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Decentralized Evaluation

Evaluation Series on Emergency School Feeding in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Lebanon, Niger and Syria

2015-2019

Niger Evaluation Report

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List of acronyms and abbreviations

C2C	<i>Communes de Convergences</i>
CBT	Cash-Based Transfers
CFSAM	Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission
CO	Country Office
COGES	School Management Committees (<i>Comité de Gestion des Etabli. Scolaires</i>)
DNPGCA	National Entity for the Prevention and Management of Disasters and Food Crises (<i>Dispositif National de Prévention et de Gestion des Catastrophes et Crises Alimentaires</i>)
DREP	Regional Education Directorate (<i>Direction Régionale de l'Enseignement Primaire, de Promotion des Langues Nationales et de l'Éducation Civique</i>)
ECW	Education Cannot Wait
EMOP	Emergency Operation
EQ	Evaluation Question
ESF	Emergency School Feeding
FFA	Food for Assets
HGSF	Home Grown School Feeding
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GFD	General Food Distribution
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
GTE	Education Working Group (<i>Groupe de Travail Education</i>)
HDI	Human Development Index
ICSP	Interim Country Strategic Plan
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
KII	Key Informant Interview
MoE	Ministry of Education
MT	Metric Ton
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OOSC	Out-of-School Children
PAEQ	Education Quality Support Programme
PRRO	Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation
PSEF	Education and Training Sector Programme
SABER	System Approach for Better Education
SBBC	Social and Behaviour Change Communication
SBP	School-based Programme Unit
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SF	School Feeding
SO	Strategic Objective
SPR	Standard Project Report
T-ICSP	Transitional Interim Country Strategic Plan
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UEMOA	West African Economic and Monetary Union
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USD	United States Dollar
WaSH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme

Executive Summary

This Evaluation of Emergency School Feeding activities in Diffa region in Niger from 2015 until 2019 is part of a four-country¹ Evaluation Series on Emergency School Feeding (ESF) commissioned by the WFP School-based Programme Unit (SBP) and made possible by a multi-year contribution by Global Affairs Canada to WFP².

The series provides accountability to Canada and other donors, as well as to the wider humanitarian community. It also promotes learning at the strategic and operational levels, both globally and in country. Findings from the country evaluations feed into a synthesis of lessons learned which also draws on a global literature review, interviews with key global stakeholders, and a survey among a wider selection of WFP country offices on school feeding.

The evaluation series has been timed to inform the implementation of WFPs school feeding strategy 2020-2030. Expected users of the report are WFP headquarters (HQ), regional and country staff as well as external partners (Governments, United-Nations, regional organizations, Non-Governmental actors (NGOs), and private sector) at these three levels.

ESF in Diffa started in 2015, initially through a budget revision of a regional Emergency Operation (EMOP) and were included in the transitional country strategic plan (T-CSP) in 2019. This is therefore an activity evaluation.

Context

Niger remains far from achieving universal primary education: access and completion remain limited, rural participation is much lower than urban. Women and girls face discrimination in access to services, including education and health services. The spread of radical Islamic beliefs is further exacerbating political, social and economic exclusion of women.

Diffa region has been severely affected by the Boko Haram activity. Over 260.000 persons have been displaced, many multiple times. Displaced include refugees from

Nigeria, internally displaced persons (IDP) as well as returnees. Numerous schools have been destroyed and closed since 2015 and 78 percent of children in the region estimated to be out of school. Children face serious risks and are exposed to violations of their rights. 42 percent of children in Diffa under five are stunted, and 10 percent are chronically malnourished. Insecurity affects access to education. Conflict and instability have exacerbated the protection risks for girls who face abduction, forced marriage and survival sex, and boys who are at risk for being exploited for work and recruitment by armed groups.

Methodology

The development of the thematic scope for this evaluation was coordinated with the three other evaluations teams. Scoping was guided by a global evaluation matrix. This matrix was adapted to the specific characteristics of the ESF intervention in Niger. An Inception workshop attended by WFP Country Office School Feeding and Monitoring and Evaluation teams validated the approach and tools.

The evaluation adopted a mixed-method approach based on desk review of documents, in-depth qualitative interviews, focus group discussions (FGD), and site observations. A total of 133 interviews and FGD were conducted covering WFP staff, government staff, humanitarian actors, United-Nations agencies, community leaders, teachers, parents and pupils. The research team visited 15 purposely selected schools in Diffa region. Gender was integrated in the design of data collection instruments and in the approach to interviews and field visits.

The evaluation faced exceptional limitations, not all of which could be attenuated. Security issues prevented international consultants from traveling to Diffa. A local field research team conducted data collection under deteriorated security conditions which impacted on this team's capacity to move around. Communication issues affected oversight of the field team resulting in some topics not being adequately explored at field level. Quality of record keeping by the

¹ Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Lebanon, Niger, and Syria.

