 response group included WFP efforts to procure the first round of PPE equipment and to contribute to the United Nations studies on the impact of COVID-19 (for example: the Impact of COVID-19 on Lives, Livelihoods and Micro, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises in

⁷⁵ FAO/WFP. 2020. COVID-19 and Food Security – Monthly Update (June 2020).

⁷⁶ WFP. 2020. Economic and Food Security Implications of the COVID-19 Outbreak (July 2020).

⁷⁷ WFP. 2020. Tajikistan Annual Country Report 2019 (January-June) – Country Strategic Plan 2018-2019, pg. 9.

Tajikistan;⁷⁸ the Integrated Socioeconomic Response Framework to COVID-19;⁷⁹ and the Rapid Gender Assessment of the Situation and Needs of Women in the Context of COVID-19 in Tajikistan).⁸⁰

74. There was consensus among internal and external stakeholders on the need to strengthen partnerships (programming and implementation) across United Nations agencies in the areas of school feeding and nutrition, building on each other's capacities and comparative advantage. Examples given by interviewed stakeholders included: in relation to school feeding collaboration with UNICEF in terms of infrastructure (WASH) and with FAO for HGSF. In this regard, the FAO/UNICEF/WHO/WFP United Nations Strategic Framework for Nutrition adopted by the four agencies in July 2021⁸¹ sets the scene for future collaboration across agencies in assisting the Ministry of Health and Social Protection in implementing the MPAN 2021-2025.

2.2 EQ2: WHAT IS THE EXTENT AND QUALITY OF WFP'S SPECIFIC CONTRIBUTION TO THE TRANSITIONAL INTERIM COUNTRY STRATEGIC PLAN AND THE COUNTRY STRATEGIC PLAN STRATEGIC OUTCOMES IN TAJIKISTAN?

Delivery of expected outputs and contributions to the expected strategic outcomes of the transitional interim country strategic plan and the country strategic plan

Finding 8: WFP has been effective in reaching intended beneficiaries across thematic strategic outcomes, though delivery of output-level results under SO4 is less pronounced. The transformational potential of delivered outputs is uneven across thematic interventions.

75. Progress towards desired outcomes shows mixed results: progress against indicators was within set targets for SO1 and SO2, while the impact of asset creation on beneficiaries was variable: improvements were noted in six out of nine indicators for which data were collected but there was a deterioration in livelihood-based coping strategy indicators, likely as a result of the negative socioeconomic impact of COVID-19. The T-ICSP and CSP envisaged strategies to navigate across the humanitarian-development nexus by strengthening the WFP programme approach and engaging in more strategic country capacity strengthening. This was programmed under SO4 but was also interweaved across other strategic outcomes. The evolution of the programme approach has been slow, and not fully finalized during this programme cycle. The evaluation team consider the reason for this to be WFP resource mobilization challenges, which affected uneven delivery across all strategic outcomes, and in particular SO2 and SO3.

76. Annual beneficiary planning figures were exceeded throughout 2018-2020 for both SO1 - school feeding and SO2 - moderate acute malnutrition treatment. Actual beneficiaries receiving food under SO3 - asset creation and livelihood - were considerably below targets throughout, while cash-based transfer beneficiaries exceeded targets under the CSP. The COVID-19 response - addressing asset creation by engaging affected populations - provided effective support to beneficiaries while also improving local community infrastructure. The shift from direct implementation to strengthening the capacity of government institutions and schools to implement social protection programmes (SO4) did not proceed entirely as planned and was affected both by WFP capacity limitations for country capacity strengthening and by external factors. These external factors included limitations in terms of government human resources and financial capacities and decreasing donor assistance to core thematic WFP interventions (see figure 23 and finding 41). Details on the perceived added value of WFP by stakeholders as captured by the e-survey conducted for this evaluation can be found in Annex VII Figure 5.

77. The WFP COVID-19 response included procurement and delivery of on-demand services to United Nations agencies (including delivery of PPE), under the scope of 17 bilateral service provision agreements with United Nations agencies for the supply of logistics and procurement services. WFP Global Passenger

⁷⁸ UN. 2015. United Nations Development Assistance Framework for Tajikistan 2016-2020.

⁷⁹ UNSDG. 2020. Integrated Socioeconomic Response Framework to COVID-19.

⁸⁰ ADB. 2020. Women's Time Use in Rural Tajikistan.

⁸¹ FAO/UNICEF/WHO/WFP. 2021. UN Strategic Framework for Nutrition.

Services operated a total of 18 flights transporting passengers from 14 different organizations to and from Tajikistan when no other flight options were available.

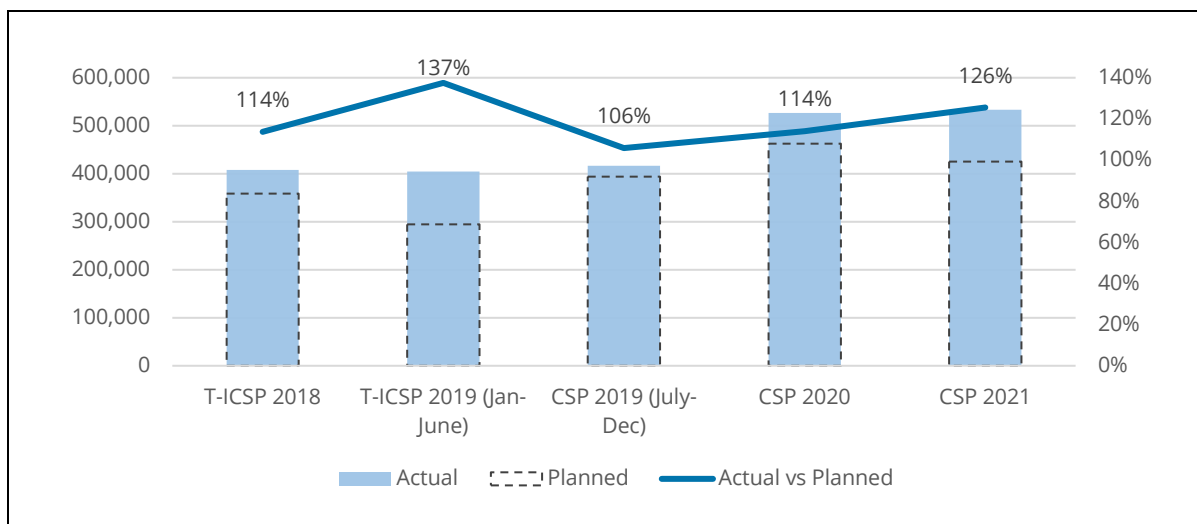
78. Detailed assessments of WFP performance within each strategic outcome are presented below.

SO1: School feeding

Finding 8.1: WFP maintained planned school feeding beneficiaries, albeit with reduced food entitlements due to funding shortfalls, which undermined intended nutritional benefits. Available information does not allow a quantitative assessment of whether children did receive “daily nutritionally balanced meals” (Output 1). Financial contributions from local government entities and voluntary in-kind or cash contributions from parent teacher associations (PTAs) have complemented WFP rations.

79. Throughout 2018-2021, WFP was able to provide food assistance to over 1,900 targeted schools in food-insecure areas across 52 districts in Tajikistan, reaching a total of 2,320,020 schoolchildren.⁸² The actual number of beneficiaries reached in 2020 came up to 114 percent of the target if the 126,000 (24,000 households) take-home rations beneficiaries are included.⁸³ Girls and boys were equally represented in planning figures while actual numbers show that slightly more boys were reached (Figure 7). This finding concurs with available education statistics whereby approximately 3 percent of boys of primary school age are out of school compared to 4 percent of girls of the same age.⁸⁴

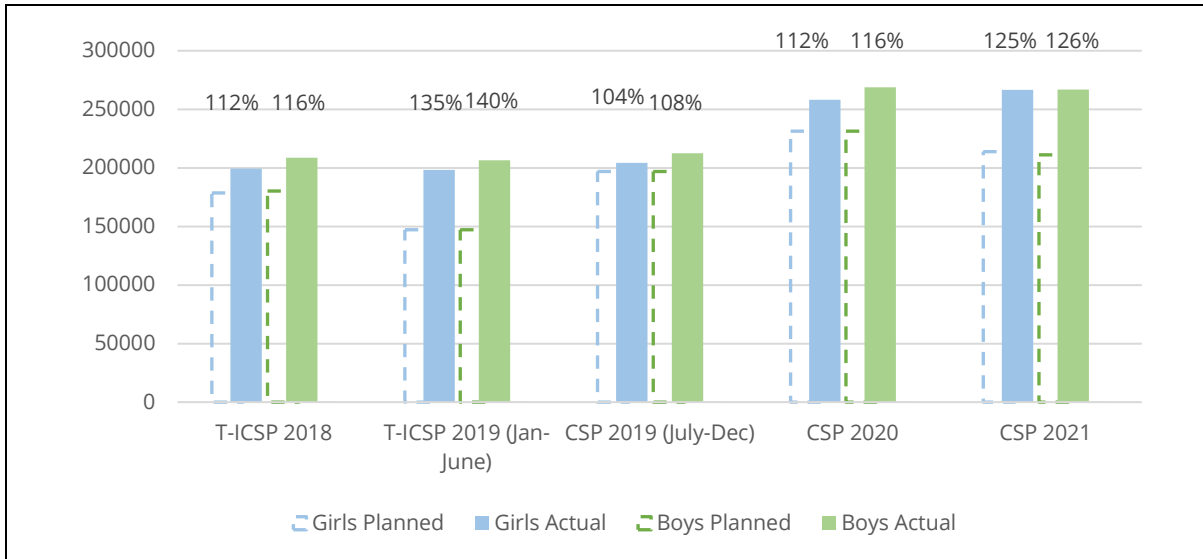
Figure 7: School feeding beneficiaries, overall and by gender



⁸² No disaggregated data by region could be readily provided by the WFP country office (according to the country office manual data retrievals would be necessary to obtain disaggregated data).

⁸³ THR distributions are discussed in paragraphs 87 and 88.

⁸⁴ World Bank. 2018. Tajikistan National Education Profile 2018 Update.

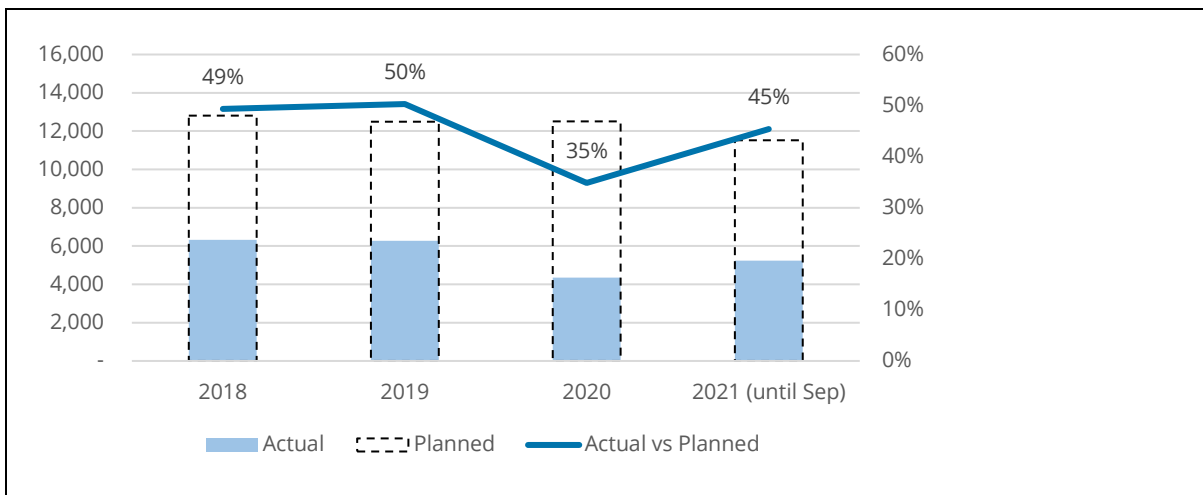


The actual number of beneficiaries in 2020 includes 126,000 beneficiaries of take-home rations (THRs), the number of school children having benefitted from meals equals 400,971 (87 percent of planned excluding THR distribution).

Source: T-ICSP ACR 2018-2019; CSP ACR 2019-2020; CO: for 2021 data. For 2020, the actual number of beneficiaries equals 541,811 schoolchildren having benefitted from school meals (excluding THRs beneficiaries)

80. In light of funding shortfalls and delays in the supply chain (See Finding 28 and Finding 30) WFP, in consultation with national and subnational level government, decided to maintain its geographic coverage and number of schools and reduce the ration size and number of feeding days from five to four and in 2020 to 125 days in 21 districts and for 90 days in 31 districts (out of a total of 137 school days).⁸⁵ In 2020, the planned ration was reduced from 198 to 120gr/day of mixed commodities and further down to 117g/day for the 2021-2022 academic year providing about 460 kcal per child per day instead of the planned 781 kcal.^{86,87} Actual quantities of all commodities distributed were consistently below planning figures particularly under the CSP. Between 2018 and 2020, the largest shortages in commodities are observed for split peas: amounts provided represented 28, 39, 17, and 3 percent of planned; and none provided in 2021 (Figure 8 and Table 13).

Figure 8: School feeding food transfers



⁸⁵ WFP. 2020. Annual Country Report 2019 Tajikistan Country Strategic Plan 2019-2024, p.9; WFP. 2021. Annual Country Report 2020 Tajikistan Country Strategic Plan 2019-2024, p.12.

⁸⁶ WFP. 2018. WFP Tajikistan Country Brief April 2018.

⁸⁷ Information provided in the agreements between WFP and state authorities of the various regions and districts for implementation of SF for the 2021-2022 academic year.

Source: T-ICSP ACR 2018-2019; CSP ACR 2019-2020; CO: for 2021 data. Note: figures from the two 2019 ACRs (January-June and July-December) were combined to show picture for the whole school year and be comparable with the other years,

81. The decision to maintain coverage and reduce entitlements was made based on the grounds that local government entities and parent teacher associations would complement WFP rations through local foods and/or provide a full meal one day a week. Financial contributions from local government entities and voluntary in-kind or cash contributions from parent teacher associations have been critical as evidenced from observations in schools and WFP field offices' (FOs) annual reports. As shown in Table 4, local authorities' contributions to the total cost were highest in Rasht Valley (20 percent) and lowest in GBAO. Parent teacher association contributions were highest in Sughd (25 percent) and lowest in Roghun. During the academic year 2020-2021, contributions from parent teacher associations in Sughd reached 35 percent of the total school feeding cost. The daily school feeding cost per child per day in Sughd during the school year 2020-2021 was estimated at USD 0.10. Data collected through focus group discussions in 17 schools showed that only one school reported having experienced delays in the receipt of commodities during the 2019-2020 academic year, and did not manage to continue providing meals.

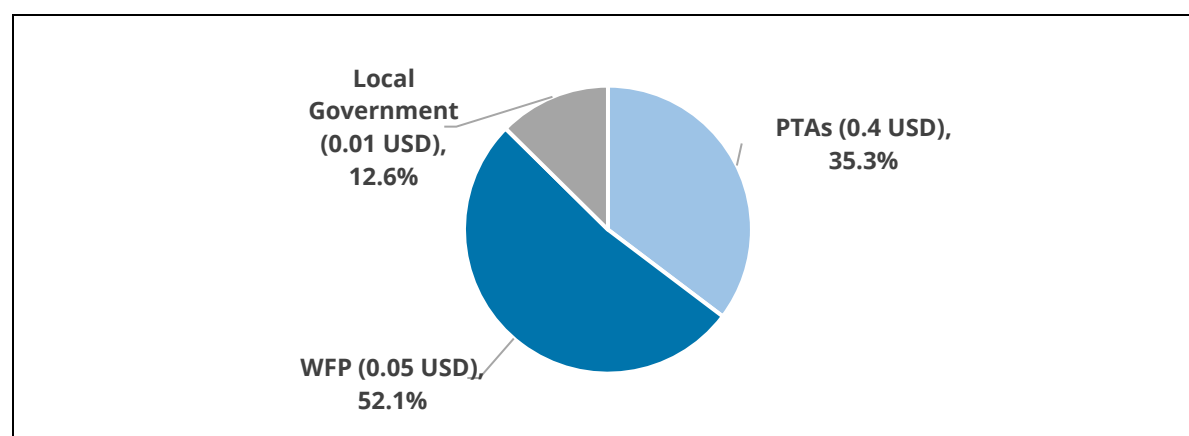
Table 4: Contributions of local governments and communities to school feeding by region for the school year 2019-2020

REGION	NUMBER OF SCHOOLS	NUMBER OF BENEFICIARIES	TOTAL	WFP		LOCAL GOVERNMENT		PTAS/COMMUNITY	
			USD	USD	% OF TOTAL	USD	% OF TOTAL	USD	% OF TOTAL
Khatlon	767	224 736	2,687,763	1,987,983	74%	389,977	15%	309,803	12%
Sughd	620	163 637	2,445,476	1,563,460	64%	262,028	11%	619,988	25%
GBAO	130	7 126	105,906	82,315	77%	4,205	4%	20,381	19%
Rasht Valley	355	32 826	605,161	394,844	65%	118,008	20%	92,269	15%
Roghun	42	4 788	93,541	76,275	82%	12,978	14%	4,288	5%

Source: WFP Tajikistan CO.2020. School Meals Programme Annual Report for 2019-2020 academic year: key highlights.

Note: Cost includes food, cooks' salaries, energy sources, electricity, transportation, supplementary food commodities, cash, etc.

Figure 9: Contributions to school feeding – example from Sughd for the school year 2020-2021



Source : WFP Khujand Field Office. 2021. Final Report School Meals Programme (School Year 2020-2021)

82. These promising results bode well for the potential future transition to a government and communities-owned school feeding programme.⁸⁸ The evaluation team found that empowerment of local

⁸⁸ The transition of school feeding programmes is a gradual and long-term shift from an externally supported school feeding programme towards full national ownership while maintaining programme quality and sustainability. Under full national ownership, the Government (and other engaged national actors) is envisioned to have strong capabilities to

authorities and communities is coherent with the WFP plan to gradually phase down its assistance and hand over the programme to the Government, which is less costly and hence more sustainable in the long run. These findings are corroborated by responses to the survey Question 8, which shows that WFP partners acknowledge positive achievements of WFP in delivering a strong and effective school feeding programme (See Figure 32)

Finding 8.2: SBCC nimble trials based on formative research initiated by the country office are reported to yield positive behaviour change among schoolchildren (Output 2).

83. Nutrition and hygiene knowledge promotion activities among schoolchildren and in communities at large started in 2019 with formative research on SBCC initiated by WFP with the support of the regional bureau in Cairo and in partnership with the Ministry of Health and Social Protection.^{89,90} A mix of SBCC interventions was developed aimed at improving hand hygiene practices among schoolchildren in rural Tajikistan. Implementation started in August 2020.⁹¹ According to WFP country office reports, SBCC interventions can positively change handwashing practices amongst school-aged children. This data could not be triangulated through field data collection as none of the visited schools benefitted from SBCC.

Finding 9: Whilst pursuing nutrition and education improvements, school feeding acts as a safety net intervention.

84. The SO1 focuses on nutritional benefits,⁹² and the initial logframe included a mix of education and nutrition indicators: gender ratio; consumption-based coping strategy index; food consumption score; food expenditure score; and enrolment rate.⁹³ The last four were dropped in 2019 and replaced by reduction in drop-out rate and increase in retention rate. Reported results show that the gender ratio reached 1.03 in 2020; the drop-out rate (at zero) and the retention rate (at 100) meet the respective targets (see Table 14). When asked about their views as to the benefits of school meals, community members and parents often mentioned its contribution to regular attendance, besides the nutritional benefits, in particular for girls, and increased attention/better learning outcomes.

85. School feeding pursues a threefold objective – nutrition, education and as a safety net (explicit under SO4, in line with WFP 2013 school feeding policy).⁹⁴ The contribution of school feeding to social protection is recognized in NDS-2030 “Development of incentives package and social welfare capabilities, including through the provision of food (to primary grades students)”. According to the 2018 Fill the Nutrient Gap analysis, the cost of a nutritious diet to a household for a school-age child is reduced from Tajikistani Somoni (TJS) 2.8 per day to TJS 0.5 per day thanks to the ration provided by WFP.⁹⁵

86. A recent WFP Office of Evaluation strategic evaluation of school feeding activities highlighted its use as a shock-responsive safety net (see Box 1 through the provision of take-home rations in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As mentioned in the Office of Evaluation report, the wide coverage and in-built systems for delivery of school feeding in Tajikistan served as a shock-responsive safety net as

design, fund, plan, implement, manage and coordinate, as well as monitor and evaluate their own school feeding programmes in a sustainable manner. At the same time, the process also entails shifting the WFP approach from providing direct implementation and rudimentary technical assistance to systematically and comprehensively strengthening national capacities until full national ownership is achieved. Capacity strengthening is ideally done jointly with other relevant and qualified partners. Definition taken from: RBB. 2021. Project Outline: Design of the Framework for Planning and Implementing Transition towards nationally owned school feeding programmes in Asia and the Pacific

⁸⁹ Rowena Merritt. 2019. Improving Nutritional Outcomes in Tajikistan: SBCC Formative Research Findings.

⁹⁰ These SBCC interventions include baseline data collection, implementation of interventions, follow-up data collection and analysis of trial evaluation data.

⁹¹ WFP. 2020. Successfully Increasing Good Handwashing Practices in Tajikistan’s Schools: Social Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC) Nimble Trials Results.

⁹² SO1 Outcome statement: “Food-insecure vulnerable people, including primary schoolchildren, in targeted districts meet their basic food requirements by 2024.”

⁹³ WFP. Tajikistan Transitional Interim Country Strategic Plan (2018-2019) – TJ01 Logframe.

⁹⁴ WFP. 2013. Revised School Feeding Policy – Promoting Innovation to Achieve National Ownership.

⁹⁵ WFP. 2018. *Fill the Nutrient Gap Tajikistan*. Summary report; p.16.

acknowledged and promoted by WFP at corporate and regional levels.⁹⁶ The findings of the Office of Evaluation report were confirmed by this evaluation.

Finding 9.1: The WFP response to the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on vulnerable families of schoolchildren was timely (in particular the second distribution during the lean season in February 2021). However, findings from the second post-distribution monitoring (PDM) raise concerns about targeting (choice of/adherence to targeting criteria).

87. Due to school closures in light of COVID-19, WFP continued supplying the most vulnerable families of schoolchildren with food assistance through take-home rations, with two rounds of one-off take-home ration distributions to vulnerable families having children enrolled in WFP-assisted schools in May 2020 (24,000 households) and in February 2021 (21,679 households) during the lean season.^{97,98} The selection process was consultative: families drawn from listings of families receiving targeted social assistance⁹⁹ were corroborated by school personnel and parents in consultation with the education departments. Selection criteria included: children with no parents or caregivers and children from households headed by women; disability was an additional criterion used for the second distribution.

Box 1: School feeding as an effective safety net in Tajikistan

“The school feeding system was found to be both effective for and essential to the country’s food-insecure people, but it is fragile due to funding constraints. Established in the early 2000s in response to poverty, malnutrition and poor education indicators, the programme has grown from 360,000 to 420,000 children between 2015 and 2020 (population growth effect). By targeting the poorer communities, which was the premise for the initial selection, and through the comparatively wide coverage (close to 50 percent of schools), the school feeding programme acts as an effective safety net intervention. Additionally, this aspect was leveraged during the COVID-19 pandemic response, when the use of school feeding stores for take-home rations, and of schools as distribution centres showed its value as a safety net.”

Source: Excerpt from WFP Office of Evaluation 2020.

88. The first post-distribution monitoring conducted within three weeks of take-home ration distribution confirmed that beneficiaries experienced food shortages during the seven days preceding the survey (65 percent of respondents) and had to borrow from families (44.6 percent) or to reduce meal size (33.8 percent). The second post-distribution monitoring (conducted about three months after take-home ration distribution) showed that around one-third of interviewed households were headed by women and one-third had at least one member with a disability. However, more than a quarter of the households reported having at least one of the members working outside the district or country at the time of the survey and/or having received remittances over the six months preceding the survey. As acknowledged in the post-distribution monitoring report, existence of a stable income raises concerns as to whether targeting criteria were strictly followed. In both distributions there was high satisfaction among respondents, with COVID-19 precautionary and preventive measures applied during distributions. Although the targeting criteria aimed at reaching low-income households identified, among other criteria, on the basis of the Government’s targeted social assistance programme, the 2021 post-distribution monitoring survey (also confirmed by the country office) showed an inclusion error whereby school management committee members also received assistance.

⁹⁶ WFP. 2020. School-Based Programmes as a Social Protection Tool in the RBC Region.

⁹⁷ WFP. 2020. Post Distribution Monitoring Survey Report: School Meals Programme COVID-19 Response: Provision of Take-Home Rations to Vulnerable Households with Children in Primary School, May 2020 (Data collection, July 2020).

⁹⁸ WFP. 2021. Outcome Monitoring Results Take Home Ration Project WFP Tajikistan School Feeding Programme.

⁹⁹ An unconditional cash transfer programme managed by the MoHSP.

Finding 10: High recovery rates of moderate acute malnutrition treatment were reached through the provision of the commodity. This was coupled with nutrition counselling and SBCC as well as by strengthening the capacity of primary health care staff in the management of malnutrition (outputs 1 and 2). Weaknesses were observed in planning beneficiary and commodity requirements.

89. Between 2018 and September 2021, a total of 33,598 children aged 6-59 months and pregnant and lactating women (18,211 girls/women and 15,387 boys) affected by moderate acute malnutrition benefitted from specialized nutritious food through approximately 260 primary healthcare centre facilities in targeted districts.¹⁰⁰ According to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)/the Ministry of Health and Social Protection/WFP review of moderate acute malnutrition treatment conducted in 2020, the number of girls treated is slightly higher, as explained by the difference in the sex ratio of the population in the country. Over the period 2018-September 2021, the number of children actually reached represents 116 percent of the planned 29,000.¹⁰¹ The higher-than-planned coverage is attributed mainly to improved community screening and an effective referral system for malnourished children, as well as the extension of the geographical coverage to one additional district in 2018.¹⁰²

90. A total of 231 metric tons (mt) of Super Cereal Plus was distributed under the T-ISCP and CSP (up until September 2021) representing about 60 percent of the planned amount. The activity overachieved its targets with less than planned commodities because the “length of stay” (time elapsed between admission and discharge) was less than the estimated maximum of four months mentioned in the IMAM protocol. Children’s weight gain is monitored on a weekly basis and children are discharged by primary healthcare centre staff based on the IMAM/the Ministry of Health and Social Protection protocol criteria.¹⁰³ During the focus group discussions at the primary healthcare centres, the mothers/caretakers of beneficiary children stated that most of the children recovered within two months.¹⁰⁴ The country office confirmed that the average length of stay is currently included by field offices in their annual reports to regional health departments (available in Tajik) but is not integrated in the corporate monitoring system of the country office thus far.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ WFP country office provided the evaluation team with actual beneficiaries disaggregated by district but did not provide planned figures to allow for an analysis of trends in performance (actual versus planned) by district.

¹⁰¹ The higher number of planned beneficiaries in 2021 is due to the addition of 4,000 pregnant and lactating women to benefit from prevention activities through CBT.

¹⁰² USAID/MoHSP/WFP. 2020. Review of WFP Tajikistan Prevention and Treatment of Malnutrition Activities in Khatlon and Sughd Regions 2017-2020.

¹⁰³ Weight for Height (W/H > -2 Z-score (towards -1 Z-score) or MUAC > 125mm in 2 consecutive visits (IMAM protocol p. 45).

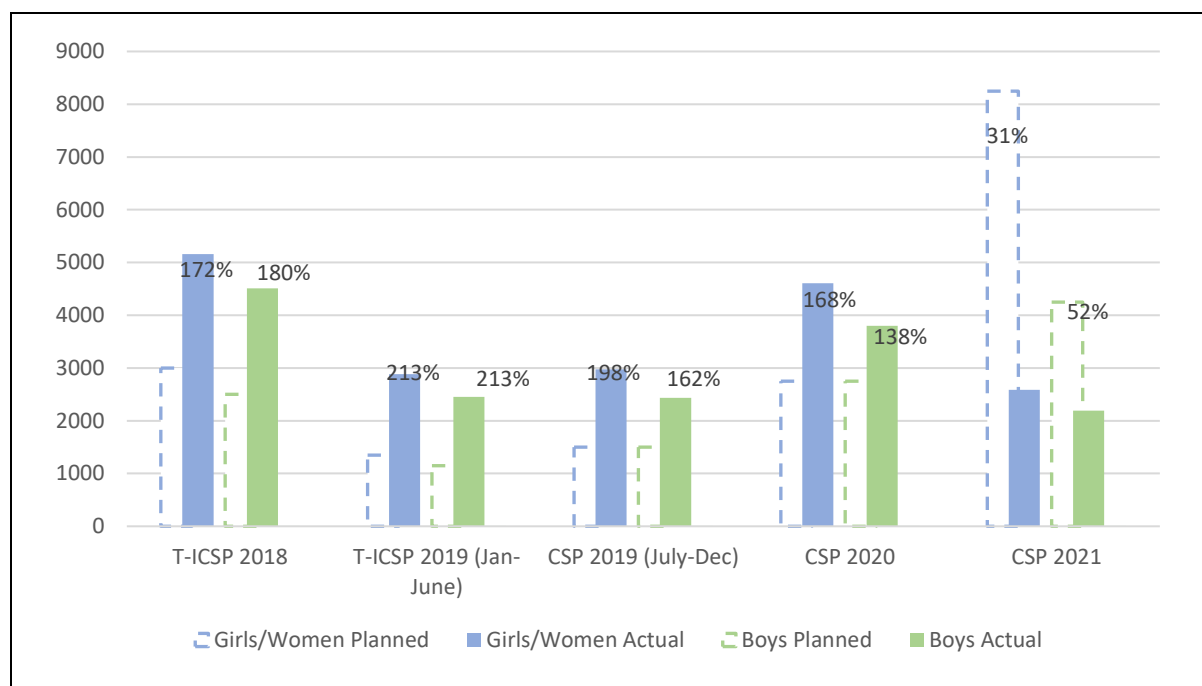
¹⁰⁴ According to WFP guidance, the average duration of assistance is between 3 to 6 months; WFP. (n.d.). WFP nutrition policy, nutrition programmes and food supplements: Updated with new evidence, scientific knowledge and global partnerships.

¹⁰⁵ This indicator is not included in either the CSP logframe or the WFP indicator compendium but is recommended in some national guidelines developed with WFP support such as for the Philippines.

(https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000019825/download/?_ga=2.259764682.1559690484.1578927537-1415096524.1568800526 (p. 84).

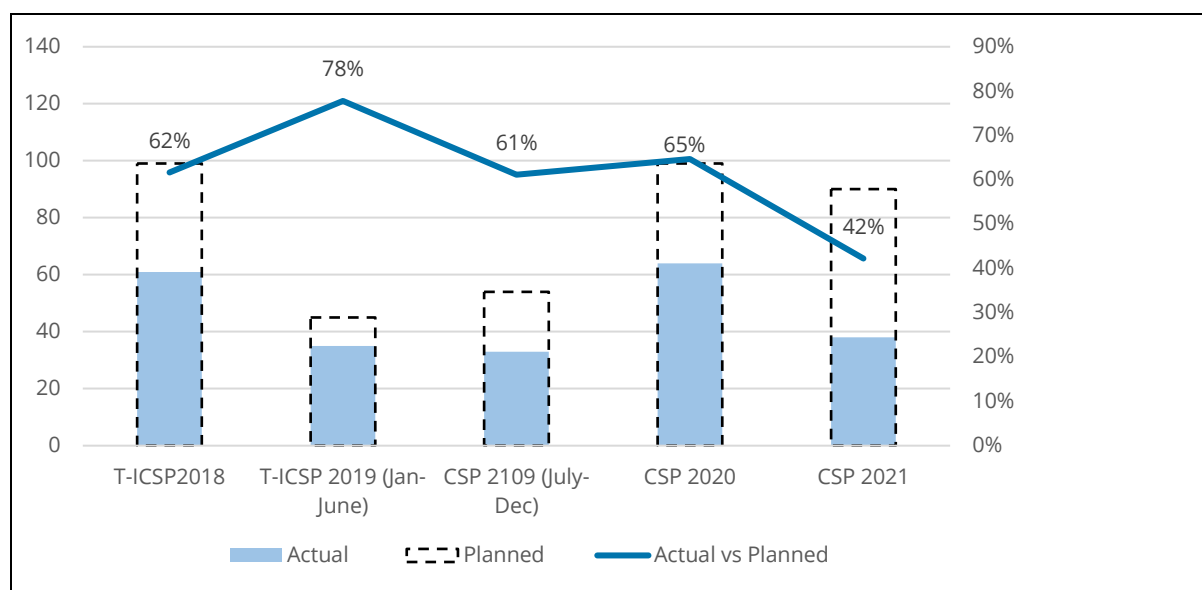
Indicators such as the average length of stay and re-admissions would be useful.

Figure 10: SO2 – Moderate acute malnutrition treatment beneficiaries, overall and by gender



Source: T-ICSP ACR 2018-2019; CSP ACR 2019-2020; and the country office for 2021 data.

Figure 11: SO2 – Moderate acute malnutrition treatment food transfers



Source: T-ICSP ACR 2018-2019; CSP ACR 2019-2020; CO: for 2021 data

91. In addition to counselling provided to parents and caregivers at primary healthcare centres on: a) infant and young child feeding and maternal nutrition; b) hygiene promotion and care for sick children; and c) children’s growth monitoring, SBCC nimble trials were implemented in 2020 in Jaloliddini Balkhi district (as mentioned in paragraph 82).

92. According to the project output data, 152 SBCC activities were implemented with over 7,100 community members attending the sessions and 2,226 schoolchildren (1,126 boys and 1,100 girls) benefitting from hygiene and sanitation sessions. The trial results show that SBCC interventions positively affected attitudes, knowledge and practices related to cooking oil usage in households, while women started preserving vegetables as a strategy to reduce loss of excess produce and contribute to meal diversification at times when less or no fresh fruits or vegetables were available. This finding was confirmed by beneficiaries during focus group discussions organized within the scope of this evaluation.

93. As regards outcome results, all indicators are within the set targets with very little change from year to year (see Table 5). Annual reports attribute the good results to prevention activities through SBCC and improvements in patients' follow-up by primary healthcare centre staff as a result of the capacity strengthening activities. The USAID/the Ministry of Health and Social Protection/WFP independent review conducted in the fourth quarter of 2020 confirms these findings.

Table 5: SO2 – Moderate acute malnutrition treatment outcome indicators

	MAM recovery rate	MAM coverage	Default rate	Mortality rate	Non-response rate
Target	≥75	>50	<15	<3	<15
2018	99.6	138	0.12	0.06	0.22
2019	98.13	172.23	0.23	0	1.54
2020	99.51	167.69	0.13	0	0.36

Note: for 2019 figures are the same in the 2019 T-ICSP and 2019 CSP ACRs. Green indicates achieved; red indicates non-achieved.

Source: T-ICSP ACR 2018 and 2019 (Jan-June) and CSP ACR 2019 (July-Dec) and 2020.

Finding 11: The introduction of digital registration and management for moderate acute malnutrition treatment (SCOPE CODA) faced implementation challenges and there are concerns regarding its sustainability (Output 3).

94. As regards the third output under SO2 on improved capacities of local health authorities to manage IMAM programmes, including the digitalization of reporting and monitoring, WFP integrated some country capacity strengthening efforts of primary healthcare centre medical staff and communities through trainings implemented in close collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Social Protection and the Regional Health Department of Hukumat of the Sughd region and the Regional Health and Social Protection Department of the Khatlon region¹⁰⁶ on moderate acute malnutrition, maternal nutrition, hygiene promotion and care for sick children. As per the project reports, a total of 345 primary healthcare centre staff (172 men and 173 women) have benefitted from various capacity strengthening trainings. A total of 5,863 mothers were also trained on child feeding and nutrition. Health personnel interviewed during the field visits to primary healthcare centres confirmed the utility of such trainings on awareness-raising of these issues.

95. At the end of 2018, WFP started piloting the SCOPE CODA. SCOPE is a WFP digital beneficiary and transfer management platform, which enables the digitization of the registration and management of moderate acute malnutrition treatment. CODA stands for conditional on-demand assistance. Implementation started in 20 primary healthcare centres in one district in 2018 and was extended to all 56 primary healthcare centres of the Jaloliddini Balkhi district in the Khatlon region and 51 primary healthcare centres in the Kulob district. Staff were trained on the use of this technology and primary healthcare centres were provided with nutrition information products and weighing scales.

96. The USAID/the Ministry of Health and Social Protection/WFP review identified a number of challenges, particularly regarding sustainability. These included the need for ongoing technical support, information technology skills, technology maintenance and access to internet in remote areas. Ultimately the technology would need to be linked to the national-level management information system once/if it is designed. The USAID review findings were echoed by the team's observations during visits to primary healthcare centres. Health staff reported problems such as: poor internet connection and power shortages (particularly in winter) preventing timely data synchronization; devices needing repairs; and the high turnover of health staff requiring the organization to provide regular trainings on the use of the device. Such factors hinder the sustainability and the scale-up potential of SCOPE CODA.

¹⁰⁶ USAID/MoHSP/WFP. 2020. Review of WFP Tajikistan Prevention and Treatment of Malnutrition Activities in Khatlon and Sughd Regions 2017-2020.

Finding 12: WFP swiftly introduced temporary changes in food distribution frequency to prevent mass gatherings at primary healthcare centres during the COVID-19 pandemic.

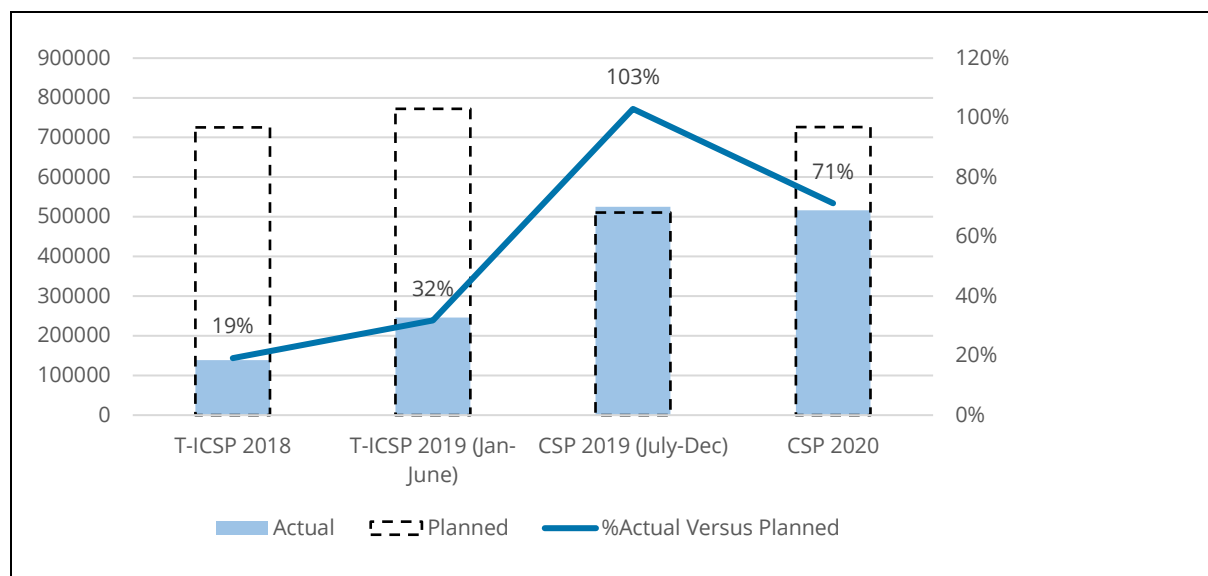
97. WFP, in coordination with the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, switched to providing one-month Super Cereal Plus rations instead of weekly rations to minimize the patient flow in primary healthcare centres in response to COVID-19. Parents/caretakers received mid-upper arm circumference tapes to monitor children’s progress at home and were educated by primary healthcare centre health staff on their use. Parents and caretakers of eligible malnourished children interviewed during the visits to primary healthcare centre facilities confirmed that such an approach was appropriate in light of restrictions, enabling them to still benefit from support.

SO3: Resilience

Finding 13: WFP relief support during and after a crisis has had beneficial effects for targeted populations, but had a small scope due to a limited budget. As a result, the approach of enhancing beneficiaries’ livelihoods and assets has been moderately successful. Where implemented, interventions resulted in improvements in food consumption scores and coping strategies, along with an improvement of community infrastructure through constructing/rehabilitation of assets, despite the negative socioeconomic impact of COVID-19. Sustainability of these results is fragile.

98. WFP work under SO3 was heavily affected by funding shortages and delays in starting the project funded by the Green Climate Fund. In 2019, only 29 percent of the total planned resources were made available. In the first half of 2019, available resources were prioritized targeting fewer beneficiaries for a shorter period of time due to delays in the receipt of funds. As presented in Figure 12 below, funding inflow in the second half of 2019 and in 2020 enabled WFP to scale up the scope of its interventions, providing support to affected populations due to COVID-19 and natural disasters (earthquake in the Rasht Valley in June 2021 and floods in the Khatlon region in May 2021). This support was funded from different sources, including the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, which was a new donor, assisting the COVID-19 response (included food assistance for assets using cash-based transfer interventions only).

Figure 12: SO3 – Cash transfer amounts



Source: T-ICSP ACR 2018-19; CSP ACR 2019-20. Data for 2021 not provided by the country office.

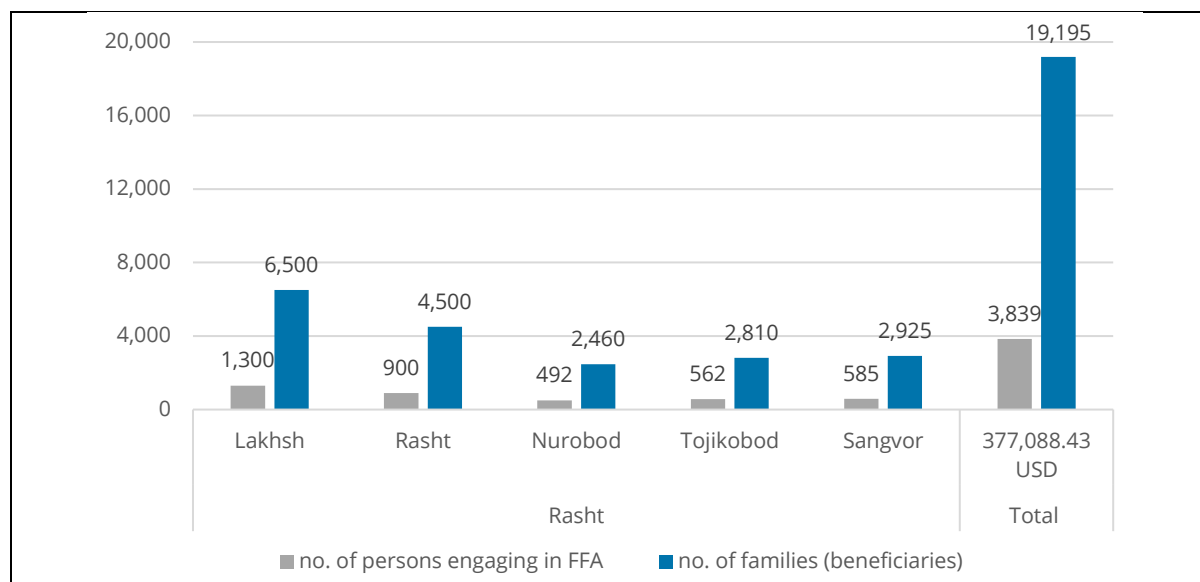
99. Due to limited funds in the first years of implementation (2018 and 2019), implementation of activities within SO3 was leveraged through school feeding programme funds, allowing continuous food assistance for assets initiatives in 2018-2019. These included tree-planting activities aimed at assisting schools in the school feeding programme to diversify school menus by including fresh fruits from planted trees. At the same time, the programme engaged parents of schoolchildren from vulnerable households to prepare, plant and take care of seedlings with one-month cash transfers. Such food assistance for assets activities

covered 19 districts in four regions. It started off in the Sughd region in 2018 and continued in 2019,¹⁰⁷ when new regions, that is, Khatlon,¹⁰⁸ the districts of Republican Subordination¹⁰⁹ and GBAO¹¹⁰ were added. This activity resulted in planting approximately 43,000 fruit and non-fruit trees in 126 WFP-supported schools in these districts, with a potential of reaching over 48,000 children. This activity also included climate adaptation and tree-caring sensitization from WFP in partnership with the Forestry Agency.