² This evaluation took place between June 2019 and June 2020. It does not include the "Breaking Barriers for Girl's education" project.

research team was weak. Lack of data at WFP level reduced the extent to which documentation could be used to fill gaps. Finally, data on the Government of Niger financial contribution to ESF remained incomplete. To ensure reliability of findings presented here only information adequately triangulated has been reflected.

Key findings

EQ1 – Appropriateness of ESF

The ESF intervention has been well aligned with Government plans, with Diffa priorities, and with the expressed needs of refugees, displaced and host populations. The ESF design and implementation replicated the model WFP has used for school feeding in non-crisis settings and was not specifically adapted to the emergency context. The design of two modalities (with two and three meals a day, respectively) to meet the needs of different target groups was relevant given different needs. ESF interventions were not informed by a specific gender analysis. Monitoring by WFP disaggregated beneficiaries by sex without capturing other gender issues or effects.

WFP's support to ESF targeted formal Government primary education. ESF was provided to all children in a given school, including children who were participating in other classes organized in the same school (pre-primary classes, catch-up classes, etc.). Non-discrimination of beneficiaries was valued by communities.

ESF has not covered all Government primary schools in the same geographical area due to funding constraints. Priority schools were identified by the Government, but the limited coverage created differences between children who de facto have the same needs and led to movements of pupils between schools. ESF – and partner activities - have not prioritized children between 13 and 17 years in spite of high unemployment, and risks of radicalization and recruitment into armed groups.

Complementarity with other services was envisioned but difficult to implement in practice. Priorities were identified through a joint partner data base for Diffa.

EQ2 – Coherence with WFP's work and with the overall humanitarian response

Complementary activities were planned for under Government leadership in the context of the Education Cluster. Limited resources and a challenging implementation context reduced the extent to which complementary activities were available in most schools in practice. WFP has participated regularly in joint planning but has not consistently shared information necessary for joint humanitarian response planning.

Various appropriate measures were taken by WFP and partners to address the security of schools, to safeguard against attacks, and to protect teachers in a volatile security situation. Other protection issues have not been systematically identified or addressed. ESF design did not foresee a specific complaint system reducing the possibility for communities, schools and beneficiaries to voice complaints.

EQ 3 – Results: Education and Food Security

WFP reached almost equal numbers of boys and girls with meals on most school feeding days. Female beneficiaries outnumbered men. Coverage increased over time from 7.000 to 23.000 children and covered one third of the emergency schools. Tonnage dropped somewhat suggesting that portion size and regularity of feeding may have been affected. In practice, a single modality for ESF has been in place, with two meals five days a week being served in most schools, rather than the two modalities foreseen.

Outcome indicator data is not available for the full period. The available Government statistics (2014 to 2016) shows a beneficial effect of ESF on enrolment, attendance and completion in Diffa, in spite of the crisis. Beneficiaries, communities and parents attribute positive performance to the availability of ESF. Anecdotal evidence suggested a strong positive effect of ESF on feelings of well-being by pupils.

Challenges to effective ESF delivery included sub-optimal quality of millet grain and cowpeas; delays in delivery and challenges to storage due to security issues; absence/irregular government funding for the purchasing of complementary ingredients; difficulties in monitoring, reporting and feedback on receipt of goods by schools; time and logistical challenges related to the transformation of the millet

grain; and non-materialization of the envisioned complementarity with other donors, affecting among others water provision to schools.

To meet essential costs that are not covered by WFP and the Government, most visited schools adopted strategies that were not part of the design including: exchanging or selling part of the food that is provided by WFP; declaring incorrect numbers of pupils and underreporting absenteeism; and reducing the number of meals/quantity of food. These measures likely impacted composition, portion size and calorie intake of the pupils on some days. There is no evidence that ESF changed nutrition habits. Effects on local economy were not specifically planned nor were effects in evidence.

EQ 4 – Effects on households

Effects on households were only superficially investigated by the research team. The limited data collected suggests ESF provided relief at the level of family resources and favoured a return to normalcy. However, requirements for financial and in-kind contributions for ESF functioning (monetary or in-kind contributions and/or labour) placed a burden on families who were already under significant stress and highly vulnerable.

EQ 5 – Unforeseen effects

ESF favoured integration of displaced children and parents in new communities and facilitated access to psycho-social services, where existing. ESF also favoured social cohesion. Conflicts around the management of ESF, and erosion of the authority of directors of relocated schools were noted.

Unintended consequences of ESF include: putting children at risk where schools are targeted because of food; negative impacts of food preparation on the environment; the use of children for ESF tasks; threats of exclusion of children because of non-payment of fees; movements of pupils between non-SF and ESF schools; and reduced pupil-teacher contact time because of the time spent managing school feeding. All but the first factor are not specific to emergency settings but appeared exacerbated in fragile contexts where coping mechanisms and systems are weaker.