100. WFP also supported food assistance for assets activities in the Shahrituz district and the Khatlon region in 2018, with a focus on road and irrigation infrastructure rehabilitation, engaging more than 1,600 people. The food assistance for assets activities in 2019 produced a wide range of community-owned assets, such as canteens and fruit trees in schools diversifying the children’s diet, while non-fruit trees were planted to protect lands from wind erosion. Through food assistance for assets activities, fruit production workshops and warehouses, drinking water supply systems and piped and open-type irrigation systems were supported to boost agricultural land productivity. Almost 2,000 vulnerable households benefitted from respective cash assistance in amount of 440 TJS (about 45.40 USD) per 25-day cycle in 2019.

101. The COVID-19 response reached 32,305 beneficiaries in Rasht Valley and GBAO through food assistance for assets, engaging directly with 6,461 persons in the rehabilitation of assets. A review of country office data shows that a variety of asset-creation activities took place, including afforestation, water supply, bridges, roads, irrigation canals and agricultural storage facilities. WFP prioritized chronically food insecure households that were directly affected by COVID-19-related socioeconomic shocks.

Figure 13: COVID-19 response – Rasht Valley, 2020-2021



Source : WFP Tajikistan Country Office, November 2021.

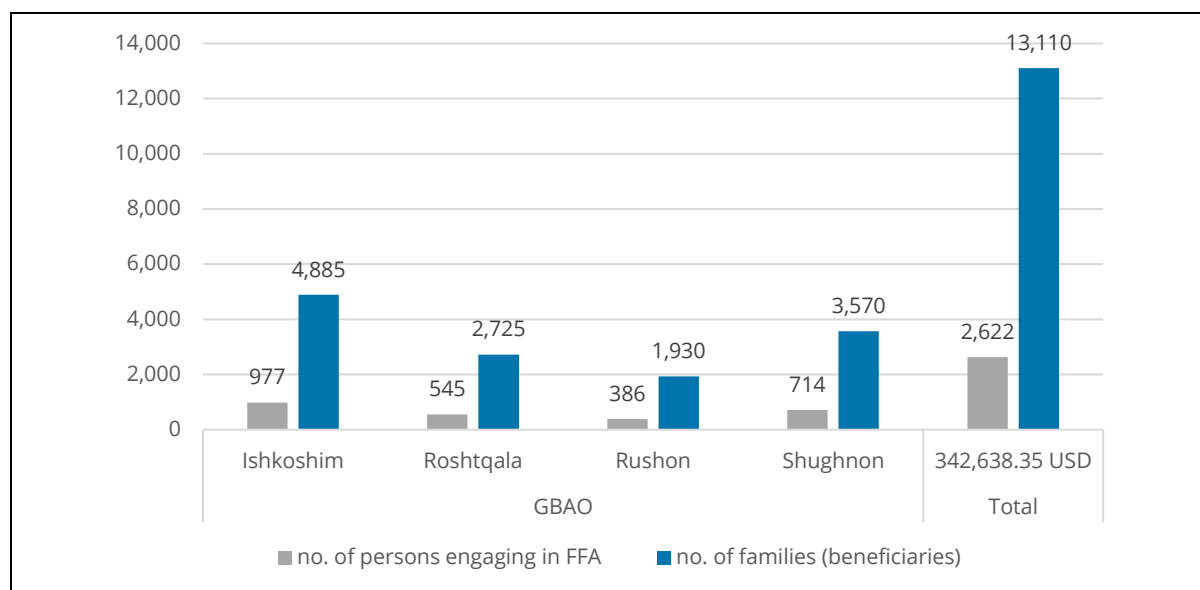
¹⁰⁷ A total of 11 districts were reached through this initiative in 2018-2019 in the Sughd region (i.e. Asht, Devashtich, B. Ghafurov, J. Rasulov, Isfara, Istaravshan, Shahriston, Konibodom, Zafarabad, K. Mastchoh, and Ayni).

¹⁰⁸ Three districts of Khatlon region (Balkhi, Qubodien, Temurmalik).

¹⁰⁹ Four districts in DRS (Tavildara, Rasht Valley, Tojikobod, Rudaki).

¹¹⁰ Ishkoshim district of the GBAO.

Figure 14: COVID-19 response - Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast, 2020-2021



Source : WFP Tajikistan Country Office, November 2021

102. The one-month food rations (50kg wheat flour and 2l of vegetable oil per household) were provided to a total of 1,724 families affected by flood in three communities in the Khatlon region (See Table 6).

Table 6: Flood response 2021

Region	Community	No. of families	Food ration description
Khatlon	Vakhsh	204	One month food ration Of 50kg Wheat Flour and 2l Veg. Oil per HH
	Kulob	1,500	
	Jomi	20	
Total		1724	

Source : WFP Tajikistan Country Office, November 2021.

103. WFP invested a total of USD 469,000 in response to the earthquake that happened in July 2021, focusing on the reconstruction of 70 houses and the provision of food rations for 304 families affected by the earthquake.

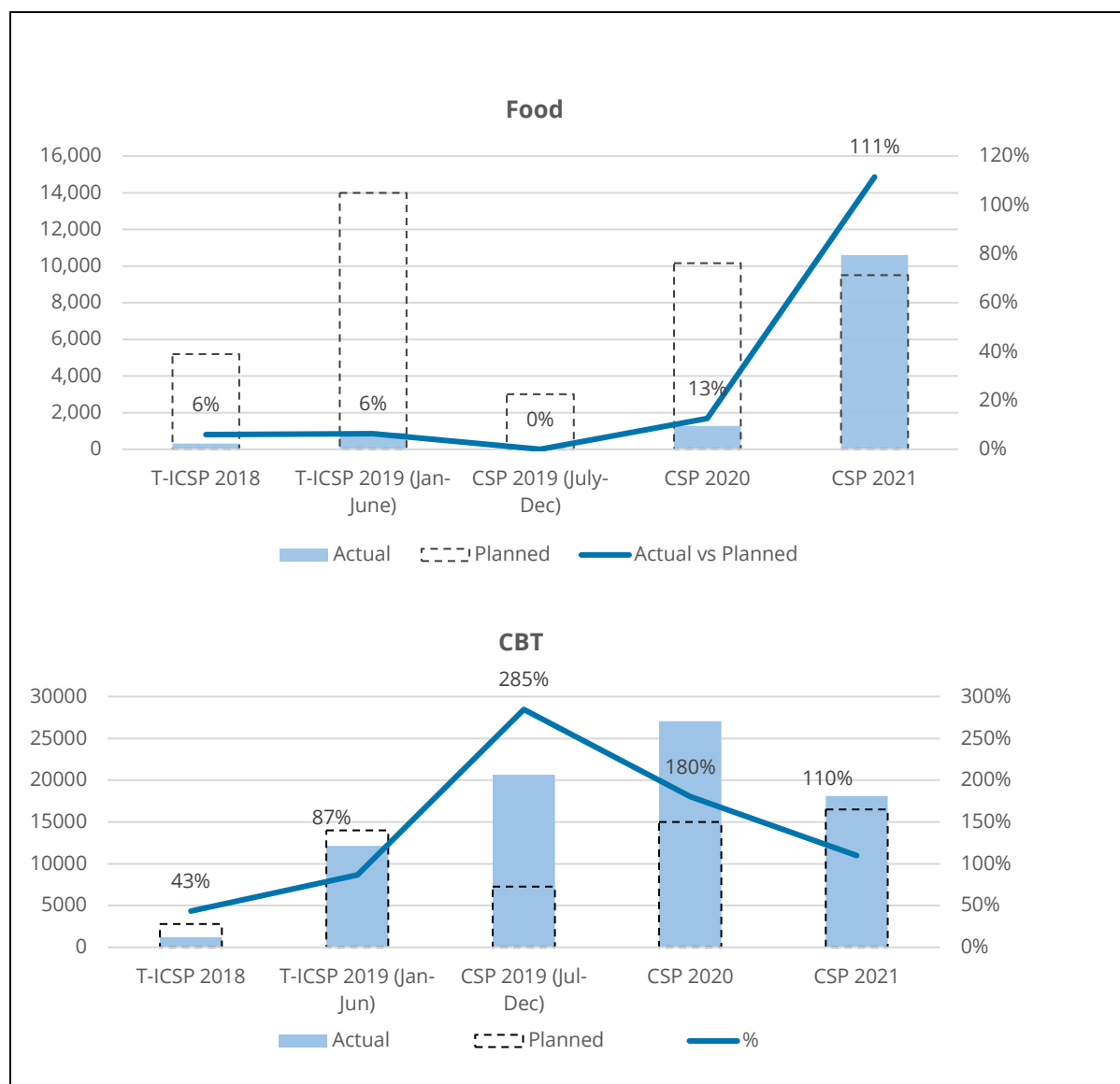
Table 7: Earthquake response 2021

Region	Community	No. of families receiving one-month food ration	No. of houses reconstructed (same no. of households)
Districts of Republican Subordination (Rasht Valley)	Rasht	35	4
	Tojikobod	268	65
	Sangvor	1	1
Total	USD469,000	304	70

Source : WFP Tajikistan Country Office, November 2021

104. A review of the data shows that across these three response initiatives, mostly one-off support was provided to the affected populations.

Figure 15: SO3 – Asset creation and livelihoods beneficiaries



Source: T-ICSP ACR 2018-2019; CSP ACR 2019-2020; in 2020: food distribution was under emergency response (information provided by the country office on 19 October 2021).

105. Food assistance for assets activities resulted in improved community assets as well as improved food consumption scores of vulnerable groups compared to 2019 (see Annex XIII for details). Regarding the effects of newly built or rehabilitated assets on livelihoods, WFP data shows that 72 percent of beneficiaries of assets created within the COVID-19 response reported that the assets had positive benefits to them and the community, by increasing agriculture production, while 88 percent of those beneficiaries reported that the projects have helped improve the natural environment. The data reported by 84 percent of eligible households - that the built or rehabilitated assets improved the ability of household members to access markets and/or basic services such as water, sanitation, health and education, - was corroborated by stakeholder interviews. Moreover, 91 percent of the eligible households reported that trainings and other support provided in the community have improved their household's ability to manage and maintain assets. The 2020 post-distribution monitoring survey findings concur with these data, revealing that 59 percent of households were better at protecting their household livelihood capitals from natural disasters; 58 percent were able to increase/diversify production; and 70 percent decreased their day-to-day hardship.

106. However, some criticism was raised regarding the extent to which WFP consulted local communities in the selection of assets, the ways to organize the work and the beneficiaries to be included in food assistance for assets. WFP consults closely with CoES and regional, district and local authorities (the last less so and in conjunction with higher levels of government) on the selection of sites and beneficiaries to

engage. Despite WFP efforts to consult affected groups, the document review and interviews revealed that efforts invested to consult affected groups were suboptimal and unsystematic, which is considered a weakness in the approach. For cash assistance-type support activities, the transfer value as set in the CSP was based on market research, amounting to 440 TJS (approximately 39 USD per December 2021 exchange rate) per 25-day cycle. Interviewed stakeholders raised criticism regarding what was perceived as a low transfer value and one that was suboptimal for families as a coping mechanism. Stakeholders noted that the amount did not reflect market prices or provide for the appropriate compensation for hard work that was required (canal cleaning, construction, or other types of works), but was also not sufficient for families to fill their nutrition gap.

107. The evaluation also found different perspectives on the utility and sustainability of assets. Interviewed stakeholders noted that assets, such as water systems or reforestation or fruit plants, are beneficial and have strong potential for sustainability through ensured maintenance (by schools or local population using the water systems). Other assets, such as irrigation canals or road rehabilitation, were viewed as more difficult to maintain due to a lack of budget or community governance mechanisms, though the situation is diverse. A good example was raised from experience with the regional Vodkhoz water company in the Rasht Valley, which manages the rehabilitated canal. This canal uses annual fees for water use to reinvest in further rehabilitation of the canals. The annual fee is paid by individuals and *dekhan* farms¹¹¹ following their harvest, but it is vulnerable to harvest failure. Stakeholders noted that WFP support was instrumental in mobilizing communities to undertake rehabilitation. However, WFP did not always integrate activities that would ensure local communities capitalize on these projects by establishing or enhancing local resource mobilization and/or maintenance and governance mechanisms. A systematic approach to integrating mechanisms would have enabled communities to maintain and/or enhance the assets created, which would in turn diminish their vulnerability and dependence on external aid. Such mechanisms would have also enhanced WFP country capacity strengthening potential and its contribution to the humanitarian-development nexus.

Finding 14: Implementation of the Green Climate Fund project since 2020 envisages more focus on country capacity strengthening, but such efforts are only emerging (see interlinked Finding 18 below).

108. Within its corporate shift towards stronger country capacity strengthening and assisting the Government in strengthening its emergency preparedness system, WFP has supported the work of national platforms and inter-agency efforts on emergency preparedness and disaster risk reduction in coordination with the CoES, and in line with the National Disaster Risk Reduction Strategy 2019-2030.

109. The limited availability of funds and delays in approval and initiation of the Green Climate Fund project prevented WFP focusing on strengthening the Government's capacities in disaster preparedness and response, for which 70 percent of expected resources were originally planned. Some capacity strengthening activities took place in 2018-2019, including trainings (for example, training in 2018 for the Information Management and Analytical Centre (IMAC) of the CoES on key features of Esri ArcGIS, a leading mapping and spatial analytics software); or procurement of technical equipment (for example, GPS navigators, cameras, laptops, tablets and printers) to assist IMAC and CoES conduct risk assessments and collect, analyse and disseminate data on disasters, etc (See Finding 18 below).

SO4: Country capacity strengthening

Finding 15: WFP capacity strengthening efforts theoretically follow a multi-dimensional approach, envisaging operations at different levels¹¹² and at different domains and activities.¹¹³ Operationalization of such WFP country capacity strengthening efforts is slow, resulting in a narrow focus on central government with some limited subnational-level engagement.

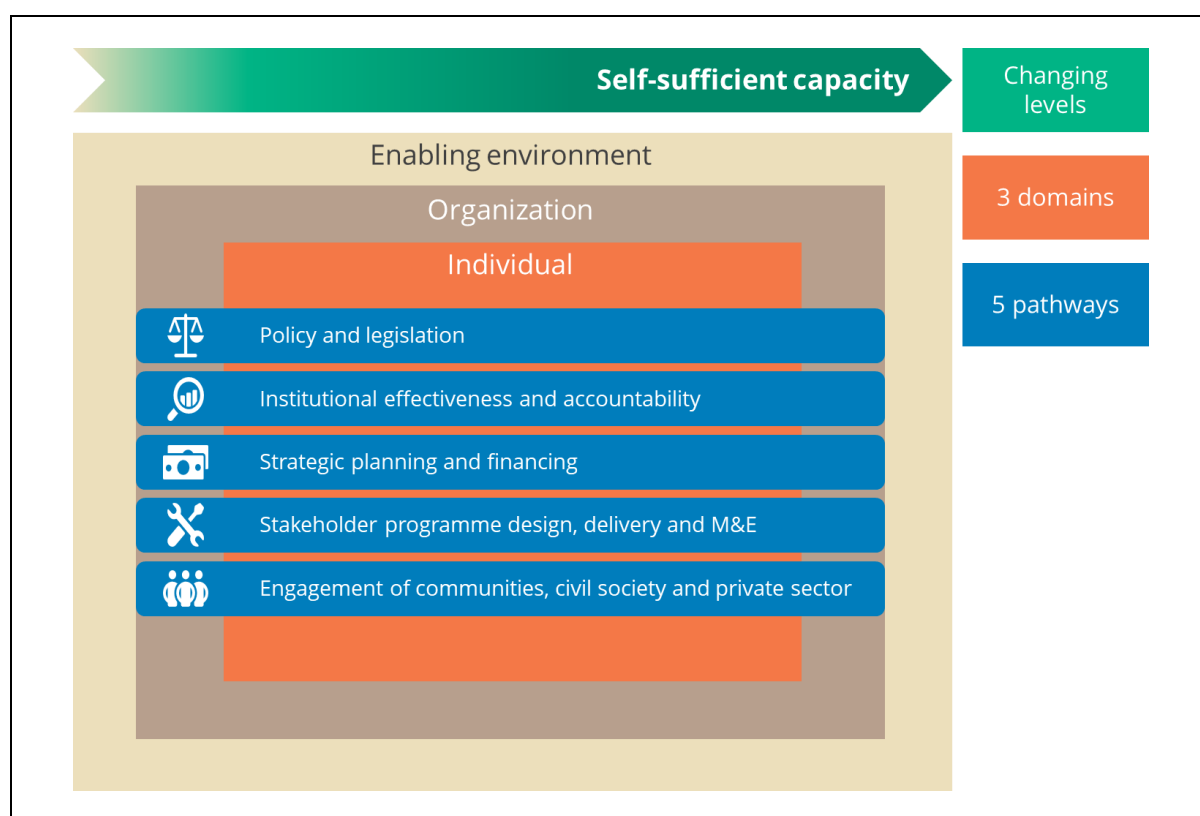
¹¹¹ A *dehkan* farm is an individual or family farm in Central Asia

¹¹² At the national, regional/district and community levels.

¹¹³ WFP capacity strengthening contributions are focused on three domains of intervention: (i) Individual; (ii) Organizational; and (iii) Enabling environment with investments in (1) advocacy; (2) policy dialogue; (3) informing policy advice).

110. In line with the WFP corporate country capacity strengthening framework (see Figure 16), the WFP Tajikistan country office has increasingly invested in more upstream capacity strengthening work.¹¹⁴ SO4 is operationalized through three activities focusing on: strengthening the capacity of government institutions and schools to implement social protection programmes (A04); providing policy advice and technical assistance to public institutions and private sector stakeholders involved in advocating for and implementing food security and nutrition programmes, including emergency preparedness (A05); and providing an on-demand service for the governmental institutions, development actors and other partners including the private sector (A06). The T-ICSP allocated relatively small funds for capacity strengthening under SO3 as discussed in Finding 14 above, while the implementation of the CSP saw a substantial increase in country capacity strengthening funds between 2018 and 2020 (allowing WFP to step up its efforts to build the capacity of national and subnational stakeholders).

Figure 16: WFP country capacity strengthening framework



Source: Adapted from WFP 2019. WFP Capacity Strengthening Supports Nations to End Hunger

111. The evaluation found that WFP capacity strengthening contributions were mainly visible at individual and organizational levels, with some more tangible achievements in enabling environments within school feeding. As shown in Figure 17 and Figure 18, some more strategic mentoring and showcasing happened within school feeding, and to a lesser extent, in nutrition. Mentoring and modelling within school feeding helped raise awareness and strengthen capacity to design school feeding policies but has not resulted thus far in schools and other institutions being able to organize and implement school feeding entirely on their own. Stakeholder interviews with participants of trainings conducted within the school feeding and moderate acute malnutrition programmes confirmed the usefulness of such trainings, despite the slow pace of transformational organizational change. The policy changes in school feeding are the most substantial achievement thus far, though their operationalization is still pending (See Finding 16 below). As corroborated by interviewed stakeholders across all stakeholder groups, the profile of WFP is still very heavy on service delivery and response. WFP is not seen as an actor of country capacity strengthening in areas other than school feeding, where its position is visible and strong. No specific country capacity

¹¹⁴ WFP. 2017. WFP Corporate Approach to Country Capacity Strengthening (CCS). Rome: WFP CCS Toolkit Component.

strengthening activity was visible (or needed) in implementation of SO5 activities in support of humanitarian and government actors. Details can be found in Finding 16, Finding 17, and Finding 18.

Finding 16: There has been slow progress in terms of the transition and handover of school feeding to the Government since 2018, with further setbacks due to COVID-19 in 2020, despite sustained advocacy, policy dialogue and technical support efforts by WFP.

112. WFP provided assistance for the development of national school feeding along the five goals of the Systems Approach for Better Results (SABER)¹¹⁵ through a mix of modalities: (1) advocacy; (2) policy dialogue; (3) technical support (assessments, feasibility studies and training); and (4) material support at the district and school levels. Various activities were conducted or are ongoing (see Annex XII).

113. WFP advocated for increased political commitment to school feeding through a variety of activities. These efforts culminated in the signing of a memorandum of understanding between WFP and the Ministry of Education and Science in July 2021, delineating respective responsibilities along the various SABER parameters.¹¹⁶

114. There is overall slow progress in the development of a transition and hand-over plan for school feeding with variable achievements on SABER goals.¹¹⁷

115. In terms of SABER Goal 1 (policy frameworks), there is evidence of proactive involvement by WFP in the development of national policies, in particular those focusing on and ensuring school feeding and nutrition priorities were integrated into social protection, health and education sectors. Such examples include WFP input and its advisory role for development of documents including the National Strategy for Education Development 2021-2030 and its Mid-Term Action Plan 2021-2023; the Mid-Term Development Programme 2021-2025; and the National Strategy of Health and Welfare of the Population of the Republic of Tajikistan for 2021-2030. WFP is currently facilitating the work of a task force that was established by the interministerial coordination council with WFP impetus for the development of a national school meals policy/action plan.

116. Concerning SABER Goal 2 (Financial capacity), there is still no national budget line for school feeding. WFP Tajikistan country office recently recruited a consultant to undertake a costing study and propose a public finance mechanism for school feeding with a view to developing a plan for sustainable resourcing.

117. As regards institutional capacity and coordination (SABER Goal 3), WFP has been advocating for the establishment of multisectoral coordination councils at subnational and local levels to mainstream school feeding into district development programmes. Such councils have been established in the Khatlon region, Roghun town, the Rasht District and GBAO. However, linkages and coordination between the education and health departments at the district level are weak or non-existent. The establishment of a school feeding centre is underway with funding from WFP for the first two years.

118. In terms of design, implementation and legislation (SABER Goal 4), WFP, with the support of the Social and Industrial Foodservice Institute (SIFI), facilitated the development and adoption of the resolution on the procurement procedure for school feeding in October 2019.¹¹⁸ The development of other required standards has been agreed in the Ministry of Education and Science/WFP memorandum of understanding.