EQ 6 – Sustainability and connectedness

The National School Feeding Strategy supported by WFP foresees schools functioning during crises but did not specifically integrate ESF into a national programme. WFP objectives included building national institutions' capacities to manage emergency and preparedness. However, ESF training has mainly focused on procedures and administrative steps for food delivery. WFP has had limited presence in the field and has operated in a highly complex and volatile environment which has reduced the capacity to monitor and to build capacity in practice.

WFP feeding modalities for Diffa were designed at national level without adapting these to the specificities of a crises setting. WFP was actively involved in the Education Working Group. Participation of communities in ESF was found to be weak reflecting insufficient attention to this aspect in support to schools, as well as the challenging operational context. As a result, ESF was also frequently absent from community plans in the context of the *Communes de Convergences* (C2C). Participation by women, including in decision-making, has been limited.

Internal and external influencing factors

Strong Government leadership in Diffa was a significant positive external factor in the initial period. The challenging and volatile operational context and short-term nature of donor funding negatively affected results. Internal positive factors include the experience built up by local WFP staff and their commitment while working in very difficult circumstances. Internal challenges include insufficient corporate guidance and learning on ESF and limited monitoring of the ESF implementation. A number of key underlying assumptions of the Niger Theory of Change (ToC) on funding, capacity, community contribution, and quality services were not supported.

Overall conclusions

C1: ESF has been relevant to priorities of Government and to the needs of beneficiaries and communities. However, ESF has benefitted only a selection of schools, and has only focused on primary level.

C2: ESF as an emergency response was rolled out rapidly in Diffa and replicated the approach to SF used in non-crisis settings. This evaluation has highlighted that ESF will likely have specific objectives, different from those in “regular settings”, and that the intervention operates in contexts where assumptions around community participation, partnerships, presence of local authorities, may be challenged.

C3: ESF had positive effects on enrolment in school and attendance and provided important relief to families, but nutrition quality has been variable. School level strategies for addressing shortfalls in government and community contributions affected meal provision and had some unintended effects. Overall, a focus on food provision, and lack of monitoring of ESF results reduced the extent to which WFP could report on and learn about ESF implementation and broader ESF effects, including on any possible differential effects on girls and boys.

C4: ESF had selected additional positive effects, in particular on integration of children in host communities and of refugee displaced families in community governance, in some settings. However, ESF management has also put a burden on families and communities and produced unintended tensions at community level which reflected weaknesses in ESF design and supervision. Opportunities were missed to ensure a stronger voice by women in ESF decision making at community level.

C5: In spite of a focus by Government and humanitarian partners on joint planning, school feeding activities have not been sufficiently paired with complementary activities and services (especially water). This has reduced the potential beneficial effects that school meals have for children.

C6: Niger national policies have evolved to reflect acknowledgement of ESF and provide broad guidelines for implementation. However, there was still insufficient understanding nationally and within WFP on how to approach school feeding in emergency settings in a manner that was cognisant of the challenges that were present in volatile emergency contexts.

Opportunities exist to further strengthen learning between the emergency schools and those operating in non-emergency contexts in Niger and in the region.

Recommendations

R1: WFP Country Office (CO) in Niger should target all basic education establishments, including non-government and non-formal education, in a given geographical zone. Priority setting should be guided by clear criteria, with specific attention to levels of vulnerability and informed by a gender and age analyses.

R2: Given high risks of teenage pregnancy, marriage and Gender Based Violence (GBV), the WFP CO and Regional Bureau (RB) should work closely with relevant partners in the context of Humanitarian Response Planning in Diffa to identify appropriate solutions for supporting the education of adolescent girls (13 to 17) in priority geographical zones through Take Home Rations (THR) or other appropriate incentives³.

R3: Future designs of WFP’s approach to ESF in Diffa and other areas of the country need to be based on in-depth analysis of the context including a gendered analysis of risks and protection issues. This analysis should be at the foundation of programme design and should be conducted jointly with other partners in the context of Humanitarian Response Planning. Such an analysis should then inform choices in terms of targeting, approaches and modalities. Regular and scaled up participation in the work of the Protection Cluster in Diffa should be envisioned by the WFP CO to ensure plans are based on protection considerations.

R4: WFP HQ should use the ESF evaluation to put forward a clear vision and strategies of what a SF programme should look like in crisis and conflict settings and reflect this in a corporate ToC for ESF. Particular attention needs to be paid to the underlying ToC assumptions and to the implications for programming and implementation in light of the vulnerability and fragility of communities and families.

³ A Canadian project “Breaking Barriers to girls” started end of 2019 to address these specific issues. It is implemented by

WFP, UNICEF and UNFPA in Diffa and 5 other regions in Niger.

R5: WFP HQ in collaboration with the RB, should develop specific guidance documents on the planning and implementation of ESF based on the revised ToC and provide targeted support through the RB and dedicated resources to the design and implementation of ESF.

R6: WFP HQ should review corporate tools for monitoring and reporting to adjust these to the specificities of ESF. These tools should be fully gender-responsive and be designed with considerations of utility, efficiency and learning given the context of ESF implementation. Indicators for ESF should capture the full range of anticipated effects, including food security, health, nutrition of children and adolescents, protection, gender, as well as principles of complementarity and joint implementation.

R7: In light of the challenges with food preparation and storage, food quality, and evidence of negative environmental impact, WFP CO should test the feasibility and acceptability of adopting a mixed modality of food provision combining a hot meal prepared at the school at mid-day, with energy biscuits/snack that are taken home for the evening/weekend meals for children who are not living with their parents. WFP CO should also take action to improve conditions for food storage for example through the use of hermetically sealed bags.

R8: Over the next programme period, WFP CO should conduct a real-time evaluation in ESF settings in Niger to collect evidence of the relationship between ESF (including complementary services) and reduction in early pregnancy, child marriage, and radicalisation.

R9: For future ESF support, the WFP CO should draw on experience of other partners (e.g. UNICEF) to put in place a functioning complaint system which ensures confidentiality and is linked to a feedback system of accountability to populations, so the follow-up of complaints is ensured.

R10: WFP CO should strengthen community participation, ownership, and accountability in all its ESF interventions, and do so in a joint approach with partners by focusing on strengthening local plans, governance structures, and accountability. Such an approach should recognize the constraints on communities, should ensure involvement

of women and girls in decision-making, and prioritize diversity and inclusion, through active and meaningful engagement in ESF planning, implementation and monitoring.

R11: WFP RB and HQ should use the revised ToC (see Recommendation 4) and the findings from the ESF evaluation series to draw up specific guidance on how an integrated package of services can operate in a crises/conflict settings and translate this into a prioritized set of more modest and realistic expectations of school health and nutrition which prepares the ground for working across the nexus. This will need to include stronger engagement in humanitarian and development coordination fora.

R12: WFP HQ should update guidance specifically for ESF programming for COs and partners, with a particular focus on community participation, System Approach for Better Education Results (SABER), and equitable involvement of women and men in decision-making around ESF. Guidance on minimum standards needs to reflect these priorities as well as lessons learned from ESF implementation (see also Recommendation 9).

R13: To promote stronger understanding of ESF, the WFP RB should - with support from WFP HQ - prioritize learning and sharing of information between countries including by organizing an ESF event in the region with governments and partners to share lessons from stakeholders/programming in emergency settings.

1 Introduction

1. **This evaluation of Emergency School Feeding (ESF) in Niger is part of a series of four World Food Programme (WFP) country evaluations⁴** that have been commissioned by the WFP School-based Programmes (SBP) Unit ⁵. The evaluations examine the relevance, coherence, effectiveness and sustainability of WFP's work in ESF in each country. Separate country reports will inform decision making and future programming in each of the countries. A synthesis report of the four decentralized country evaluations summarizes the findings, conclusions and recommendations across the country studies, and also draws on global interviews, a literature review and a global survey.

2. The evaluation series was made possible by a multi-year Canadian financial contribution to WFP to support ESF activities. The evaluation series was carried out by Particip in 2019 and covers the period from 2015 to 2019.

3. In Niger the evaluation covers the ESF activities implemented by WFP in Diffa region between 2015 and 2019. These activities were implemented under the regional Emergency Operation (*EMOP*) 200777 - *Providing Life-Saving Support to Households in Cameroon, Chad, and Niger Directly Affected by Insecurity in Northern Nigeria* between 2015 and 2018. The ESF activities in Diffa were then integrated in WFP's Niger Transitional interim Country Strategic Plan (T-ICSP) for the period from January to December 2019.

4. **The emphasis of evaluations is on accountability and learning for WFP.** From an accountability perspective the evaluation series includes an assessment of WFP ESF activities and results which is expected to be of use to Global Affairs Canada and other donors, and to the wider humanitarian community. The learning dimension of the evaluation at the strategic and operational levels is expected to help inform the implementation of the recently approved Global School Feeding Strategy for WFP (2020-2030). This new strategy covers school feeding in development contexts as well as in emergency and fragile contexts.⁶ For Niger specifically, the planning of school feeding activities in Niger under the Country Strategic Plan (CSP) for 2020 – 2024 will be informed by this evaluation.

5. This is an activity evaluation. As stipulated in the Terms of Reference (ToR) – Annex 1 - for the ESF Evaluation Series, the final report of the Niger ESF evaluation should: a) establish a multi-faceted baseline for future evaluations; document best practices and generate evidence about ESF programming; and c) generate context-specific recommendations for ESF/School Feeding (SF) programming.

6. **Users of this evaluation report include WFP management and technical staff involved in ESF/SF programming in Niger, the Regional Bureau (RB) in Dakar, and the SBP Unit Rome.** It is expected that the evaluation will also be of interest to other partners and donors that provide support to ESF and SF more broadly. In Niger this includes the Ministry of Education and the Government of Niger, development partners, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and members of the education and other humanitarian clusters.