¹¹⁵ SABER goals: 1) Policy frameworks; 2) Financial capacity; 3) Institutional capacity and coordination; 4) Design and implementation; and 5) Community roles

¹¹⁶ These include: the adoption of legal frameworks by the Government and establishment of a dedicated SF unit in the Ministry of Education and Science.

¹¹⁷ Handover in school feeding refers to an action within a relatively short timeframe where the implementation of school feeding is transferred from an external stakeholder to the appointed national stakeholder(s). The latter is expected to assume full responsibility for, as well as ownership and leadership of, programme implementation. A handover plan agreed upon by the Government and an external stakeholder often specifies the number of schools to be handed over to the national stakeholder at a certain point in time. Ideally, the handover should be planned and implemented as a part of the larger and more comprehensive transition. It should be viewed as an incremental step that contributes to the learning and adaptation required for the overall process. Definition taken from: RBB. 2021. Project Outline: Design of the Framework for Planning and Implementing Transition towards nationally owned school feeding programmes in Asia and the Pacific.

¹¹⁸ SIFI. 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021. Quarterly Progress Reports.

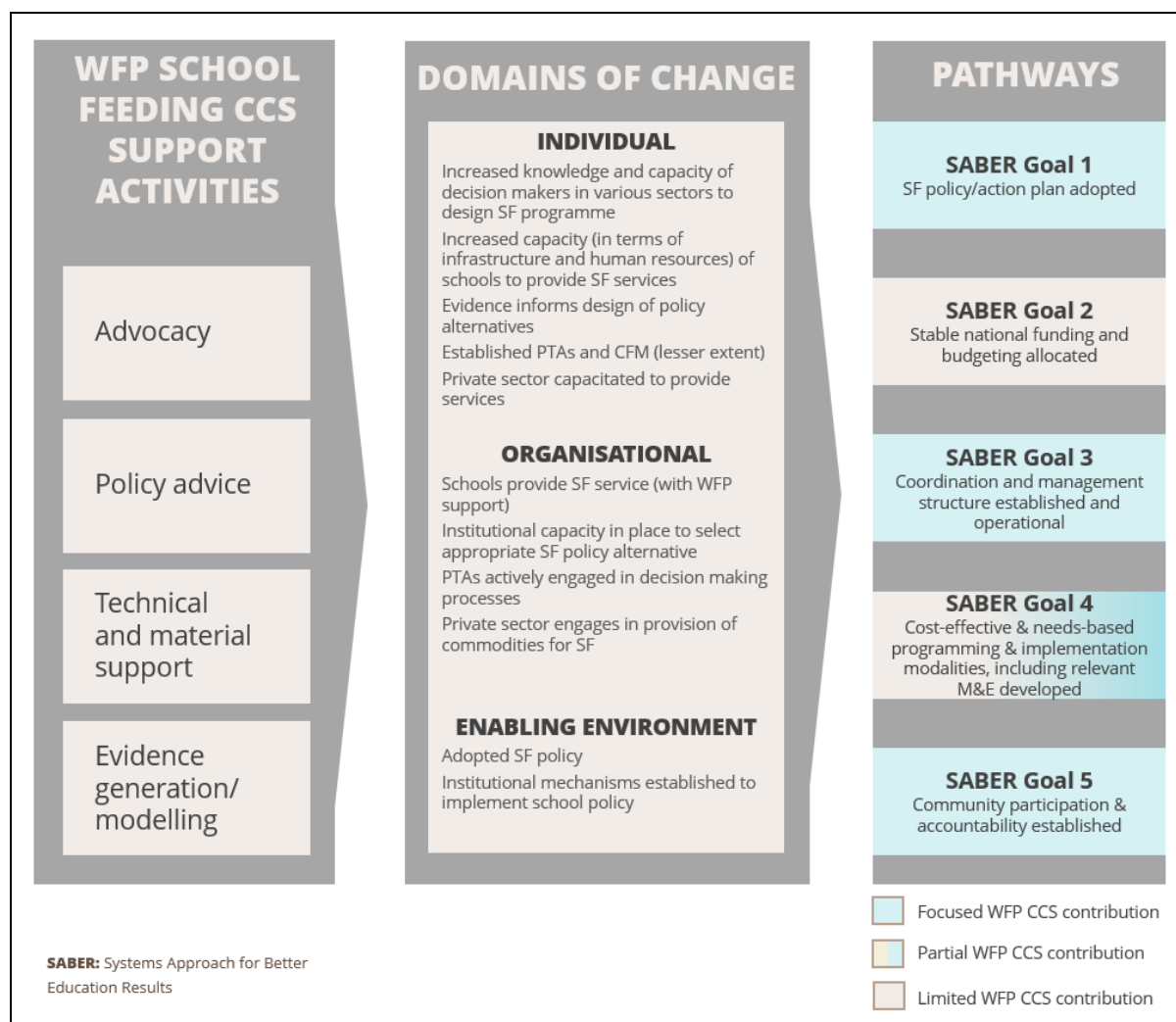
In line with SSDSM 2017-2027, WFP, with SIFI support, has been testing school feeding models like HGSF in the context of Tajikistan in order to: (1) optimize the programme by reducing operational costs and improving management; and (2) diversify the schoolchildren's diets. In 2018, 50 pilot projects were initiated in the Khatlon region and Rasht Valley, refurbishing kitchens and bakeries and constructing greenhouses. Since 2019, WFP supported income-generating activities and the production of complementary foods in selected schools such as through the use of greenhouses, beekeeping, animal breeding, etc. to enable schools to generate income for improved and more diversified meals. Some of the schools visited by the evaluation team benefitted from this support and either used the products from greenhouses and orchards for the preparation of meals or sold the product (for example, honey) to purchase local foods and condiments. Interviewed parents and school personnel shared satisfaction with the quality of the support provided, and maintenance of the assets as observed by the evaluation team was overall satisfactory with the exception of two greenhouses that had breached walls in the Ghafurov district. Documentation of successes, gaps and challenges for the greenhouse project has so far been weak; this gap will be addressed by SIFI in their planned "self-review" of the fifty pilots under phase one by early 2022.¹¹⁹ The review will be useful for identifying lessons learned, and providing an analysis of enabling factors and hindrances (for example, availability of water for drinking and washing infrastructure) to be addressed when designing future models for the 200 additional schools to be covered under phase two.

119. The feasibility study conducted in 2019 informed the development of a project with promising sustainability prospects: linking women's agricultural production groups and marketing systems with a group of WFP-supported schools participating in a cash-based transfer pilot (which was expected to start in 2021 but has not yet been implemented).

120. WFP has been advocating for community participation (SABER Goal 5): parent teacher associations are actively engaged in school feeding implementation, providing in-kind or financial support to school meals (see Table 4) but their contributions are variable, as they are not yet formalized. Parent teacher associations also serve as platforms to discuss contributions (both in-kind and monetary) to school feeding but rarely engage communities sufficiently in deciding, managing, controlling and monitoring school menus and their quality. The parent teacher associations' engagement and empowerment varies between regions and communities' socioeconomic situation, which has been stretched further due to the adverse impacts of COVID-19 on livelihood and incomes.

¹¹⁹ SIFI. 2021. Second Quarterly Progress Report under the WFP-SIFI FLA for 2021-2023, p.2.

Figure 17: Country capacity strengthening in school feeding activities



Source: evaluation team.

121. The SABER – school feeding (SABER-SF) exercise could not be carried out in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic but was undertaken in December 2021. The 2015 SABER-SF rated Tajikistan as: “emerging” (that is, taking initial/some initiatives toward policy development) in terms of policy frameworks (SABER Goal 1) and “latent” (that is, having no or very little policy development) for goals 2 (financial capacity), 3 (institutional capacity and coordination), 4 (design and implementation) and 5 (community roles); and “advanced” for one indicator under Policy Goal 3, namely existence of a formal national steering committee responsible for policy development and coordination.^{120 121} Noteworthy developments since 2015 include: 1) adoption of SSDSM (SABER Goal 1), which was considered an “emerging legal provision” in a policy analysis conducted by the regional bureau in Bangkok as “it does not include scope and coverage, etc. which would normally be provided by a national school feeding strategy”,¹²² and 2) the establishment of a school feeding centre (SABER Goal 3) which is underway with funding from WFP for the first two years and the adoption of a resolution on procurement procedure for school feeding in October 2019 (SABER Goal 4) (see details in Annex XII).

¹²⁰ WFP. 2015. SABER (School Feeding) Country Report – Tajikistan.

¹²¹ RBB. 2021. Regional Review of school feeding evaluations conducted between 2010 and 2020.

¹²² RBB. 2021. Policy Analysis for School Health and Nutrition Tajikistan, p.25.

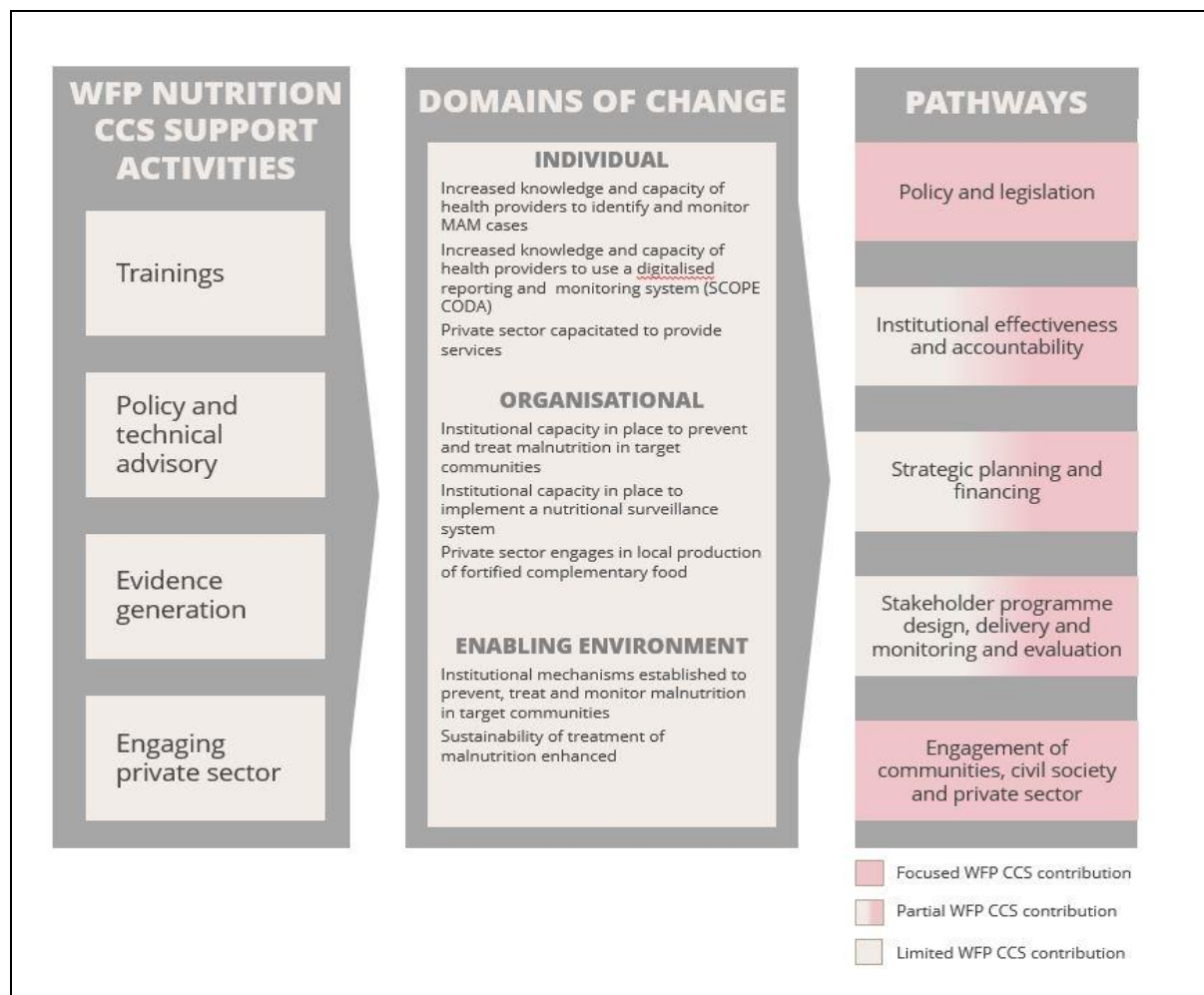
Finding 17: WFP contributed to the development and adoption of the food fortification law and is undertaking necessary assessments to facilitate its implementation. However, WFP country capacity strengthening efforts to strengthen capacities to target, design and implement effective nutrition strategies are still fragmented.

122. Prevention of micronutrient deficiencies through diversification of agriculture production as well as food fortification is among the key priorities identified by the Fill the Nutrient Gap analysis, which recommends in particular exploring the feasibility of local/regional production of fortified complementary foods for children 6-23 months old and the fortification of wheat flour, given its high consumption in Tajikistan. The advocacy efforts of the country office, supported by the regional bureaux in Cairo and Bangkok, contributed to the preparation of the law “on the provision of the population of the Republic of Tajikistan with fortified food products”. The law, which was drafted by a technical working group on micronutrient deficiencies under the strong leadership of the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, was approved by the Parliament and entered into force in July 2019. Interviewed stakeholders commended the WFP advocacy role and support, which contributed to adoption of this law. Stakeholders concede that effective implementation remains a challenge (for example, underdevelopment of the private sector, market limitations, taxation issues, etc.) but are hopeful that the establishment of food fortification as a flagship national nutrition issue will create a golden opportunity to engage private sector entities in multisectoral nutrition efforts, an opinion shared by the evaluation team. The country office has planned a food fortification assessment (feasibility assessment and milling assessment) for March 2022 (Annex XI).

123. The evaluation team also found evidence of some, albeit not systematic, capacity strengthening activities (mainly training and mentoring activities) targeting community health service providers and the Ministry of Health and Social Protection. These capacity strengthening efforts aimed to train medical staff on moderate acute malnutrition and alternative approaches to tackling moderate acute malnutrition issues (See Finding 10 above).

124. Deeper engagement by WFP was affected by limited financial resources and the absence of more a comprehensive country capacity strengthening strategy that could influence system changes in nutrition beyond target communities. The country capacity strengthening activities within the nutrition theme were focused on a narrow number of local stakeholders and did not include more systematic efforts to ensure wider coverage (or replication of practice across the nutrition sphere). The focus on a narrow pool of institutions limited the potential to bring more outcome-level changes (institutional or policy changes) beyond the individual or institutional changes in these targeted institutions (see Figure 18).

Figure 18: Country capacity strengthening in nutrition activities



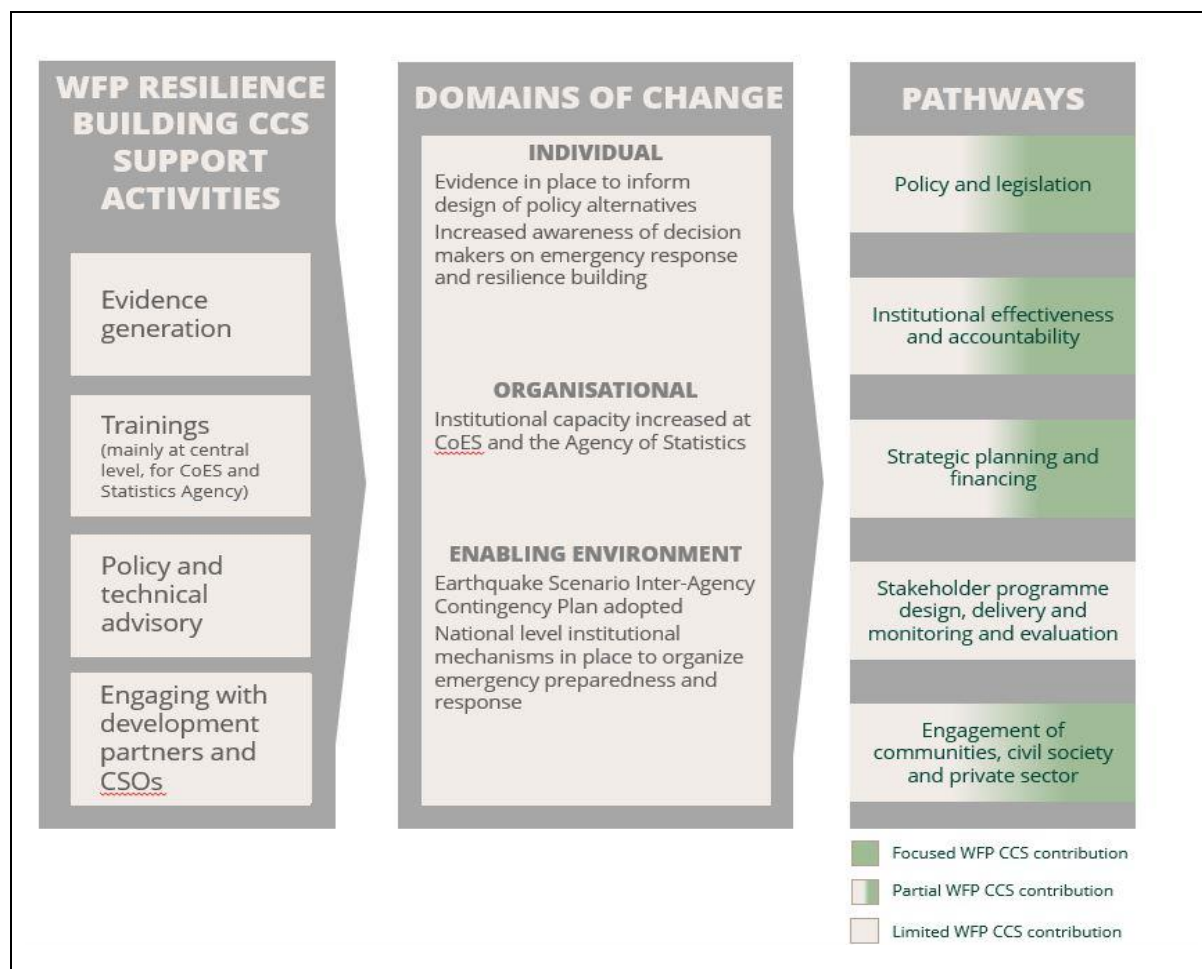
Source: evaluation team.

Finding 18: WFP country capacity strengthening efforts to strengthen capacities to target, design and implement effective emergency preparedness and disaster risk reduction strategies are only emerging. This evaluation could not measure effects on strengthening partners' capacities or related outcome-level results.

125. As noted in Finding 15, WFP country capacity strengthening activities within the disaster risk reduction area have been boosted with funding from the Green Climate Fund for climate change and resilience, with a strong focus on capacity strengthening and advisory engagement primarily with CoES but also with other relevant institutions in charge of climate change and resilience. The project started in 2020 with a rather long inception phase (which included the scoping mission, selection of five implementation partners, etc). It was also affected by slowdown due to COVID-19, resulting in a slow disbursement rate overall. Interviewed stakeholders had high expectations for this project, in particular in support to the shift towards emergency preparedness, though some interviewed stakeholders raised concerns regarding WFP capacity to implement comprehensive country capacity strengthening efforts. The bulk of WFP country capacity strengthening efforts within the reference period included trainings in order to strengthen the efforts for emergency response and resilience building of the CoES and the Agency of Statistics, including in trainings, provision of equipment and advisory support. WFP also led the efforts of the REACT partners to develop a sector response plan for the Earthquake Scenario Inter-Agency Contingency Plan. However, as in other capacity strengthening efforts, WFP targets mainly the national level, with less engagement at the regional and district levels. As shown in Figure 19 below, country capacity strengthening activities resulted in an increase in technical capacity (through equipment, knowledge and awareness) of the CoES and Agency of Statistics, leading to improvements in institutional capacity across these agencies to collect and analyse

data on disasters and to be better prepared. However, significant gaps persist as evidenced through document review and interviews with all relevant stakeholders.

Figure 19: Country capacity strengthening in resilience building activities



Source: evaluation team.

SO5: Humanitarian response

Finding 19: The WFP humanitarian and COVID-19 responses were appropriate and effective.

126. The WFP response to COVID-19 organized under SO5 was based on the availability of WFP assets and its traditional capacity to mobilize its support efficiently in times of crises. However, WFP support to affected populations through food assistance for assets activities (COVID-19 response, flood and earthquake response) were implemented within the scope of SO3 and not SO5. Within SO5, WFP effectively delivered on-demand services to United Nations agencies, maximizing the value of the USD 68,000 available for this support. Stakeholder interviews with United Nations agencies showed strong appreciation of WFP support during the COVID-19 lockdown, enabling United Nations agencies to operate by providing protective equipment. WFP also provided ongoing information sharing with all development partners thanks to its network of field offices, which enabled timely information and updates on contextual issues during the lockdown. Review of the online survey results shows high rates of satisfaction with WFP support, corroborating the data collected through stakeholder interviews.

WFP contribution to the achievement of cross-cutting aims (humanitarian principles, protection, accountability to affected population, gender equality and other equity considerations)

Finding 20: WFP field operations were implemented in line with humanitarian principles.

127. WFP and its cooperating partners (CPs) strongly integrate the humanitarian and protection principles across its country interventions, ensuring humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence in implementation of activities and interactions with local communities in particular when it comes to the most vulnerable and excluded communities. Stakeholders see the importance of field offices engaging with local communities. The fact that most WFP staff are locals is also considered important, as they are able to engage with local communities in their own language. The WFP school feeding programme was also commended for ensuring that all children, regardless of their ethnicity, gender or social status, have access to hot meals. For instance, interviewed parent teacher association members asserted that, in schools that opted for either in-kind or cash contributions from parents (between 5 and 20 TJS per child per month as decided consensually by communities to purchase local foods and other items), children from poor families are exempted and in some cases, a “charity box” is used whereby more able households contribute on a voluntary basis to cover the costs of more vulnerable families.

128. WFP has emphasized the cross-cutting themes in the field-level agreement (FLA) with cooperating partners and regional health and social protection departments implementing moderate acute malnutrition treatment activities. The agreement includes a number of obligations that cooperating partners have to comply with during the implementation. These obligations include a reference to actions in the WFP Gender Policy and the clauses in the agreement describe humanitarian principles, accountability to affected population and other equity considerations (see Annex III for details on cross-cutting aims in the field-level agreement, for example, gender equality, protection and accountability to affected populations).