1.1 Overview of the evaluation subject

7. EMOP 200777 was launched in January 2015 ⁷ and originally designed for one year.⁸ It was subsequently extended through various budget revisions up to December 2018.⁹ As a whole, the EMOP targeted food assistance for 2.2 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDP),

⁴ The other countries are the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Lebanon and Syria.

⁵ This evaluation timeframe covers the period 2014-2019. The scope of the evaluation does not include the "Breaking Barriers for Girl's education" project which started in late 2019.

⁶ <https://www.wfp.org/publications/chance-every-schoolchild-wfp-school-feeding-strategy-2020-2030>, accessed 20 March 2020.

⁷ SPR (2015). Providing life-saving support to households in Cameroon, Chad and Niger directly affected by insecurity in northern Nigeria - Standard Project Report. EMOP 200777.

⁸ WFP ((2014).). Regional Emergency Operation West Africa 200777 – Operation document.

⁹ Budget revision 4 extended the EMOP by 12 months to December 2016 and introduced emergency school feeding in Chad and Niger. Budget revision 8 extended the EMOP by a further 12 months to December 2017. Budget revision 12 extended the EMOP to December 2018.

returnees, refugees and vulnerable host populations in three countries - Chad, Niger and Nigeria. In line with WFP Strategic Objective 1 “Save lives and protect livelihoods in emergencies”, the EMOP aimed to: a) stabilize the nutrition situation of crisis-affected children through prevention programmes adapted to nutrition indicators of population groups; and, b) ensure the food needs of crisis-affected populations. In Diffa, WFP’s activities under EMOP 200777 included conditional and unconditional food and nutrition assistance through in-kind and Cash Based Transfers (CBT). The provision of assistance also sought to mitigate tensions between communities in fragile receiving regions.¹⁰

8. **The school feeding component in Diffa was** included in the EMOP in 2015 through Budget Revision (BR) four¹¹. This reflected a specific request by the Government of Niger to address the urgent situation of out-of-school children following the Boko Haram insurgency which started on the 6th of February 2015.¹² The main objective of the school feeding component of the EMOP¹³ was *“to incentivise families to keep their children in school”*¹⁴, and success was to be measured by increased enrolment of boys and girls.¹⁵

9. WFP’s emergency school feeding interventions in Diffa (under the EMOP and T-ISCP) have covered two types of school:

- **Emergency or spontaneous school:** Existing or newly established primary school created by communities¹⁶ in response to population movement. These schools catered to children of IDP. WFP has offered two meals a day to children (morning porridge, and lunch of cereals and pulses) five days a week. Rations were composed of 175 g cereals, 40 pulses, 25 g oil, 4 g salt and 80 g of Super Cereal.¹⁷
- **Host or relocated schools:** These primary schools catered for children whose schools were closed due to insecurity and which were moved by the Government of Niger to more secure areas. In these schools WFP serves three meals a day, seven days a week, based on the assumption that the children do not live with their parents but with host families. Daily rations per child consisted of 295 g of cereals, 70 g of pulses, 40g of oil, 7 g of salt and 80 g of fortified cereals (Super Cereal).¹⁸

10. A map of Diffa with the location of ESF schools is in Annex 2. The main activities in ESF included **provision of food to schools, support to implementation (setting up school feeding committees), training at community and school level, and participation by WFP in coordination fora** to ensure coordination of inputs with those of other partners. The timeline in Annex 3 provides an overview of key ESF events.

11. **Partners:** The Ministry of Education has been the main partner for the intervention and leads on coordination of school feeding partners.¹⁹ In Diffa the responsibility for education rests with the Regional Education Bureau (known by the acronym DREP) and with six directorates for each geographical sub-region. The Food Security Cluster and the Food Security, Nutrition and Education Working Groups have had the role of ensuring complementarity of interventions between Government, United Nations agencies, NGOs and other actors in support of education. Until 2019, WFP directly implemented the ESF programme. From 2019 WFP has worked through a local NGO – Karkera - to support delivery to schools.

¹⁰ WFP (2014). Regional Emergency Operation West Africa 200777 – Operation document.

¹¹ “EMOP 200777, Budget Revision 4, page 6.

¹² Apart from Niger, ESF was also introduced in Chad through the EMOP.

¹³ This evaluation covers only the SF in Diffa component of the overall EMOP. WFP also implements SF in Niger under the PRRO 200961, targeting different areas and beneficiaries. As per ToR, SF under the PRRO in Diffa is outside of the scope of this evaluation and has been subject to a separate evaluation.

¹⁴ Budget Revision 4. p. 6.

¹⁵ Ibid, p.6.

¹⁶ Parent Teacher Organizations will play a role in the establishment of these schools.

¹⁷ WFP (2018). Providing life-saving support to households in Cameroon, Chad and Niger directly affected by insecurity in northern Nigeria -- Standard Project Report. EMOP 200777.

¹⁸ Originally the ration for all schools was 3 meals a day. From 2016-2017 the host schools received the same ration and number of meals (3 per day) while the spontaneous schools received 2 meals per days with a reduced ration.