Finding 21: WFP applies the protection and accountability to affected population tools and mechanisms (such as consultations with local communities, and increasingly the community feedback mechanisms (CFM) in implementation of its activities, though some shortcomings in terms of the scope, depth and breadth of such consultations when it comes to engagement with affected populations are noted.

129. WFP integrates protection and accountability to affected population tools in implementation of its interventions, in line with the corporate 2020 Protection and Accountability Policy. In conjunction with applying humanitarian principles, accountability to affected population and protection principles are also mainstreamed to ensure safety and dignity and meaningful access to beneficiaries. However, feedback from the communities shows that WFP could take more systematic measures to ensure consultations with beneficiaries when selecting communities or target groups for its emergency or food assistance for assets interventions. WFP consults primarily with central and, to a varying extent, with subnational-level authorities in the process of selection of communities and beneficiaries. Consultations with affected populations (local community members or potential beneficiaries, notably women) in particular for emergency response and food assistance for assets activities are not systematically organized, and WFP relies on government institutions in the selection process.

130. In light of COVID-19, protection of affected populations received greater attention and response, whereby WFP provided take-home rations to the most vulnerable households whose children were studying in primary grades to ensure they remain food secure. The safe distribution of rations was ensured in close cooperation between WFP staff and parent teacher associations, by ensuring that the distribution sites were arranged with appropriate health and safety measures. Masks and sanitisers were provided and social distancing measures were followed to mitigate the possible spreading of COVID-19 amongst recipients of the assistance. WFP also successfully coordinated with the Ministry of Health and Social Protection and primary healthcare centres that deliver moderate acute malnutrition treatment services. Measures were put in place that aimed to prevent the risk of contracting and further spreading the infection by providing a one month ration instead of a one-week ration to lessen walk-in visits to the clinics.

131. In line with accountability to affected population principles, WFP undertakes measures to inform its beneficiaries about relevant interventions and such information is provided through: leaflets or

informational corners in schools, health centres or other community institutions; direct phone calls between beneficiaries and WFP focal points in the field; site visits conducted by project teams; and post-distribution monitoring, etc. WFP also conducts surveys to monitor satisfaction of beneficiaries, collecting feedback on access to WFP programmes, the safety challenges they may face when receiving assistance and whether they have been treated with dignity by WFP staff members and cooperating partners. For instance, a survey on the framework of the food assistance for assets interventions was conducted in 2019 covering almost 400 households (among them 19 percent households headed by women), confirming that the beneficiaries had unhindered access to WFP programmes during 2019 and that they did not face any safety challenges when enrolled in the assistance programmes. WFP also conducted a satisfaction survey for recipients of take-home rations in 2020, which showed a high level of satisfaction with the safety and security regulations at the distribution sites, accessibility of the sites and the professional attitude extended by the staff.

132. WFP established the community feedback mechanism in 2019 as a tool to strengthen community engagement, promote participatory decision making and inform programme design. In 2020, a review of the mechanism was conducted focusing on barriers and ways to enhance the community feedback mechanism, engaging with approximately 100 beneficiaries of food assistance for assets, nutrition and school feeding activities in the Sugd, GBAO and Khatlon regions. The results of the review were used to improve the mechanism. WFP field office staff visit schools regularly and interact with schools. However, stakeholder interview group discussions and site observations show that the community feedback mechanism is still in its initial stages. For instance, community members in four schools visited in Khatlon and GBAO, mentioned that communication regarding project activities goes through the school administration and/or school feeding programme focal points from the district education departments. There is therefore no direct communication with WFP in these specific schools. Site observations showed that school feeding information boards in some schools (for example a school in Sogd region) included contact details for WFP in order to provide feedback, but such information was missing in schools visited in Khatlon and GBAO. A main barrier mentioned by interviewed local stakeholders is the lack of information about the community feedback mechanism or other feedback mechanisms directly to WFP or a lack of attention to it by partners.

133. WFP created and then consulted with project management committees for each project within SO3 to understand the needs and priorities and to validate the relevance of climate change adaptation activities that would commence in 2021. WFP solicited feedback from beneficiaries by phone through the involvement of project management committees and WFP field offices.

Finding 22: Disability was not systematically considered.

134. The focus of WFP on disability was rather erratic and happened based on the emerging situation on the ground, rather than as part of a conscientious decision to focus on disability. One instance where WFP included the integration of a disability perspective was found in the take-home ration distribution criteria, where disability was added as a targeting criterion for the second take-home ration distribution to vulnerable families of schoolchildren in February 2021. The post-distribution monitoring survey, conducted about three months after take-home ration distribution, showed that around one-third of households had at least one member with a disability. Instances of a direct focus on disability were not visible in other interventions.

Finding 23: Gender principles and GEWE have been reflected in T-ICSP and CSP, with evidence of their mainstreaming also in implementation, though some limitations to the extent to which women are trained and empowered to participate in decision making on resilience and climate change are noted.

135. WFP interventions have sought to contribute to positive changes in gender roles and enabling access to and benefit for both women and men. The T-ICSP and CSP design were informed by a gender analysis conducted by WFP in 2016,¹²³ and gender remained an integral part of implementation of programme activities. Throughout 2018-2020, women and girls accounted for 49 percent of total beneficiaries with minor variations among programme areas; slightly more girls were treated for moderate acute malnutrition

¹²³ WFP. 2019. "Tajikistan Country Strategic Plan (2019–2024)". (WFP/EB.A/2019/8-A/10).

than boys. Allocation of funding across the reference period included approximately 12 percent on an annual basis dedicated to activities in support of GEWE. Additional earmarked funds were used to conduct gender sessions among partners and awareness-raising activities during a campaign against gender-based violence each year in cooperation with other United Nations agencies. WFP also ensured that households headed by women are prioritized for take-home rations or relief support following the mudflows.

136. The post-distribution monitoring survey of the second take-home ration distribution for vulnerable families showed that around one-third of interviewed households were headed by women. WFP launched a project where women's agricultural production groups and marketing systems are linked with a group of WFP-supported schools participating in a cash-based transfer pilot. It is expected that this new approach will be taken up by schools participating in this project in subsequent years, and ultimately by all schools. However, it is too early to provide an evaluative judgement on the actual prospects of this happening.

137. The trainings and awareness-raising sessions within the nutrition project were delivered not just to mothers but also to fathers and to wider community members. Field observations revealed variable participation of women in parent teacher associations: some interviewed parent teacher associations had equal participation of men and women, some had more women than men and others had only men. The decision to use in-kind transfers or cash-based transfers and the cash-based transfer value were based on gender analysis and market price, efficiency and beneficiary preference assessments.¹²⁴ More than 50 percent of food assistance for asset project beneficiaries were women. Households headed by women were targeted on a priority basis and the project involved training and technical advice on house renovations, greenhouses and irrigation canals, while providing entitlements under the food assistance for training and food assistance for asset programmes. More efforts to increase women's participation not just in implementation, but also in decision making processes would have added value as well.

138. WFP demands focus on the participation of women from cooperating partners and engages with other United Nations agencies on the topic. For instance, WFP and UN Women helped organize business training courses for women in northern Tajikistan under the auspices of the United Nations Peace Building Fund, leading to improved knowledge, skills and self-confidence and increased participation of women in WFP-led projects, as reported by WFP.¹²⁵ This finding could not be confirmed from other sources.

139. WFP advocacy and awareness raising efforts, both centrally and locally, also include attention to gender issues. WFP invests efforts to engage women in very remote areas where women's participation is a big problem, for instance through separate meeting for mothers at school. However, WFP has done little to conduct more targeted trainings for women on climate change issues and building resilience or to invest other efforts to increase women's participation not just in implementation, but also in decision making processes.

140. Over 60 percent of survey respondents perceive that WFP considers GEWE issues to a great extent, confirming the findings emerging from other data sources (see responses to survey question 12 in Figure 36 in Annex VIII).

Finding 24: WFP has taken into consideration environmental aspects by undertaking measures like environmental screenings for its asset-creation activities; in-office energy and water saving and monitoring of greenhouse gasses emissions to decrease its environmental footprint.

141. To address some of the environmental challenges in Tajikistan, WFP conducted a context analysis during the planning phase of the CSP to identify environmental concerns and their effects on the most vulnerable population and environmental screenings as a basis for the design of its projects contributing to the resilience of communities that are prone to shocks.

142. In 2019, WFP supported tree-planting projects, the rehabilitation of irrigation canal networks and fortification of river embankments to reduce the risk of deforestation. WFP continued to contribute to alleviating and mitigating environmental degradation and its consequences in Tajikistan by reforestation

¹²⁴ WFP. 2019. "Tajikistan Country Strategic Plan (2019–2024)". (WFP/EB.A/2019/8-A/10).

¹²⁵ WFP. 2019. Tajikistan Annual Country Report 2019 Country Strategic Plan (2019–2024).

efforts. Rehabilitated irrigation systems also assisted vulnerable rural households to reclaim and use the dormant land, which was previously unused due to lack of irrigation water.¹²⁶

143. WFP reports on energy usage, greenhouse gas emissions, waste and water management through the annual environmental footprint report (ARCHIBUS). While results for 2020 are not yet available, trends show a significant improvement in Tajikistan, from 300 tons of carbon dioxide-equivalent (tCO₂e) emissions in 2010 to approximately 200 tCO₂e in 2019. These emissions stem from fuel consumption, air conditioning, purchased electricity, public transport and air travel. Given the movement restrictions in 2020 due to the pandemic, it is a safe assumption that the tCO₂e for 2020 will also be greatly reduced. While sustaining the reduction once the situation normalizes may be unrealistic, WFP commitment to measure its footprint and investment in energy-efficient equipment supports its commitment to environmental protection.¹²⁷

Sustainability prospects of the transitional interim country strategic plan and the country strategic plan's achievements

Finding 25: Implementation of the CSP was primarily demand-driven and focused on filling in the gaps in service provision by government institutions, while its country capacity strengthening interventions are still only emerging. This brings about positive output-level results (services provided, immediate or unmet needs responded to) but moderate sustainability prospects under nutrition and resilience building areas, while sustainability prospects of school feeding are more promising. Despite the fact that WFP engaged intensively with government institutions to set mechanisms for sustainability of school feeding, scaling up of this programme is still vulnerable to many factors, notably financial and human resource availability.

144. WFP efforts to strengthen policy and institutional capacity for nationalization of school feeding were intensive, as found by this evaluation. A resulting policy/action plan is being developed and provides a clear indication of the commitment of the Government to establish and sustain national school feeding. Despite this, stakeholder interviews emphasize that government institutions are not ready yet to operationalize their policy commitments as also evidenced by the lack of national budgeting and financing for school feeding. Government financial contributions to school feeding have been so far very limited whether at central or decentralized levels. Review of the agreements between the WFP country office and regional/district authorities for 2021-2022 shows that inputs from the Government ("partner total direct costs") are not quantified and limited to expenditure relating to the preparation and delivery of bread and to salaries for technical staff in schools. In these agreements, costs of monitoring by the education departments are entirely provided by WFP as "capacity strengthening costs". The evaluation team was informed about a recent positive, though very modest, development as regards national financing: three to four out of the fifteen schools that will benefit from the cash-based transfer modality will be funded by the Government. Community ownership is altogether strong as evidenced by observations during field visits as well as quantitative information on parent teacher associations' contributions.

145. SO2 sustainability was assessed from two angles: capacity strengthening and Super Cereal Plus provision. WFP investments were mainly focused on filling in the gap in service provision by national institutions, with a small-scale country capacity strengthening intervention (see paragraph 93), targeting health personnel of the primary healthcare centres in areas focused on moderate acute malnutrition prevention and treatment and related topics such as infant and young child feeding and growth monitoring and on SCOPE CODA. Trainings were based on the Ministry of Health and Social Protection's training modules and performed by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection trainers, which helped to ensure that the acquired skills on health and nutrition are and will continue to be relevant (with or without the distribution of a specialized nutritious food) to the needs of the mothers and children. The recent adoption of the "1,000 Days Golden Strategy"¹²⁸ to improve nutrition and development outcomes of children is a good step in this direction. In contrast, the long-term relevance of building the capacity of health personal

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ WFP. 2020. Tajikistan Annual Country Report 2020 Country Strategic Plan 2019–2024.

¹²⁸ The strategy defines necessary changes in social and behavioral norms in relation to the development of children under two years of age in Tajikistan.

on the use of SCOPE CODA is questionable in view of the many issues raised concerning its sustainability (discussed in paragraph 95).

146. The sustainability of the Super Cereal Plus distribution for moderate acute malnutrition treatment is questionable in view of the high cost of the imported product. WFP, in consultation with the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, is pursuing a less expensive chickpea-based product alternative that can be purchased in Pakistan. The evaluation team also learned that the Ministry of Health and Social Protection team is working with the Ministry of Industry and New Technologies to develop an alternative locally produced product. This augurs well for the continuation of this activity and its possible expansion, as long as it is indeed a priority for the Ministry of Health and Social Protection. This seems doubtful at this stage as the MPAN (2021-2025), which was approved by government decree in February 2021, does not mention moderate acute malnutrition or the provision of a specialized supplementary food for moderate acute malnutrition treatment. The prospects for the Ministry of Health and Social Protection funding this activity are low as the bulk of MPAN activities is expected to be funded mainly by international development partners. Government funding is foreseen for a limited number of activities that involve more organizational and structural actions.

147. Similarly, the resilience building efforts until late 2020 were mainly emergency-response oriented without deeper engagement in institutional mechanisms that would enable sustainability. This was mainly due to funding shortages. WFP food assistance for asset interventions in support to community actions, such as cleaning canals or reconstruction of roads in disaster-prone areas, have been successful and brought short-term improvements in terms of some local infrastructure. Sustainability of rehabilitated assets (for example irrigation canals, roads or bridges in areas prone to floods) in the medium to long term depends on the ability of local communities (and also higher-level government) to ensure funds to maintain such assets on their own. Stakeholders noted that the sustainability of rehabilitated assets in disaster-prone areas depends on the extent to which funds are there to maintain them, requiring more comprehensive action, beyond one-off small-scale activity supported by WFP. The food assistance for asset framework as it is set up does not systematically provide for strong sustainability mechanisms, due to its short-term/one-off nature. The evaluation found that this is due to the fact that, in light of its traditional humanitarian approach (and weak linkages with its increasing developmental direction), WFP tends to provide food assistance for asset support only to those communities in crises, moving out once the community does not need relief support any longer. Such an approach is feasible for immediate response, but does not yield the longer term results that would have been possible if support were more strategic.

148. Stakeholder interviews on both the WFP and government side raised expectations from the project funded by the Green Climate Fund, which started in late 2020, though it is too early to assess the full potential of the project on institutional changes within the sector.

149. WFP engagement in support to humanitarian-development actors and national systems has been short-term interventions enabling access to logistics, procurement and administration services without a wider sustainability plan. This is justifiable for its emergency response nature but contributes to the overall observation that WFP still does not sufficiently consider sustainability aspects of its interventions, only relief ones.

Finding 26: Government ownership is relatively strong, but sustainability prospects are challenged by government resource (institutional, human and financial) limitations.

150. The evaluation found ample evidence of strong WFP strategic positioning and government ownership over results and programmes implemented by WFP. The needs-driven responsiveness and flexibility of WFP as well as its close consultation and liaison approach was found to help maintain ownership by national institutions. As a result, as visible from document review and stakeholder interviews, government ownership and commitment to school feeding and nutrition, as well as climate change and resilience efforts, are high. However, the commitment is not sufficiently translated into operational programmes, mainly due to limited institutional capacity of the Government to mobilize resources (human, financial, technical, and logistical) to implement programmes and concerted actions on the ground in order to address priorities set in the relevant policies (for example school feeding). Evidence points to an already restrained fiscal environment that has been exacerbated by negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic affecting the prioritization of budget allocations across different sectors. These factors are expected to have

repercussions on the nationalization of school feeding and other areas, as emphasised by interviewed stakeholders. Interviews with the government stakeholders show that expectations from WFP are high, as the government institutions seem not able to manage the school feeding, the nutrition or the disaster preparedness and response without support from WFP and other development partners. This is visible, for instance, in the challenges for sustainability and proper management of created community assets, where communities show lack of knowledge and capacity to maintain or organize similar actions. This was observed during field missions organized within the scope of this evaluation. Stronger and more systematic efforts by WFP are required to integrate sustainability measures more rigorously.

The extent to which the transitional interim country strategic plan and the country strategic plan facilitate more strategic linkages between humanitarian and development work

Finding 27: The T-ICSP and CSP do not include explicit strategic linkages between humanitarian and development work, though these dimensions are targeted through efforts to integrate country capacity strengthening efforts.

151. Document review of the UNDAF and the WFP strategic framework does not show explicit elaboration of strategic linkages between the humanitarian and the developmental nexus or how the nexus is to be operationalized in Tajikistan. However, the evaluation has found that the WFP shift to strengthening both national and local systems, so that they can provide transparent and essential services to citizens, and local leadership is suitable. Thus far, this process is only slowly emerging within and outside WFP in Tajikistan, and stakeholder interviews with WFP and external partners show that WFP is still seen as a leader in the provision of humanitarian assistance, as corroborated by survey responses. Some stakeholders also question the organization's initiative to shift its work towards also engaging in country capacity strengthening, noting that other United Nations agencies focus on development while the strategic position of WFP is within the humanitarian realm. One reason for this is the continued focus of WFP on humanitarian assistance, which still seems to be the comfortable and known zone for WFP. This is also reflected in staffing of the country office. The country office still lacks more country capacity strengthening expertise or conceptualization of what country capacity strengthening would mean across all thematic areas.

2.3 EQ3: TO WHAT EXTENT HAS WFP USED ITS RESOURCES EFFICIENTLY IN CONTRIBUTING TO TRANSITIONAL INTERIM COUNTRY STRATEGIC PLAN AND COUNTRY STRATEGIC PLAN OUTPUTS AND STRATEGIC OUTCOMES?

The extent to which outputs have been delivered within the intended timeframe

Finding 28: The WFP CSP has experienced a number of delays, most of which were beyond WFP control. Budget allocation and timeliness was suboptimal across all thematic areas, but WFP found ways to ensure stable planned outreach within possible expenditures.

152. Some delays in initiation and implementation of WFP activities were due to cumbersome government and donor procedures. WFP interventions require governmental approval through the presidential office. Due to the bulk of demands going through this office, some requests take months to be processed, leading to delays in implementation. Slow donor approval procedures also lead to slow materialization of funding, which affects planning and importantly implementation. Since 2020, delays occurred due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused cancellation, altering or postponement of activities, such as school feeding and nutrition but also resilience building activities to some extent.

153. As shown in Table 8 below, between January 2018 and August 2021, allocated resources for SO1 and SO2 amounted to about two-thirds of the needs-based plan, while allocated resources exceeded the needs-based plan for SO3, SO4 and SO5. For instance, SO3 exceeded its planned budget in 2020 through additional funds raised for COVID-19 response activities. Expenditure rates varied between strategic outcomes and from year to year. For example, in 2020 WFP experienced considerable delays in receiving contributions that were earmarked for 2020 with more than 55 percent of the funds that were confirmed being available for use only in September of 2020. Consequently, and despite the efforts made to access

the advance financing facilities, this resulted in a funding gap affecting activities. The expenditure rate was relatively high for SO1 (81 percent), less than half for SO2 (42 percent), half for SO3 (50 percent), very low (36 percent) for SO4, and extremely low for SO5 (<1 percent). For SO3, the allocations, particularly in 2020 and 2021 were higher than the needs-based plan, with a very high rate of expenditure in the second half of 2019 due to the higher level of funding inflow (funding from the Green Climate Fund and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation), which enabled WFP to scale up its interventions providing assistance to over 23,000 food-insecure people (213 percent of the target) with a shift from in-kind to cash support, through COVID-19 response and response to floods in 2021.¹²⁹ SO4 experienced an overall low expenditure rate (36 percent), reflecting overall limited country capacity strengthening engagement of WFP thus far, though allocated resources for capacity strengthening for school feeding were highest in 2020.¹³⁰

154. Resources allocated for capacity strengthening increased substantially between 2018 and 2020 (under the T-ICSP relatively small funds allocated for capacity strengthening were included under SO3) allowing WFP to step up its efforts to build the capacity of national and subnational stakeholders.

155. SO3 interventions exceeded their target beneficiaries in 2020 (102 percent of target) in response to economic hardship in communities affected by COVID-19, along with a 20 percent increase in budget expenditures through additional funds raised for COVID-19 response activities. The programme had one budget revision to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, when SO5 was introduced.

Table 8: Utilization of allocated resources (USD)

Period	Needs Based Plan	Allocated resources		Expenditures	
		Amount	Allocated vs NBP	Amount	Expenditures vs Allocated
SO1- Activity 1 School feeding					
T-ICSP 2018	11,172,710	8,126,166	73%	6,921,939	85%
T-ICSP 2019 (Jan-June)	5,608,619	3,354,353	60%	3,743,365	112%
CSP 2019 (July-Dec)	4,807,917	2,629,366	55%	1,263,994	48%
CSP 2020	9,417,450	5,047,166	54%	4,456,777	88%
CSP 2021	8,943,238	5,815,438	65%	3,808,306	65%
Total	39,949,934	24,972,489	63%	20,194,381	81%
SO2 - Activity 2 MAM treatment					
T-ICSP 2018	843,444	402,041	48%	206,940	51%
T-ICSP 2019 (Jan-June)	448,897	139,339	31%	192,783	138%
CSP 2019 (July-Dec)	308,460	584,778	190%	101,528	17%
CSP 2020	527,641	406,455	77%	289,044	71%
CSP 2021	1,174,263	508,873	43%	163,135	32%
Total	3,302,705	2,041,486	62%	953,430	47%
SO 3 - Activity 3 Resilience and livelihoods					
T-ICSP 2018	2,217,340	935,255	42%	485,743	52%
T-ICSP 2019 (Jan-June)	1,746,998	498,040	29%	1,721,819	346%

¹²⁹ WFP. 2020. Annual Country Report 2019 Country Strategic Plan 2019-2024, p.11.

¹³⁰ The budget for capacity strengthening includes two budget lines: (1) capacity strengthening and (2) cooperating partners' (CPs) cost. The CPs costs amounted to 33 and 56 percent of the total allocated resources in 2018 and the first half of 2019; and to 79 and 45 percent under the CSP. The FLAs with regional and district authorities indicate that the costs of M&E conducted by the SF focal points is covered by WFP under the CCS budget (see summary of FLAs in **Error! Reference source not found.** for details). In contrast, MAM treatment is implemented through the existing MoHSP structures with minimum expenditures on human resources dedicated to the project and the delivery of the commodity in country from country office stock to the districts and health facilities is managed by the PHC management and staff at no cost for WFP.