¹⁹ The Government is the second most important contributor to school meals in Niger financially. In 2016, the government was directly paying for school meals in 188 schools, benefitting 30 481 pupils (SABER, 2017).

12. **Resource requirements and funding situation:** The initial budget for EMOP 200777 was USD 52,386,039 (covering all three countries and all activities funded through the intervention). Various budget revisions resulted in an increase in the overall number of beneficiaries (all countries) and the budget (also across all countries). The EMOP was 69 percent funded in 2018. A breakdown of the budget and expenditure on school feeding remained outstanding at the time of submission of the final evaluation report.

13. **Other WFP activities:** WFP has also implemented school feeding in Diffa under the Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation (PRRO) 200961, benefiting approximately 92,000 school children in 2018.²⁰ As per ToR these schools were outside the scope of this evaluation. Moreover, in Niger's Diffa region, in addition to school feeding, WFP provided conditional and unconditional food and nutrition assistance through in-kind and cash-based transfers (CBTs) as well as food for assets (FFA).

14. **Prior evaluations:** There have not been any specific previous evaluations or reviews of school feeding in Niger. A regional EMOP 200777 evaluation commissioned by WFP's Office of the Evaluation (OEV) excluded school feeding activities which at the time were just starting. A decentralised mid-term evaluation of PRRO 200961 commissioned by the Niger Country Office in 2018 included the Diffa region but only SF activities that were undertaken under the PRRO, excluding ESF under the EMOP.²¹ A 2018 strategic evaluation of WFP's support for enhancing resilience highlighted Niger's resilience strategy as a model for joint planning and programming to achieve a long-term solution to hunger. The evaluation noted that the attendance rate for girls rose from 32 percent in the 2013–2014 school year to 68 percent in the following school year. There was also a significant drop in anaemia prevalence and improved nutritional awareness practices, including hand washing and other hygiene measures.²²

15. **Gender dimensions of the intervention:** A review of EMOP planning and reporting documentation did not highlight specific gender analyses at the time of programme design. The documentation also does not highlight specific strategies or gender related targets other than gender disaggregation at the level of output and outcome indicators.

1.2 Theory of Change

16. The evaluation was guided by a Theory-Based approach. The ESF Theory of Change (ToC) is based on the assumption that over time, school feeding will contribute to ensuring equitable access to education for girls and boys. **The ToC is based on the premise that school feeding - by providing quality food and food energy - is critical to increasing enrolment, attendance, and retention by providing an incentive for coming to school and staying in school.** In addition, better nutrition and alleviation of short-term hunger is also assumed to have positive effects on children's levels of energy, resulting in increased attention in the classroom, better capacity to learn, and better education results. School feeding - complemented by other activities implemented by different humanitarian actors – is expected to contribute to improved psycho-emotional and social wellbeing of children and to help household food security. It is also expected to have beneficial effects on girls' retention and education.

17. For school feeding to work efficiently and effectively and to produce the anticipated intermediate outcomes, outcomes and impacts, functioning systems which ensure regular and timely well-targeted school feeding are critical assumptions. WFP's technical assistance is expected to ensure that food is placed in schools in a timely manner and that the capacity at local, regional and national level to implement the school feeding programme is built. Finally, for these objectives and impacts to be achieved, WFP's efforts need to be combined with complementary efforts by Government, international humanitarian actors, and NGOs to ensure

²⁰ PRRO SPR. 2018.

²¹ IRAM (2016). West Africa Regional EMOP 200777. Providing life-saving support to households in Cameroon, Chad, and Niger directly affected by insecurity in northern Niger. An Operation Evaluation.

²² Bene, T.; Robinson, D.; Laanouni, F.; Bahr Caballero, K.; Murphy, B.; and D. Wilson (2019). *Strategic Evaluation of WFP Support for Enhanced Resilience*. ITAD.

that schools are available, are safe place, and offer a range of complementary services including psycho-social support, Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), etc. The list assumptions underlying the Niger ToC can be found in Annex 5.

1.3 Context

18. **Overall context:** Niger is a land-locked and food-deficit country in the Sahel region. Niger shares borders with Algeria, Libya, Chad, Nigeria, Benin, Burkina Faso and Mali. It has a population of 22.4 million, 84 percent of which live in rural areas.²³

19. **Economy and poverty:** Niger's economic growth of 4.9 percent is one of the slowest within the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA) and has dropped in recent years.²⁴ Economic growth is driven by agriculture and services (45 percent of the gross domestic product) and industry (18.5 percent). Persistent conflict and security threats, falling oil and uranium prices, unequal labour force participation rate (men 90.7 percent; women 67.5 percent), and high population growth²⁵ have been barriers to stronger economic development.²⁶ Niger ranks last among 189 countries on the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Index (HDI).²⁷ 44 percent of the population live on less than USD 1.25 per day, and 80 percent live in a situation of extreme poverty. Poverty is much higher in rural areas and has grown compared to urban areas in the last ten years.²⁸

20. **Food security and nutrition:** Over 80 percent of the population rely on agriculture to meet their food needs. At times of shock, up to half of the population can become food-insecure.²⁹ Stunting affects 42.2 percent and acute malnutrition 10.3 percent of children under five respectively, with large disparities among regions.³⁰ Acute malnutrition is at 15.3 percent for Diffa region.³¹ Anaemia affects particularly children under 5 (73.4 percent) and women aged 15-49 years (45.8 percent). In Niger, more than 40 percent of households cannot afford a daily nutritious diet. Diffa region has the highest percentage of households that cannot afford a daily nutritious diet - 59 percent compared to Maradi (43 percent), and Zinder (47 percent).³²

21. **Government policies and priorities:** The rights to education and to healthy and sufficient food are recognized in Article 12 of the Constitution of the Republic of Niger. The Sustainable Development and Inclusive Growth Strategy 2035 and the Economic and Social Development Plan 2017-2021 are the two main development plans for Niger. Food security has always been high on the Government agenda. After the Sahel food crisis in 2011, the new Government adopted an integrated multi-sector strategy, *Les Nigériens Nourissent les Nigériens* (Initiative 3N) focussed on overcoming the frequent national food and fodder deficit by increasing agricultural production and improving market access. A dedicated Government agency: the *Haut Commissariat à l'Initiative 3N* has been in charge of the implementation of this strategy and collaborates with respective line ministries for its implementation.

22. **Education:** The Niger Education and Training Sector Programme (PSEF 2014-2024) prioritises the quality of education, equitable access to basic education, and a focus on reducing regional disparities. However, the country remains far from achieving universal primary education: access and completion remain limited, even though the gross enrolment ratio (GER) has more than doubled in 20 years - from 35 percent in 2001 to 71 percent currently. Disparities are marked, with rural areas, children of poor households, and girls being particularly disadvantaged. Children in rural areas are much more likely to be out of school

²³ <http://uis.unesco.org/country/NE>, accessed 20 March 2020. Note that in 1988 the population of Niger was just 7 million.

²⁴ Ministère de l'Enseignement Primaire, de l'Alphabétisation, de la Promotion des Langues Nationales et de l'Éducation Civique (2017). Analyse SABER du 11 au 12 juillet 2017, Plan d'Action 2017-2024.

²⁵ Niger has an annual population growth of 3.9 percent which is one of the highest in the world with 51.6 percent of the population under 14 (Institut National de la Statistique (INS), 2014).

²⁶ WFP (2019). Transitional Interim Country Strategic Plan.

²⁷ UNDP Human Development Index 2019. Accessed 20 March 2020 at <http://hdr.undp.org/en/2019-report>

²⁸ The absolute number of rural poor has grown from 4 million persons in 2004 to 6 million in 2014 i.e. a 50 percent increase. Source: <https://www.banquemondiales.org/fr/country/niger/overview>

²⁹ Integrated Context Analysis (ICA).

³⁰ INSNS. 2018. Enquête démographique et de santé – résultats préliminaires.

³¹ Ibid.

³² WFP ((2018)). Fill the Nutrient Gap (FNG) Niger.

(59.7 percent in rural areas against 20.1 percent in urban areas).³³ Expected years of schooling are 4.7 years for girls and six years for boys. Mean years of schooling in Niger (Sustainable Development Goal 4.6) is 2.0.³⁴ The primary school dropout rate is 36 percent. Learning outcomes are weak. Niger has one of the lowest literacy rates in the world. Adolescents and youth, particularly girls, face major constraints to fulfilling their potential. Access to secondary education is low, only 31 percent of girls and 42 percent of boys enrolled.³⁵

23. **School feeding:** WFP assistance to the education sector in Niger started more than 40 years ago. For decades, WFP school feeding was implemented as development aid, with the aim therefore, to address structural issues. WFP work in emergency is more recent and reflects the deteriorating security situation in the country and region.³⁶ In terms of policies, school feeding as one of the key strategies of the *Programme Sectoriel de l'Éducation et de la Formation* (PSEF) for 2014-2024. The national School Feeding Strategy (launched in 2015) focuses on school feeding as a support to education access, progression and learning, particularly for girls, and frames school feeding as an entry point to building safety nets and ensuring adequate nutrition. It acknowledges that in emergency situations the Ministry of Education coordinates with partners to provide a response.³⁷ There is an emerging commitment to school feeding in the budgetary framework³⁸.