CSP 2019 (July-Dec)	893,361	2,304,116	258%	459,709	20%
CSP 2020	1,968,282	2,349,067	119%	1,071,630	46%
CSP 2021	1,862,298	3,736,376	201%	791,253	21%
Total	8,688,279	9,822,854	113%	4,530,154	46%
SO4 - Activity 4 Strengthen the capacity of government institutions and schools to implement social protection programme					
T-ICSP 2018	192,756	226,368	117%	-	-
T-ICSP 2019 (Jan-June)	101,210	31,690	31%	-	-
CSP 2019 (July-Dec)	1,213,746	2,194,560	181%	236,882	11%
CSP 2020	2,503,667	3,108,216	124%	1,875,257	60%
CSP 2021	2,871,355	3,287,464	114%	1225983	37%
Total	6,882,734	8,848,298	129%	3,338,122	38%
SO 5: Crisis response					
CSP 2020	92,155	4,084	4%	3,269	80%
CSP 2021	126,464	18,071	14%	4,074	23%
Total	218,619	22,155	10%	7,343	33%

Note: For 2018 NBP for SO2 includes USD 173 957 for SBCC which was not spent; For 2019 (until June 2019) NBP for SO2 includes USD 317 543 for SBCC which was not spent. As of July 2019, the amount for SBCC is not provided (incorporated into the SO2 budget figures). No figures provided for capacity strengthening for SF for 2018 and 2019.

Source: ACR reports for 2018-2020, and WFP Tajikistan CO for 2021.

Finding 29: The country office structure has been solid and assisted implementation of the programme. There has been significant turnover of staff and some issues in vertical communication channels within the country office over the reference period of the evaluation, which affected the timeliness and quality of outputs.

156. The evaluation found an overall sound country office structure and geographic coverage through field offices in Bokhtar, Khujand, Garm and Khorog, which allowed efficient implementation of interventions, also during COVID-19. Stakeholder interviews revealed that, for instance during the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions, field offices were often the only reliable source of information for WFP and development partners on the context and developments in the regions. The field office structure is also feasible for supply and storage of food items, with a network of food storage facilities upholding WFP standards.

157. There has been significant turnover of staff over the reference period, particularly within the resilience building section, marked by a change of both national and international staff in 2020 and the beginning of 2021. Some positions were still vacant at the time of finalizing this report. Stakeholder interviews with current and former staff revealed that this has been a challenge for timely implementation of activities, but also for institutional memory on approaches and results.

158. The evaluation found somewhat of a silo approach when it comes to implementation of activities, with some, but still insufficient, efforts (such as school gardens being established using food assistance for assets in 2018 and first half of 2019) invested to bring synergies and more coherent approaches to the implementation of activities. The evaluation found, for instance, a limited level of interaction or synergies between SO1 or SO2 and SO3, whereby strategic outcome activities are focused mainly on the delivery of their respective outputs. Stakeholder interviews also reveal difficulties in vertical communication between field offices and country office, characterized by a lack of (timely and full) information sharing or discussions/consultations on decisions or approaches. On the other hand, there were positive examples of WFP cross-sector synergies and nutrition mainstreaming, including: the school feeding recipe book that encourages dietary diversity; SBCC interventions advocating healthy diets; and the planned resource

centres that will link SBCC with the schools more directly. Nutrition is also included in the trainings provided to beneficiaries under SO3. Initially some SO3 food assistance for assets activities were implemented in schools (for example, school gardens, tree planting). These were phased out after introduction of income-generating activities in schools under SO4, which are in fact assets creation/resilience activities that also contribute to school meal diversity. These projects are planned in close collaboration with the SO3 team for technical support.

Finding 30: Disruptions in the supply chain resulted in delays and challenges in the achievement of results.

159. There is evidence of delays in the delivery of food and goods due to insufficient resource availability and also in light of COVID-19 since 2020. Over the reference period, there have been disruptions in the delivery of Super Cereal Plus to targeted districts, resulting in one-week long delays in some primary healthcare centres. Within the district when one primary healthcare centre ran out of Super Cereal Plus, the district focal points organized supply from other facilities that had enough of the product in stock and later on replenished them when supply was resumed. In 2020, due to COVID-19, WFP faced supply chain challenges, including import restrictions and supplier delays. Food commodities arrived with a one-month delay and in incomplete quantities, creating further obstacles to the provision of meals in schools. Fortified wheat flour was the first to arrive and WFP ensured adequate communication with central and subnational government counterparts as well as parent teacher associations to develop plans for the distribution of this commodity to those schools that could supplement the flour to create a full meal. WFP initially planned to provide only fortified vegetable oil but also distributed non-fortified vegetable oil together with additional arrivals of fortified wheat flour towards the end of 2020 to cover supply gaps.

160. More general restrictions in the international supply chain and logistics regarding sanitation and hygiene items and other types of non-food items have occurred in 2020, along with growing local demand. To respond to the supply chain disruptions, but also in light of the need to fulfil its mandate, WFP revised its programme to include SO5 in support to the humanitarian community in the country in order to develop alternative ways in responding to newly emerged needs, including by enhancing inter-agency service delivery systems. Stakeholder interviews with WFP field offices and United Nations partners show that the supply chain was useful and timely, enabling partners to continue with their operations.

Appropriateness and effectiveness of coverage and targeting of interventions

Finding 31: The school feeding targeting and coverage have remained unchanged, so this cycle of support was not informed by a comprehensive situation analysis. Coverage of WFP support to nutrition and resilience has been limited due to resource constraints. Moreover, the emergency response targeting and coverage was needs-based and rather ad-hoc.

161. School feeding was designed to target food-insecure communities,¹³¹ so the selection of regions and schools at the onset of the programme was informed by food security assessments, such as the WFP Food Security Monitoring System.¹³² Initial targeting was not informed by a comprehensive situation analysis and defined targets or guidelines. These should have been developed by the Government to identify target groups as recommended by the SABER analysis, which rated Tajikistan as “latent” on targeting (SABER indicator 4B under Goal 4).^{133,134} Field observations noted diverse school characteristics, that is, some schools have good access (road infrastructure) and availability/accessibility to the market, with usually higher number of students; while some schools, for example in rural GBAO, encounter poor accessibility (lack of paved roads) and unavailability/inaccessibility of the markets that are located three to four hours’ drive away from the community, creating challenges for WFP and the Government to ensure regular monitoring.

¹³¹ WFP. 2020. Strategic Evaluation of the Contribution of School Feeding Activities to the Achievements of Sustainable Development Goals – Centralized Evaluation Report, p.51.

¹³² WFP. 2010. Development Project Tajikistan 200120. (WFP/EB.A/2010/9-A/2) (paragraph 31).

¹³³ 2015. Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER).

¹³⁴ WFP Regional Bureau Asia and Pacific. 2021. Regional Review of school feeding evaluations conducted between 2010 and 2020, p.57.

162. Stakeholder feedback confirmed the relevance of the current coverage, though issues were raised with the possible exclusion of some very remote food-insecure areas due to their difficult access, and the inclusion of schools located in better-off areas when it comes to food security and access to markets. Possible exclusion of such remote areas cannot be confirmed by the evaluation team. A comprehensive assessment, as mentioned above, would have been useful to verify the continued relevance of the initial targeting.

163. The WFP approach to targeting beneficiaries of nutrition interventions has been adequate, though rather narrow, focusing only on five districts of the two regions of the country, mainly due to financial limitations. Even within these districts, the project does not cover all of the primary healthcare centres. The evaluation found that the geographical spread of the key malnutrition indicators (wasting, stunting) has changed over the years and as per the latest demographic and health survey data for 2017, there are more cases of malnutrition reported in regions of the country that WFP does not cover. However, WFP could not have expanded its reach due to resource limitations.

164. WFP emergency response interventions, such as the response to the mudflows and effects of COVID-19, have been organized in consultation with CoES and its regional institutional counterparts, which provided guidance and advice to WFP in the selection of beneficiaries of WFP emergency support. Coverage in both emergency response initiatives was overall adequate, though criticism was raised regarding weaknesses when it comes to transparency of consultative processes with institutions and an uneven approach to consultations with affected communities and populations. Local stakeholders also raised concerns with weaknesses in terms of consideration of individual or household specificities. In particular, food assistance for assets activities were criticized for the amount of compensation, which was viewed by a majority of relevant key informants as suboptimal and insufficient to cover even basic supplies for persons engaged in this intervention, as discussed in Finding 13 above.

165. The targeting and coverage of government institutions when it comes to country capacity strengthening activities is considered narrow as well. During the reference period of this evaluation, WFP targeted almost exclusively a narrow number of central-level government institutions with their country capacity strengthening activities. Primarily key central school feeding stakeholders and the CoES and Statistics Agency were targeted in the resilience building efforts. Country capacity strengthening engagement at subnational levels was narrow, engaging with some schools or primary healthcare centres without a systematic or coherent plan beyond direct engagement with small groups of targeted institutions. Such an approach was inevitable due to funding limitations but also the slow conceptualization of WFP country capacity strengthening approaches. However, it affected the scalability or sustainability potential of country capacity strengthening interventions.

The extent to which WFP activities have been cost-efficient in delivery of assistance

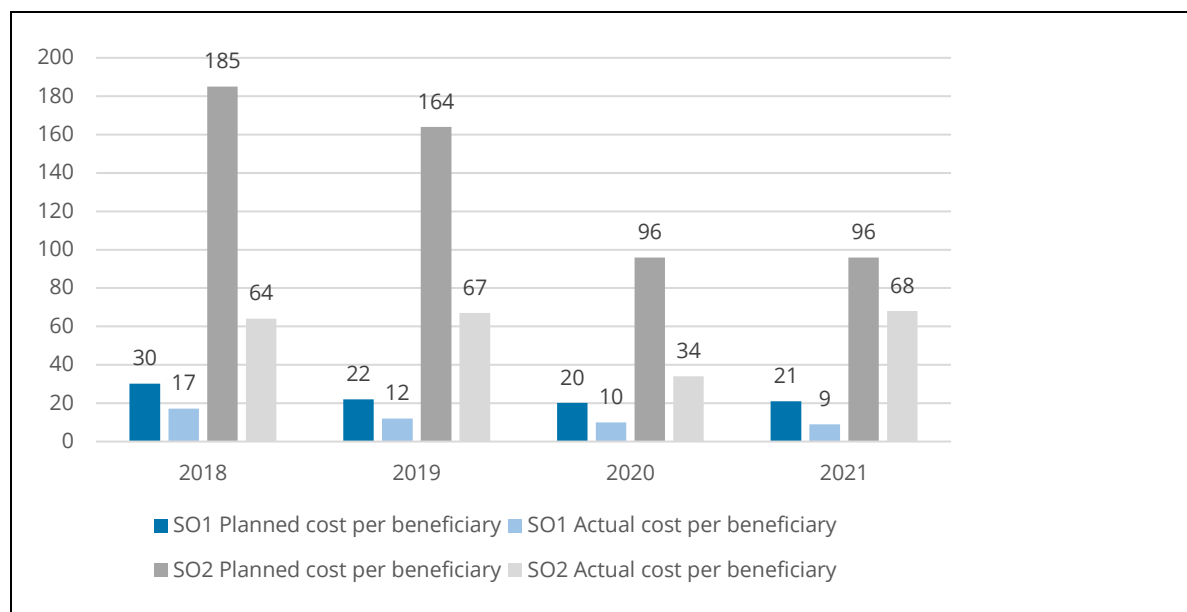
Finding 32: WFP activities were implemented relatively cost-efficiently. Varying disbursement rates across different activities are coherent with the nature of the activity, with actual costs per beneficiary being lower than planned.

166. The evaluation found that the WFP approach to implementation of activities took into account measures to mitigate potential resource losses (for example, disruption of supply chains as discussed in Finding 30) but also measures to ensure savings (through realistic calculation of costs and allocations). These measures, along with a feasible country office structure, ensured timely and cost-efficient implementation of activities and realization of outputs.

167. As noted in Finding 28, the disbursement of funds has varied across strategic outcomes, with the lowest disbursement rate in SO4 and SO5, and the highest in SO1 (see also Table 8 above). The yearly costs per beneficiary for SO1 and SO2 have been considerably below planned. For SO1 the lower-than-planned cost is most likely related to the reduction in the ration size and for SO2 a shorter duration of service than planned. For SO1, the fact that the meals have been supplemented by parent teacher associations helped increase cost-effectiveness and also assisted increased ownerships by parent teacher associations over the process. With SO3, stakeholder interviews pointed out that food assistance for assets activities in some communities were organized in partnership with Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) which helped leverage an increase in funds. The food assistance for assets transfer value was transferred through a bank account,

which required opening accounts for all beneficiaries (with assistance of local non-governmental organization partner). The bank transfers were noted to be quite cost-efficient and transparent.

Figure 20: Planned and actual cost per beneficiary per year: SO1/activity 1 and SO2/activity 2



Source: T-ICSP ACR 2018-2019; CSP ACR 2019-2020; and country office for 2021 data.

168. WFP also worked with the Government to find more cost-efficient alternatives to Super Cereal Plus. The government agreed on introduction of a chickpea product, which was to be imported from Pakistan. In light of the fact that the transport route for import was through Afghanistan, which is now closed since August 2021, it turned out not to be a cost-efficient or cost-effective alternative. The country office has recently recruited a consultant to conduct a full feasibility study of wheat flour fortification and local production of a specialized nutritious commodity. The consultant will also explore the feasibility of WFP engagement with the private sector. The study will provide evidence on a more cost-effective and easily available locally grown commodity to ensure moderate acute malnutrition treatment sustainability in the long run.

The extent to which alternative, more cost-effective measures have been considered

Finding 33: Alternative cost-effectiveness measures have been considered for moderate acute malnutrition and school feeding.

169. The evaluation found that WFP actively considered various options for nutrition and moderate acute malnutrition service provision with the Government. In support to school feeding, WFP conducted a feasibility assessment of cash-based transfer¹³⁵ in 2019 to advise on alternative modalities¹³⁶ to be piloted in 15 schools (out of which, 3 or 4 will be funded by the Government). The feasibility assessment defined the detailed operational steps of the cash transfer modality, including identifying the most appropriate financial institution for transferring cash to the schools, while also proposing to map schools in terms of infrastructure availability as a basis for school selection. Using a home-grown school feeding approach, for example, linking schools to agricultural production groups run by women, (a programme that the WFP country office is launching) may also constitute a more cost-effective approach for the provision of school

¹³⁵ Khatuna Epremidze and Vanja Karanovic. 2019. The Feasibility Study – From In-kind to Cash-Based Transfers [Powerpoint presentation November 2019].

¹³⁶ The study on feasibility to shift from in-kind to cash-based transfer in the schools for the local procurement of the commodities was conducted in two regions of Tajikistan, in Khatlon and Sughd with the support of the RBC during 1-13 November 2019.

meals. Considering alternatives for Super Cereal Plus, as discussed in Finding 29 above, was a further example of a cost-effective measure taken by WFP, albeit without much success so far. No specific alternatives to increasing cost-effectiveness were found in other components.

2.4 EQ4: WHAT HAVE BEEN THE FACTORS THAT EXPLAIN WFP PERFORMANCE AND THE EXTENT TO WHICH IT HAS MADE THE STRATEGIC SHIFT EXPECTED BY THE COUNTRY-LEVEL STRATEGIC PLANNING?

Extent to which WFP analyses or uses existing evidence on the hunger challenges, the food security and the nutrition issues in Tajikistan to develop the transitional interim country strategic plan and the country strategic plan

Finding 34: The WFP T-ICSP and CSP design, implementation and adaptation have been informed by WFP-led studies and other analytical reports made available over the reference period, except for country capacity strengthening.

170. WFP developed its strategic documents drawing on the recommendations of the PRRO evaluation as well as on government and WFP-led studies and reviews (see paragraph 35). Moderate acute malnutrition activities were informed by consecutive demographic and health survey data from 2012 and 2017. An increased focus on climate change adaptation was put in place in order to build the resilience of vulnerable communities to climate shocks and stressors as a result of the findings from the WFP 2017 Review of Climate Risks and Food Security in Tajikistan and the recommendations from the Zero Hunger Strategic Review. The increased focus on climate change adaptation is aligned with Tajikistan's intended nationally determined contribution to combatting climate change under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The evaluation also noted the use of a United Nations study on the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 in Tajikistan¹³⁷ and the gender assessment conducted by UN Women in June 2020 in adapting WFP activities in light of COVID-19.¹³⁸ Ongoing monitoring of supply chains and the situation in Tajikistan's regional and global markets has been instrumental in informing mitigation measures. WFP has been proactive in monitoring the market situation as well as contextual issues in target communities. This became particularly relevant in times of crises (for example natural disasters, COVID-19, and most recently the Afghanistan crisis and potential inflow of refugees).

171. The design and implementation of country capacity strengthening were affected by a lack of systematic needs assessment and definition of capacity strengthening needs or baselines in the Tajikistan context, leading to a lack of information on concrete capacity gaps of the government institutions and baselines. This is particularly crucial given the fact that the country office should align its interventions with the WFP corporate capacity strengthening domains of intervention: (i.e. (1) individual; (2) organizational; and (3) enabling environment), each of which is unknown from the perspective of capacity needs and capacity strengthening priorities. Due to these challenges, there is a lack of clarity in what progress has been achieved in these domains.

The extent to which WFP has been able to mobilize adequate, predictable and flexible resources to finance the transitional interim country strategic plan and the country strategic plan

Finding 35: Over-reliance on a narrow donor base, particularly in the implementation of T-ICSP and early years of CSP has made WFP vulnerable to external and contextual donor resource issues. Since 2020, more diversification of donor funding is visible, in light of engagement with new donors, such as the Green Climate Fund and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.

¹³⁷ UN In Tajikistan. 2020. *Impact of COVID-19 on Lives, Livelihoods and Micro, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises in Tajikistan*, September 2020, <https://www.tj.undp.org/content/tajikistan/en/home/library/impact-of-covid-19-on-lives--livelihoods-and-micro--small-and-me.html>.

¹³⁸ UN Women. 2020. *Rapid Gender Assessment*, June 2020.

172. The major donor for the T-ICSP and CSP was the Russian Federation, followed by flexible funding, the Green Climate Fund, the USA, private donors and the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund, along with some donors providing a small amount of funding for shorter periods of time. Resources were mobilized from Switzerland in 2020 in support of the COVID-19 response. As compared to the T-ICSP, a significantly higher allocation of contributions came from flexible funding for the CSP (11 percent as compared to 5 percent for the T-ICSP). Strong reliance on the Russian Federation's funds has had its positive sides, in terms of stability of funding and established financing and reporting procedures, maintaining efficiency as confirmed by stakeholder interviews. On the other hand, over-reliance on funding from one donor creates major vulnerabilities in the programme in the medium to long term, particularly in view of potential changes in the donor's priorities and possible fatigue if their expectations are not met (for example slow progress in the development of a transition and handover plan for school feeding after long-term support).

Finding 36: A significant share of allocated resources has been from multi-year contributions allowing the country office to plan activities adequately.

173. A significant share of allocated resources was from multi-year contributions (88.5 percent or USD 10 million in 2018; 87 percent or USD 3.5 million in the first half of 2019; 67 percent or USD 5.4 million in the second of 2019), which allowed WFP to plan for the implementation of its activities. In 2020, WFP managed to secure multi-year funding: a four-year contribution from the Green Climate Fund for climate adaptation and resilience building activities, and a contribution over four years from the Russian Federation for strengthening the capacity of government institutions and schools to implement social protection programmes. Multilateral funds were allocated for resilience activities and helped WFP to initiate and expand the coverage of the food assistance for assets projects through cash-based transfers. Additional multilateral resources were utilized for emergency preparedness and response activities. Directed contributions were received for school feeding, including country capacity strengthening and nutrition.

174. As illustrated in Table 9, 49 percent of confirmed contributions are earmarked at activity level, 51 percent at country level and none at the strategic outcome level for the CSP, while for the T-ICSP almost all donor contributions were earmarked at activity level (99.8 percent). The apparently higher earmarking under the T-ICSP is actually a result of the carry-over of resources that then appeared as earmarked because they were assigned to individual activities under the country programme, although actually not originally earmarked by the donor.

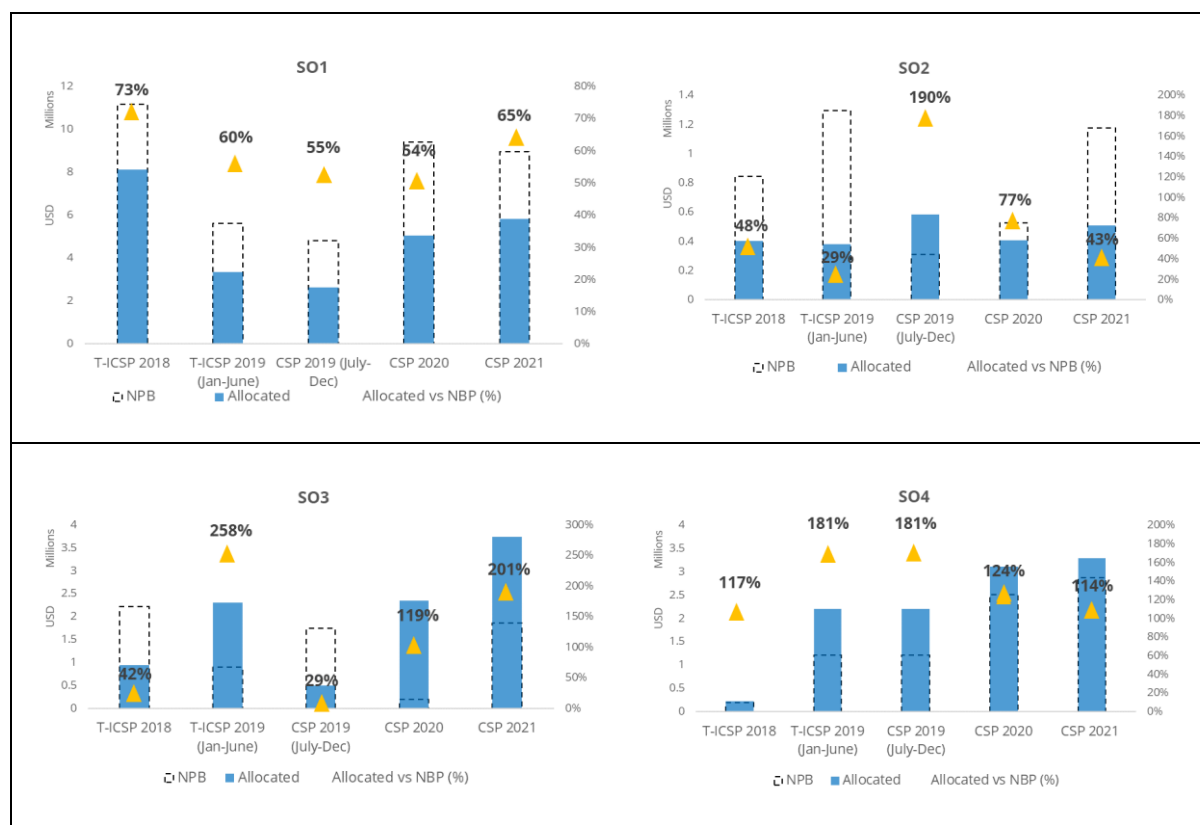
Table 9: Tajikistan Transitional Interim Country Strategic Plan (2018-2019) and Country Strategic Plan (2019-2024) budget earmarking level

	T-ICSP (2018-2019)		CSP (2019-2024)	
	CONFIRMED CONTRIBUTIONS (USD)	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL CONTRIBUTIONS	CONFIRMED CONTRIBUTIONS (USD)	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL CONTRIBUTIONS
Country level	22,464	0.2%	15,886,328	51%
SO level	~0	0%	~0	0%
Activity level	13,327,664	99.8%	15,029,751	49%
Sum	13,350,128	100%	30,916,079	100%

Source: IRM analytics – Country portfolio budgeting grants balance report (data extracted on 04/01/21). Note: confirmed contributions values do not include indirect support costs.

175. Nutrition and resilience building interventions were continuously underfunded, while school feeding also encountered a funding shortage, due to the slow process of approval by the Government, among other reasons. The funding situation for resilience building improved upon receipt of funding from the Green Climate Fund and with receipt of Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation funds for the response to COVID-19 in 2020.

Figure 21: Allocated resources by strategic outcome 2018-2021



Source: T-ICSP ACR 2018-2019; CSP ACR 2019-2020; country office for 2021 data until September.

176. The evaluation team found that community resource mobilization is well organized in the school feeding programme, though other thematic areas were not benefitting from such efforts within the reference period. School feeding also benefitted from resource mobilization from the private sector, though no such measures have been found in terms of engagement of private sector for other programme components.

The extent to which the transitional interim country strategic plan and the country strategic plan led to partnerships and collaborations with other actors, which then positively influenced performance and results

Finding 37: WFP is a flexible and open partner with United Nations agencies, the Government and other development actors in Tajikistan. This is a value that is positively assessed by all interviewed stakeholders. Partnership with the Government, however, often happens in silo with limited intersectoral or engagement with different levels of government (national and subnational levels).

177. WFP is a proactive and positive partner with United Nations agencies and other development partners on a bilateral basis as well as through the United Nations network/Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) platform: the WFP country office consults, involves and shares information with a wide range of development partners and government institutions through SUN networks (for example for Fill the Nutrient Gap and SBCC). WFP engagement with partners is proactive and open, with efforts to seek synergies and complementarities across its programme thematic interventions, as emphasised by all stakeholder interviews with United Nations agencies. As noted in Finding 7 above, WFP is an active member of United Nations thematic groups and leads some initiatives of the UNCT. Examples include: the coordination of the cash transfer working group in cooperation with UNICEF; co-chairing the food security and nutrition working group under the Development Coordination Council; membership in the lead education group chaired by the Ministry of Education and Science; and membership of inter-agency efforts on emergency preparedness and response, as well as other thematic inter-agency coordination forums. Partnerships with other United Nations

agencies helped the roll-out of the IMAM protocols and trainings for primary healthcare centre staff on supply chain management of supplementary food for malnutrition treatment, etc.

178. Feedback received from United Nations agencies and other development partners pointed to high utility and added value of the network of WFP field offices, which are open and are used by partners when they need space for meetings or consultations in the regions. This is especially valuable in very remote areas (for example GBAO).

179. WFP engagement with the Government is strong and based on long-term partnership and the positioning of WFP as a provider of important support to school feeding, nutrition and resilience building. Government stakeholders emphasise that the added value of WFP is the efficiency and timeliness of support at times of crises, and its open and consultative processes. However, engagement with the Government often happens in silos, focused on specific activities, thus diminishing the potential of leveraging political support across sectors. School feeding is considered as an exception, as it is conceived as a multisectoral programme for which the Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Health and Social Protection share responsibility.

180. The active participation of WFP in the REACT National Platform, which includes both government and development partners in efforts on resilience building and emergency preparedness and response helped to design and implement the COVID-19 Humanitarian Emergency Response Strategy under CoES leadership, an objective of which was to provide humanitarian assistance to impacted communities by enhancing their nutritional resilience and coping capacity to a prolonged emergency.

181. WFP engages with non-governmental organizations and other local actors. WFP engagement with its partners with extensive experience in the region, local knowledge and skills in mobilizing communities drive good results and complement each other. The evaluation found that the selection of partners has been appropriate, resulting in positive community-level results thus far in terms of community mobilization and outreach.

182. WFP engagement with the private sector is essential for optimizing school feeding. WFP engaged with bakeries in the districts where school feeding is provided through public-private partnerships in terms of delivery of food. A selection of bakeries was supported with modern equipment to enable them to perform their services. Site observations and focus group discussions with schools showed general satisfaction with the quality of services provided by the bakeries. Some documentary evidence was found regarding the engagement with private sector to reach more than 2,000 vulnerable households with community asset creation and livelihood activities. Field observations did not provide actual examples of such cooperation.

Flexibility of country-level strategic planning and delivery to respond to dynamic operational contexts, in particular regarding response to the COVID-19 pandemic and other unexpected crises and challenges

Finding 38: The shift towards the CSP approach has allowed WFP to be more strategic in its country-level interventions, while facilitating a flexible programme approach, which enables adaptation to the evolving context and provides a prompt response to crises. This is an added value of the WFP country response.

183. There is ample evidence confirming that the shift by WFP from previous individual operations (emergency operations (EMOPs), PRROs, country programmes and development operations (DEVs)) towards the CSP approach has brought a better strategic framework for WFP operations and engagement with the Government. It also helped minimize fragmentation and volatility of resource mobilization efforts, by providing a more strategic, longer-term planning and resource mobilization framework. The CSP approach helps strategic engagement, which in turn helps WFP to flexibly adapt and respond to a dynamic operational context. As noted in previous sections of this report, Tajikistan's geopolitical positioning makes the country vulnerable to a range of in-country and/or regional natural and man-made disasters. In such context, flexibility of development partners is of the utmost importance to be able to respond to emergencies or situations of crises. The prompt reaction of WFP and its provision of support to localized natural disasters (for example, mudflows and localized earthquakes) as well as its response to the COVID-19 crisis have been appropriate and effective interventions, adding to the value of WFP in terms of flexibility to respond, thanks to its availability of food storage across the country, which ensures timely and fast provision of emergency food support.

184. During 2020 and in 2021, WFP actively engaged as a service provider to local communities, contributing to the mitigation of negative impacts from decreasing remittances at times of COVID-19 restrictions. While the support through food assistance for assets could have been more targeted and larger, the ability to provide support so quickly at times when government and other development partners could not provide such flexible and prompt response was positively rated by interviewed stakeholders. The WFP initiative to procure PPE equipment for United Nations and operating flights in and out of Tajikistan were important and valuable contributions to the ability of the United Nations to continue its operations.

185. Finally, as noted in previous sections, the network of WFP field offices across the country has been very important for information sharing on status and challenges in the regions during the COVID-19 lockdown and as an information source on the potential influx of refugees from Afghanistan in the absence of other reliable sources of information on this issue.

186. WFP adopted different measures to ensure that its interventions continue to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, through: (1) the adoption of different food distribution modalities such as take-home rations to the most food insecure families of schoolchildren after early closure of schools in May 2020: it also changed its frequency of distribution of the supplementary food to moderately malnourished children from weekly to monthly to avoid the interruption of moderate acute malnutrition treatment due to movement restrictions; and (2) food assistance for assets activities.

Other drivers and hindering factors affecting WFP performance and the strategic shift expected by the country-level strategic planning

Finding 39: Demand continues to grow for handing over school feeding and systemizing climate change and resilience efforts. This underpins WFP partnerships and the continued relevance of the work done by WFP. WFP performance was also boosted through strong partnership with the Government, cooperating partners and United Nations agencies, as well as the investment WFP has made in generating evidence on its main focus themes, albeit to a lesser extent on country capacity strengthening.

Contributing factors

187. The Government has shown strong commitment in the realm of public discourse to take over school feeding. It has also acted positively by adopting the SSDSM in 2017, the relevant legislation reforms (for example, procurement law) and more recently the Ministry of Education and Science/WFP memorandum of understanding. However, translating commitment into action has been very slow and there are still gaps to be filled (for example, agreeing a stable national funding mechanism). Evidence points to a strong momentum for reforms of the school feeding approaches in Tajikistan after more than 20 years of externally supported efforts in the country. There is an increasing awareness across the government and donor community that such a programme should be nationalized and that the availability of external funding is diminishing. WFP country capacity strengthening efforts were timely in responding to this momentum, by investing in supporting institutional and policy development towards the nationalization of the school feeding.¹³⁹

188. When it comes to disaster risk preparedness, the increasing number of natural disasters and vulnerability to climate change call for more intensive government efforts to systematize early warning systems and the monitoring of potential disasters along with better response mechanisms. Such situations create momentum for stronger engagement from the Government and openness to benefit from donor support. The availability of funding from the Green Climate Fund for Tajikistan has been perceived as an important input to strengthening national systems, so the buy-in is strong, which is a driver for delivery of more sustainable results. The cooperation between WFP and CoES is close and based on a memorandum of understanding that provides the basis for further joint work.

189. Investment in building an evidence base on the needs of the population and the use of that evidence base in decision making processes informed the design of interventions. WFP conducted, participated in, or supported a number of research studies generating evidence on main socioeconomic, food security and nutrition issues in Tajikistan, as elaborated in Finding 34. These studies have been used to inform the design of WFP interventions as well as those of other development partners. However, some intervention

¹³⁹ FAO/UNICEF/WHO/WFP. 2021. UN strategic Framework for Nutrition.

design challenges persist, particularly in terms of country capacity strengthening, which is not sufficiently informed by assessments of needs, capacity gaps and priorities.

190. The evaluation found that a strong driver of delivery of results has been an appropriate selection of cooperating partners. In most cases, WFP partnered with credible local and international non-governmental organizations and private sector partners, which have a strong background and expertise in service provision and community work, engaging in particular with the most excluded and vulnerable groups. Collected evidence indicates that the cooperating partners had good understanding, knowledge and sensitivity to local contexts, which assisted delivery of assistance. For instance, the local non-governmental organization Markazi Darstgii Rushdi Garm was selected as implementation partner in Rasht for several activities including food assistance for assets and the Committee on Food Aid Policies and Programmes (CFA), which has a specific experience in the region, knows the area and approach to working with the population. The cooperating partners of the CFA activities (AKAH, Mountain Societies Development Support Programme, and Rural Aid) have been present in the region for many years and have worked closely with community structures to design and implement the project activities. This includes involving the village organizations in identifying needs and setting up project implementation committees to select beneficiaries and oversee the implementation.

191. Joining efforts with other United Nations agencies and donors contributes to coherence and effectiveness and adds the value of donor aid. There is ample evidence of the added value of WFP partnership efforts with other development partners. These are elaborated in detail in Finding 7 and 37 above. There have been two joint initiatives with other United Nations agencies. A joint project engaging UNDP, UNICEF, FAO and UN Women, with funding from the United Nations pooled Peace Building Fund, addresses limited access to and conflict over the management of natural resources on the border between Tajikistan and the Kyrgyz Republic. It works through small-scale infrastructure activities for bordering communities. Through multilateral funds, WFP was able to provide training and other capacity strengthening activities for national counterparts working on emergency preparedness and environmental protection in line with government priorities. WFP also partnered with FAO to establish gardens and greenhouses in school premises. When it comes to other development partners, WFP partnered with AKF in asset creation and resilience building activities, leading to the expansion of outreach and activities to a wider pool of local communities and stakeholders, as well as stronger sustainability potential of the interventions. The evaluation found that this partnership was based on an effective division of roles, which assisted both organizations to achieve better results. For instance, due to limited funds for engagement, WFP contributed to the delivery of bank cards to persons engaged in food assistance for assets activities, while AKAH worked with local communities on establishing local governance mechanisms that would be able to coordinate potential future community rehabilitation and cleaning actions.

Finding 40: Internal hindering factors relate mostly to a large proportion of vacancies in key positions in the country office and the skills profile of staff, which has yet to be fully adapted to reflect and support changing priorities under the CSP.

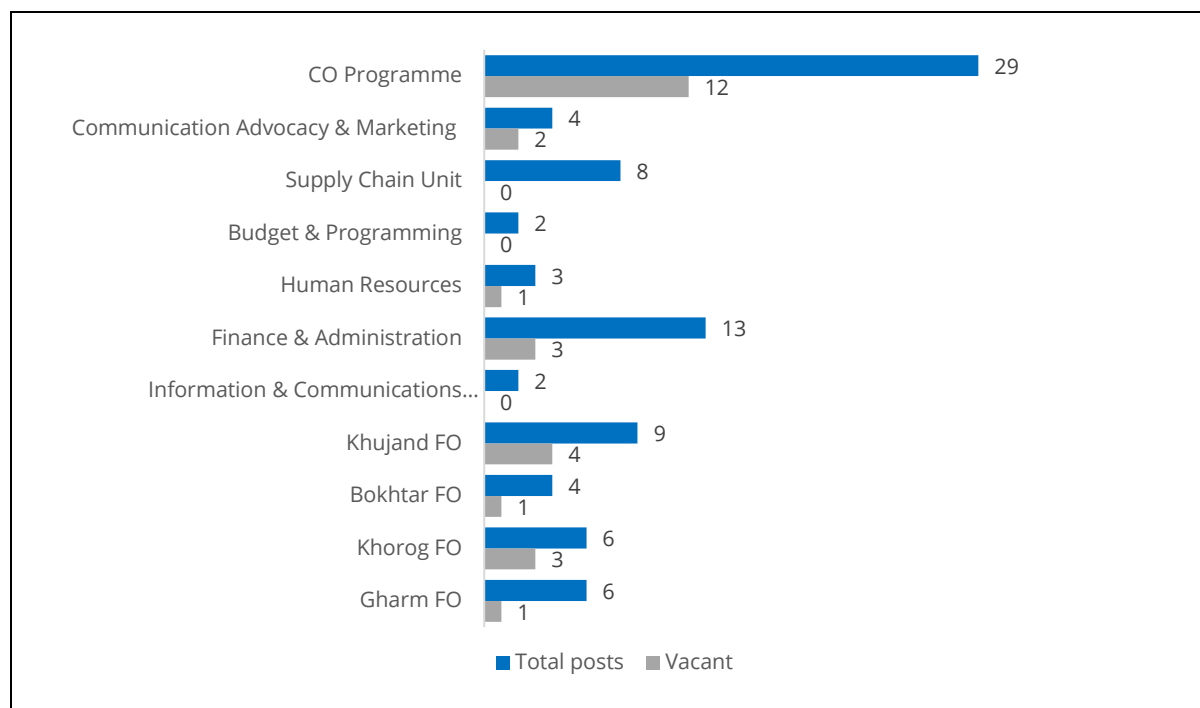
Hindering factors

192. There have been two major staff reorganizations, one six months after the CSP approval and one in 2020 to realign posts and staffing profiles with the current and anticipated needs, particularly in relation to the shift from direct implementation to more capacity strengthening. A new organigram was adopted reflecting abolished and added posts, including downsizing of some field offices, understandably causing concern and dissatisfaction among staff despite management efforts to adopt a transparent and fair process. About one third of country office and field office posts were vacant as of June 2021 (27 out of a total of 86) as a result of the reorganization and due to a number of staff having resigned from their posts.¹⁴⁰ The programme had 12 out of 29 posts vacant in June 2021 (41 percent) and field offices had 9 out of 25 posts (36 percent). Under the programme area, staffing shortages relate primarily to SO1, SO3 and SO4 programmatic areas as well as cross-cutting requirements such as monitoring and evaluation. Furthermore, no funding is confirmed yet for three posts considered as “high priority” by the country office, namely under communications, advocacy and marketing and research assessment and monitoring. Some

¹⁴⁰ WFP Tajikistan New Organisational Structure (Excel file).

stakeholders expressed their concern about the quality and frequency of monitoring and evaluation that may ensue from current vacancies as well as from the downsizing of field offices.

Figure 22: WFP Tajikistan country office staffing situation in 2021



Source: Country office organigram.

193. WFP internal (human, financial) capacity is still limited to respond to the growing country capacity strengthening demands to operationalize the corporate shift. WFP as a whole is moving rather fast towards transforming its operations to be able to provide essential services, while at the same time investing more intensively in institutional capacity strengthening of national actors to be able to organize and/or manage such relief or essential service provision efforts more independently with their own resources. However, as evidenced by this evaluation, current human resource capacities to maintain and push forward such a shift are weak beyond the most senior ranks in the country office. A number of positions, particularly in resilience building, are currently vacant. This is a challenge for engagement in the Green Climate Fund project in particular, which has a strong country capacity strengthening dimension.

194. WFP programme and intervention designs show weaknesses. The evaluation found certain weaknesses in the establishment of the elaborated pathway of change of interventions, particularly when it comes to resilience building activities. There is a lack of a clear framework of how inputs, outputs and intended programme outcomes lead to the desired change. Another challenge was found to be the absence of baselines and more operational country-specific indicators that would help monitor and reflect on results on more levels than is currently possible with WFP corporate indicators. In many cases, WFP planning documents and reports do not provide frameworks for (and in reports results of) assumption monitoring, risk assessment and mitigation strategies for some approaches and interventions, notably country capacity strengthening, but also across other strategic outcomes.

Finding 41: Implementation of WFP activities was affected by COVID-19 and other external factors including: donor resource availability and conditionality in terms of food procurement and contracting of service providers; the Government’s absorption capacity, bureaucracy and varying levels of commitment; and wider external geopolitical factors.

195. A range of external factors also affect the delivery of WFP results. Figure 23 illustrates how various external factors (discussed below) as well as internal factors (mentioned in the preceding paragraphs) have affected activities over the period covered by the evaluation.

196. The activities of WFP, the Government and their development partners have been affected significantly by the COVID-19 pandemic, which required most activities to be put on hold/move online/slow down, leading to delays and challenges to access services or assistance for the most affected populations. The role of WFP, its fast response to COVID-19-related hindrances and its continued assistance to most affected populations through alternative outreach (for example, take-home rations, food assistance for assets, PPE procurement, etc.) were all praised by interviewed stakeholders across all stakeholder groups, as elaborated in previous sections.

197. WFP has had a very narrow donor base with heavy reliance on one donor. Such a situation has caused challenges in terms of funding and longer-term planning of activities, which require longer-term engagement (for example country capacity strengthening). As noted in previous sections, COVID-19 presented new resource mobilization opportunities, on which WFP should capitalize in the next cycle.

198. Absorption capacity of government institutions to benefit from country capacity strengthening interventions has been limited. While school feeding-related key institutions have been responsive to WFP support interventions, the evaluation found a high level of donor dependence and the expectation that WFP would plug the gaps in their capacities. This is a hindering factor particularly when it comes to sustainability of achieved results in terms of nationalization of school feeding.

199. Staff turnover within the government institutions at all levels is a challenge, particularly as some of the systems have not been established yet. With high staff turnover, capacity and knowledge are lost to the institution and processes are slowed down. In moderate acute malnutrition activities, this was particularly reported as an issue for the health facilities in rural areas, where constant staff turnover due to the socioeconomic situation is observed.

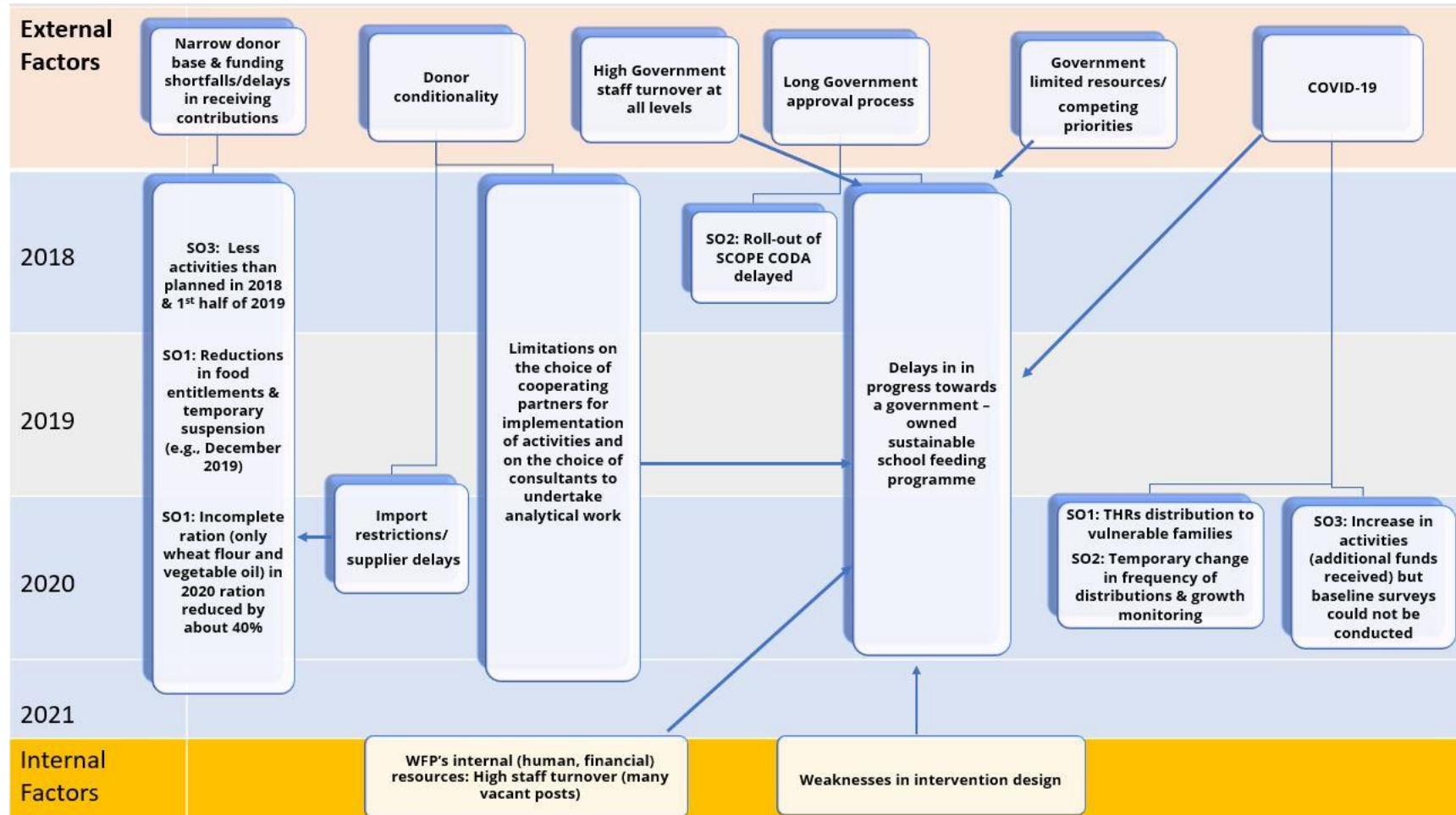
200. Instability and related geopolitical and other challenges are a central hindrance. Tajikistan's geopolitical position, as well as its internal socioeconomic challenges and hardships, along with vulnerabilities to climate change create significant challenges for the country to move forward in terms of reforms and fiscal and social stability. These challenges will continue to be an issue in terms of both the Government's policies and WFP engagement. They will also mean continued dependence on external donor aid.

201. Donor conditionality regarding suppliers, coupled with government import restrictions, resulted in supply chain challenges that affected the timely delivery of commodities for the school feeding programme. The evaluation found significant delays with the delivery of school feeding commodities: in some cases food commodities arrived with a one-month delay and in incomplete quantities, creating further obstacles in preparing adequate meals. Donor conditionality on procurement of services (for example, limiting the choice of consultants and suppliers) has caused delays in school feeding country capacity strengthening activities.

202. Bureaucracy and centralized decision making have caused long delays in finalizing and adopting various legislative decisions and documents. WFP relied heavily on the adoption of a number of decisions to ensure smooth implementation of its interventions. The delays in terms of approvals or adoptions of decisions created obstacles to timely delivery of initiatives. For example, the case of continuation and expansion of the SCOPE CODA for the registration and follow-up of moderate acute malnutrition beneficiaries was delayed due to bureaucratic reasons. This was also the case in the adoption of the procurement law and other required decisions (for example, the establishment of a school feeding centre in the Ministry of Education and Science) as part of the transitioning process of the school feeding programme.

203. The evaluation included an assessment of assumptions identified in the CSP document and those assumptions identified by the evaluation team in the process of (re)constructing the theory of change. The assessment showed that some assumptions were met and others have acted as constraints for implementation and progress towards set targets. For example, Government "capacity to allocate funding from its national budget", which was duly identified at the time of design, proved more challenging than anticipated. Table 29 (in Annex XIV:) summarizes the evaluation team findings as regards assumptions.

Figure 23: External and internal factors affecting performance



Source: evaluation team based on documentary review and interviews.

3 Conclusions and recommendations

3.1 CONCLUSIONS

204. This section provides a set of conclusions derived from the evaluation process, relating to the strategic positioning and relevance of WFP work in Tajikistan; specific contributions to T-ICSP and CSP outcomes; efficiency of WFP work in Tajikistan and main factors affecting WFP performance.

The strategic positioning and relevance of WFP work in Tajikistan

205. C1: The WFP strategic directions of investing in direct support to delivery of school feeding, nutrition services and disaster risk response with incremental integration of country capacity strengthening measures were highly appropriate and remain so in light of Tajikistan's developmental agenda and geopolitical and socioeconomic challenges. WFP is positioned as a key actor in delivering food security, nutrition and resilience building interventions that are well aligned with government priorities, and responsive to priority needs. WFP has helped fill in the gap in government services, both large scale through schools and small-scale through primary healthcare centres, and promptly responded to disasters and nutrition challenges for the most vulnerable populations across the country. Nonetheless, the shift from discrete interventions towards more integrated strategically coordinated programming has not yet materialized; in fact, synergies across thematic interventions were not systematically built into the T-ICSP.

206. C2: The shift towards country capacity strengthening is appropriate, but WFP capacity to deliver country capacity strengthening interventions beyond the individual level is weak. The WFP country capacity strengthening strategy was not informed by a comprehensive assessment of needs and gaps and lacked an intervention logic building on the WFP comparative advantage. These shortcomings, coupled with the country office's limited capacity to implement, have hindered full translation of WFP policy and strategy support into improved institutional capacity and enabling environment.

207. **Lesson 1: The CSP design requires an evidence-based selection of strategic areas of intervention.** The WFP experience in Tajikistan showcases the importance of a clear intervention logic of how direct delivery of support can be combined with country capacity strengthening efforts with a realistic resourcing strategy. Such an approach is critical in societies that encounter more limited fiscal and institutional capacity, where national institutions have to engage in crisis management on a day-to-day basis.

Specific contributions to the transitional interim country strategic plan and the country strategic plan outcomes

208. C3: WFP output-level results ensuing from direct delivery of services (in school feeding, nutrition, disaster risk reduction, the COVID-19 emergency response) have been positive and confirm the strength of WFP and its added value. However, the challenge is to ensure that investments across these thematic areas transform into more sustainable outcome-level results. WFP has managed to reach out to the most vulnerable populations across Tajikistan, notably children and their families and communities affected by food insecurity and natural disasters, providing essential food and nutrition services and contributing to improved local infrastructure, with direct effects on improvement of nutritional or livelihood potential.

209. Results at the outcome level display a mixed performance, particularly in terms of scalability and sustainability: despite its somewhat reduced nutritional benefits to schoolchildren, school feeding served as a safety net; the moderate acute malnutrition treatment intervention was successful in targeted communities but its scale-up potential was not fully explored; engagement in resilience building and emergency response has enhanced livelihoods and food security through improved local infrastructure, but long-term sustainability of rehabilitated or created assets is weakened by a lack of support to community-led governance and maintenance mechanisms.

210. WFP support for school feeding country capacity strengthening has yielded positive but insufficient results in terms of progress along the five SABER goals. No progress has been achieved so far on SABER

Goal 2: “Governance of the national school feeding programme through stable funding and budgeting”, which is crucial to the feasibility of a transition process and thus the sustainability of school feeding. However, some progress has been achieved in terms of governance (SABER Goal 3), namely the establishment of regional and district coordination councils and the recent launch of a school feeding centre (see Table 20). The country capacity strengthening interventions in the nutrition and resilience building area were limited to a narrow group of institutions, which prevented their catalytic potential. Across the board, country capacity strengthening and hand-over activities have not been framed by a prioritized roadmap with time-bound targets, which points to a lack of a full concept of what country capacity strengthening interventions should look like or aim for. The limitations in vigour to integrate more strongly the different WFP country capacity strengthening pathways of change across its interventions represents a significant shortcoming. Such shortcomings also point to a lack of links between the humanitarian-development nexus.

211. WFP is a proactive and positive partner of government, civil society and development partners. Partnership with the private sector is less pronounced and focuses on implementation. Some recent steps towards stronger collaboration are promising, particularly the consideration by WFP of opportunities to engage with the private sector in the context of public-private partnerships, especially in relation to local fortification of wheat flour and local production of a specialized nutritious foods for 6-59 month-old children. The recent adoption of the FAO/UNICEF/WHO/WFP United Nations Strategic Framework for Nutrition sets the scene for future collaboration across agencies in assisting the Ministry of Health and Social Protection in implementing its multisectoral Plan of Action for Nutrition (2021-2025). However, the WFP role is still prominent in the humanitarian domain and less so in the development realm, which may affect its strategic positioning on country capacity strengthening in the upcoming programme cycle.

212. C4: The responsiveness of WFP to the needs of the most vulnerable population groups was broadly appropriate. For instance, while initial coverage of school feeding was guided by food security assessments available at the time of design, no comprehensive situation analysis and defined targets or guidelines have been developed by the Government to identify target groups as recommended by the SABER analysis. WFP adhered to humanitarian and protection principles, ensuring observance of local cultural norms and maintaining a neutral and impartial stance in providing services and responding to crises. Gender issues received strong attention and GEWE was mainstreamed throughout implementation. However, insufficient attention was paid in some cases to ensure consultation with, and accountability to, affected populations in the provision of food assistance for assets activities, as well as in terms of a focus on disability. Environmental issues were considered to some extent.

213. C5: WFP implemented a number of relevant and effective interventions in response to COVID-19. The utility of the WFP mandate and its efficient resource mobilization approaches in response to emergencies were confirmed by the response to COVID-19. WFP mobilized early and comprehensively. It led an immediate, rapid and effective response, providing needed logistics, common services and operational support services to other United Nations agencies. Moreover, it provided assistance to the most affected populations, investing in asset creation that engaged those populations affected by COVID-19, hence mitigating the negative socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 in these communities.

214. Lesson 2. Achieving longer-term strategic (outcome-level) objectives requires the timely adoption by the Government of an appropriate set of policies and legislative and institutional reforms through a sequenced approach that incrementally builds national capacity over a longer-term horizon. The experience in Tajikistan suggests that investment in a policy area becomes a weakness that exhausts WFP strategic interventions when: (i) it is followed only passively by government institutions and has no defined or clear core policy reform steps that would allow it to achieve a higher level of strategic objectives as set out in the WFP CSP, and/or (ii) the investment benefits only isolated projects or actions that may provide immediate results but cannot be sustained and do not contribute to the ultimate realization of strategic objectives. When there are clear policy or absorption capacity issues holding back performance and where it is not possible to address key constraints in a meaningful way, there is a need to revise strategic choices and targeted outcomes set out in a CSP to make them more realistic, ensuring there are much lower expectations from its interventions. It is also critical to ensure, in advance, that the financial and institutional capacities of relevant institutions and agencies are strengthened to design (and cost) and implement policies.

Efficiency of WFP work in Tajikistan

215. C6: Programme efficiency was affected by funding shortages and delays, turnover of staff, and limitations in terms of soundness of the results framework and monitoring of higher-level results. The demand-driven approach of the CSP worked well to secure partnerships with the Government and responsiveness to priorities. Still, challenges emerged in terms of resource management, leading to weaknesses in terms of long-term planning and rather inconsistent engagement in some thematic areas (for example country capacity strengthening and disaster risk response). The reliance on a narrow donor base created effectiveness and sustainability challenges. Other issues, such as delays in the signature of agreements or project plans due to slow and bureaucratic government or donor procedures or supply chain interruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic determined the cancellation or postponement of several actions or demanded adaptation or changing the approach.

216. The country office has been challenged by significant staff turnover and a somewhat siloed approach in implementation of its activities, along with vertical communication issues between the country office and field offices. Moreover, the country office does not currently have strong country capacity strengthening expertise, which prevents the full conceptualization and integration of country capacity strengthening activities. This affects the efficiency and overall fitness for purpose of the country office to respond to its changing profile.

217. WFP could have done more to collect evidence and capture and report on its own contribution to main thematic priorities as well as to close equity and gender gaps and enhance access to services and their transformational potential. WFP reports provide an abundance of output-level data, while outcome data is generally collected and reported for direct implementation activities (such as food security indicators and moderate acute malnutrition performance indicators). However, reports do not sufficiently reflect and elaborate on outcomes associated with WFP interventions overall. The current monitoring and evaluation framework does not allow for a meaningful demonstration of WFP contribution to national capacities (result of the country capacity strengthening-related work). Such outcome-level analysis would have been beneficial to understand the full scope of the actual achievements of WFP across the sectors.

218. Lesson 3. Where WFP country operations are hindered by limited resource mobilization possibilities and potential disruptions of operations, careful operationalization of CSP objectives by ensuring risk mitigation strategies are in place takes on even greater significance. Experience from Tajikistan shows that when programmes are prone to limited availability of donor funds, slow government bureaucratic procedures or internal human resource issues, careful planning that includes risk mitigation scenarios and back-up plans based on an ongoing analysis of risks is critical. Such plans would allow WFP to promptly adjust its strategic objectives, implementation and results framework and plans.

Main factors affecting WFP performance

219. C7: A collaborative and flexible programme approach helped WFP to maximize its potential, despite challenges with financial and country office human resources, varied interest from the Government to engage in and sustain results and weak government absorption capacity as well as general geopolitical and other challenges. A number of external and internal factors hindered WFP performance, limiting its ability to fulfil the objectives set in the T-ICSP and CSP, notably the narrow donor base and related resource limitations as well as slow bureaucracy and limited government capacity. WFP country office encountered turnover of staff and general slowdown and reshuffling of activities due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The flexible approach of WFP and its open and collaborative mentality assisted in maintaining its operations and ensuring they were coherent and complementary to other government and development partners' interventions. The emerging needs due to COVID-19 restrictions also presented an opening for WFP to support a swift response and open some new resource mobilization opportunities. Tajikistan's geopolitical and economic positioning within the wider Central Asia Region is complex, creating a number of vulnerabilities that need to be continuously monitored to ensure a swift response to potential crises. This will continue to be decisive for implementation of the WFP mandate in the medium to long term.

220. Lesson 4: Investment in partnerships, consultative processes and flexibility in operations, while keeping the strategic direction, pays off. The experience in Tajikistan demonstrates the importance and value of investing in the development of strong links with the Government, civil society and development partners in joint preparation and monitoring of the reform priorities. It also demonstrates the importance of consulting with the affected populations and beneficiaries in selecting support choices and collecting

independent views, even if (and perhaps especially when) these are not consistent with the views of the Government or WFP on how to organize and implement support interventions.

3.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

221. A set of recommendations are underpinned by the need to have reliable multi-year funding that enables a more solid focus on resilience and country capacity strengthening. The recommendations focus on seeking a stronger, more realistic focus, with efforts to develop strategic partnerships. Recommendations are directed mainly to the WFP country office, but with contributions by WFP headquarters and the regional bureau in Bangkok.

Table 10: Recommendations

#	Recommendation (specific steps for implementing the recommendations are outlined in the sub-recommendations following each recommendation)	Level/nature	Responsibility	Other contributing entities	Priority	Action deadline
1	The logic of intervention under the next country strategic plan should ensure deep interlinkages between humanitarian assistance and development activities, capitalizing on the added value of WFP's corporate capacity and its strategic shift towards country capacity strengthening to maximize its delivery of more sustainable results in line with its commitment to working in the humanitarian–development nexus.	Strategic	Country office	Regional bureau	High	March 2023
	1.1 Devise activities based on evidence of approaches that are proven to produce results; on lessons learned from implementation of this cycle of the country strategic plan and outstanding gaps within WFP's thematic areas. The new country strategic plan activity logic should take into account what can realistically be achieved based on expected resource mobilization and credible assumptions in order to curtail unrealistic ambitions.					March 2023
	1.2 Devise and integrate sustainability measures across all thematic areas, fully considering risks and mitigating factors. In particular, sustainability measures for asset creation interventions such as support for local governance and maintenance or mobilization mechanisms should be conceptualized and implemented.					March 2023
	1.3 Continue to invest in consultation mechanisms to promote participatory decision making in the design of WFP programme activities by strengthening mechanisms for reaching out and consulting affected populations in targeting for food assistance for assets activities and other relief and development activities, as well as the complaint and feedback mechanism.					March 2023
	1.4 Integrate gender equality and women's empowerment, disability and accountability to affected populations principles into country strategic plan design and implementation.					March 2023

#	Recommendation (specific steps for implementing the recommendations are outlined in the sub-recommendations following each recommendation)	Level/nature	Responsibility	Other contributing entities	Priority	Action deadline
2	Develop and implement a country capacity strengthening strategy focusing on areas where WFP can add value The Tajikistan country office should assess its strategic positioning and opportunities as a provider of country capacity strengthening in the context of school feeding, nutrition, climate change and resilience. The assessment should serve as a basis for articulating a sound country capacity strengthening activity logic with strategic vision and direction for at least a 5–10-year horizon.	Strategic	Country office	Regional bureau	High	June 2023
	2.1 Conduct an assessment of the country capacity strengthening needs of government institutional partners at the national and subnational levels with regard to the five policy pathways, collecting data on capacity gaps, needs and priorities. Functional and/or fiscal analyses could be considered as useful tools for such an assessment, as exemplified by the school feeding public financing analysis.					March 2023
	2.2 Based on the findings of the assessment in 2.1, conceptualize Tajikistan-specific country capacity strengthening approaches for the five policy pathways. Include WFP's main partners (the Government, cooperating partners, donors, etc.) in the consultation on country capacity strengthening approaches and their conceptualization.					March 2023
	2.3 Mainstream country capacity strengthening activities across all WFP thematic activities. The new country strategic plan should have country capacity strengthening fully (and visibly) mainstreamed into all thematic activities, with clear country-specific capacity strengthening activities, outputs and outcomes.					March 2023
	2.4 The country capacity strengthening monitoring framework should include a set of intermediate objectives, baselines, process milestones and targets, along with their accompanying qualitative and quantitative indicators. The indicators should go beyond WFP's corporate indicators to include country-specific indicators, to help WFP to understand the effectiveness, impact and sustainability of country capacity strengthening efforts in Tajikistan.					March 2023
	2.5 Implement country capacity strengthening efforts in conjunction with national entities, applying a cascade approach to transfer information to the sub-national level as appropriate.					December 2023

#	Recommendation (specific steps for implementing the recommendations are outlined in the sub-recommendations following each recommendation)	Level/nature	Responsibility	Other contributing entities	Priority	Action deadline
3	<p>Support government fiscal planning and optimization processes for school feeding and resilience building.</p> <p>In the light of the fact that budget and fiscal planning issues are obstacles to implementation of the school feeding programme, WFP should consider expanding its country capacity strengthening interventions to support the Government in terms of fiscal planning in targeted sectors, building upon the currently ongoing school feeding public financing analysis.</p> <p>As school feeding demands the inclusion of and collaboration with various sectors (education, social protection, finance, etc.) and entities (national and regional planning entities), WFP should assist the Government in reinforcing and optimizing national institutional structures to ensure that results (particularly policy and institutional mechanisms and models) are implemented for the benefit of the most in need populations in Tajikistan. Such support could be operationalized through the provision of expertise and international best practices in the optimization of fiscal planning, organization and implementation of school feeding and disaster risk reduction activities.</p>	Operational	Country office	Regional bureaux	High	December 2023
4	<p>Develop, in close consultation with the Government and other key stakeholders, a school feeding transition and handover plan for gradual transfer of direct implementation and oversight responsibility to national and subnational authorities and parent-teacher associations. The plan should include priority objectives, time-bound targets, activities and responsibilities and should clearly define the scope of and modalities for WFP assistance throughout the transition process and after handover.</p>	Operational	Country office	Regional bureau	High	June 2023
	<p>4.1 <i>Phase 1:</i> Assist the Government in finalizing the national school feeding policy and plan of action, ensuring that it meets the five Systems Approach for Better Education Results goal standards in terms of a stable funding mechanism; oversight, management and coordination; adoption of a contextually relevant school feeding model or models based on well-defined criteria; establishment of a monitoring and evaluation system; and institutionalization of the role and contribution of communities and other stakeholders.</p>					March 2023
	<p>4.2 <i>Phase 2:</i> Conduct an assessment of capacity gaps (see recommendation 2.1) and develop a capacity strengthening strategy geared towards building national and subnational management, resourcing and monitoring and evaluation for the school feeding programme based on the Systems Approach for Better Education Results goals pathways and continue to strengthen and systematize the role of parent-teacher associations to ensure full and coherent empowerment of community members enabling them to contribute to local decision making.</p>					June 2023

#	Recommendation (specific steps for implementing the recommendations are outlined in the sub-recommendations following each recommendation)	Level/nature	Responsibility	Other contributing entities	Priority	Action deadline
5	Continue to reorganize the country office structure to optimize delivery of stronger, integrated results. WFP should consider further reorganizing the country office to ensure that the key cross-sectoral priority areas are adequately integrated and thus ensure stronger synergies, leverage and the catalytic potential of results, particularly in the light of the cross-cutting nature of food security and country capacity strengthening interventions.	Operational	Country office	Regional bureau	High	December 2022
	5.1 Enhance country capacity strengthening expertise in the country office by including specific country capacity strengthening positions that will ensure that WFP's corporate perspective is incorporated into programme design and implementation. Consider providing further learning opportunities to existing staff and/or bringing in (or outsourcing) such expertise for the short, medium and long term.					December 2022
	5.2 Reinforce the country office structure to enable synergies and more coherent and holistic delivery of the programme. Apply further efforts to seek synergies and enhance coherence across thematic interventions and thus ensure that the programme maximizes its results within resource limitations and that the entire team is on-board with changing WFP's corporate focus (including country capacity strengthening).					December 2022
6	Continue strengthening strategic and operational partnerships and efforts to diversify the donor base.	Operational	Country office	Regional bureau, headquarters	Medium	June 2023
	6.1 <i>School feeding</i> : Undertake with various government bodies (e.g., the Ministry of Agriculture) ¹⁴¹ and United Nations entities joint assessments to identify needs and design joint and complementary activities for safeguarding and promoting healthy school environments and access to nutritious, safe and affordable diets in schools.					June 2023
	6.2 <i>Nutrition</i> : Establish partnerships with other United Nations entities, cooperating and development partners and private sector entities in order to scale up malnutrition prevention and moderate acute malnutrition treatment in line with relevant national strategies (e.g., "First 1,000 days of a child's life" and the multisectoral plan of action for nutrition for 2021–2025) and the 2021 United Nations strategic framework for nutrition.					June 2023

¹⁴¹ The purpose of working on assessments with the Ministry of Agriculture would be to promote increased local production, adequate storage and processing of diverse and nutritious food and access by, among others, horticultural farmers to local institutional markets such as school feeding.

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