24. **Diffa region:** Diffa region is one of eight regions in Niger and is located in the far east of the country. Since the beginning of the Boko Haram insurgency in 2015 approximately 260.000 persons have been displaced, many of which multiple times. Displaced include refugees from Nigeria, IDPs, as well as returnees. Numerous schools have been destroyed and closed since 2015 and 78 percent of children in the region estimated to be out of school.³⁹ Several factors have affected enrolment and participation in education: fear of Boko Haram attacks, fear of abductions, targeting by armed groups of schools and other symbols of education, flooding, hunger and trauma, language barriers for Nigerian refugees, cultural beliefs (affecting girls' schooling), pressure to engage in child labour and household chores (including due to the impact of reducing fodder for cattle as a result of climate threats), early/child marriage, and inadequacy of school infrastructure.⁴⁰ Since March 2019, the crisis in Diffa has worsened, with repeated attacks which resulted in the displacement of 37.738 people. In addition, in October 2019 flooding of the river Komadougou Yobé, affected an additional 45.000 persons. Many of the challenges in education have been exacerbated including the recruitment and placement of teachers who – due to security concerns – are often absent, arrive late (most live in the city), and request transfers to other areas of the country.⁴¹

25. **Gender:** Niger ranks 151 out of 152 countries in terms of women's rights⁴² and is in the bottom third of the Women's Empowerment Dashboard. Women and girls face discrimination in terms of the legal age of marriage (15 years), access to education, information and health services, and participation in the public realm. Niger has the second highest teenage marriage rate for girls in the world and more than three-quarters of girls are married before 18 and one-quarter before 15. Over 38 percent of girls between the age of 15 and 19 experience early pregnancy, limiting girls' access to education, acquisition of knowledge, skills and self-confidence, affecting their health, and compounding inequalities into adulthood and for future generations.⁴³ Only 26.9 per cent of girls are literate, versus 50.2 percent of boys. Recent terrorist threats and the rise of radical Islamist opposition movements have

³³ UNICEF (2018). Tous les Enfants à l'École. Initiative mondiale en faveur des enfants non scolarisés. Rapport de l'étude sur les enfants et adolescent(e)s en dehors de l'école (EADE) au Niger. Ministères de l'Éducation (2018).

³⁴ <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/2019-human-development-index-ranking>, accessed 16 March 2020.

³⁵ <https://www.unicef.org/niger/children-niger>

³⁶ See Annex 14.

³⁷ Stratégie Nationale de l'Alimentation Scolaire au Niger, May 2015.

³⁸ It has been impossible for the evaluation team to obtain precise figures on this aspect.

³⁹ UNICEF (2018). Tous les Enfants à l'École. Initiative mondiale en faveur des enfants non scolarisés. Rapport de l'étude sur les enfants et adolescent(e)s en dehors de l'école (EADE) au Niger. Ministères de l'Éducation (2018).

⁴⁰ Italian Development Cooperation Agency, COOPI, World Vision ((2018).). Rapport de l'étude sur les barrières qui limitent l'accès aux possibilités d'éducation et les causes de la déscolarisation dans la région de Diffa au Niger

⁴¹ Source: evaluation interviews.

⁴² UNDP ((2018).). Human development statistical update.

⁴³ INS (2012) Enquête Démographique et de Santé et à Indicateurs Multiples (EDSN-MICS IV)

exacerbated the political and economic exclusion that women were already experiencing and have made boys and girls more vulnerable to dropping out of school, to child labour, and to recruitment into radical groups. A Government National Gender Policy is in place since 2008. This multisectoral policy is taken forward through *Communes de Convergence* (C2C) at municipal level.⁴⁴ In 2018, WFP organized a full-day training in Diffa on gender issues and gender policy with a focus on mainstreaming gender into all of WFP's activities.⁴⁵

26. **Humanitarian needs:** Humanitarian needs have been rapidly increasing. Over a quarter of all attacks on education in the world take place in five West African countries, including Niger.⁴⁶ Violent conflict in neighbouring countries - particularly in Mali and in Nigeria - have accentuated humanitarian needs, as well insecurity. The displacement of population is protracted - there are limited hopes of returning as the insurgency continues. Diffa had 340,000 people in need of humanitarian assistance in 2017 (of a total population of just over 700,000). In 2018, the Humanitarian Needs Overview estimated the figure at 419,000 and in 2019 at 450,000. In this context, children face serious risks and are exposed to serious **violations of their rights**. The situation of conflict and instability has exacerbated the protection risks for children with girls at risk of abduction, forced marriage and survival sex, and boys being exploited for work and recruited by armed groups.⁴⁷

27. **Humanitarian assistance:** Humanitarian coordination in Diffa region is done by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and is guided by Annual Humanitarian Response Plans (HRP). The Ministry of Humanitarian Action and Management of Catastrophes coordinates the response from the Government side. A large number of humanitarian actors operate in Niger (164, of which 49 in Diffa).⁴⁸

1.4 Evaluation Methodology and Limitations

28. The evaluation was guided by six evaluation questions. The global evaluation matrix was adapted for the Niger context (see Annex 4) and drew on the Niger specific ToC (Annex 5). The key questions and their relevance to Niger are shown below. The evaluation matrix and ToC were validated during a Rome Inception workshop in September 2019 attended by the WFP CO, the SBP unit in Headquarters, and the Regional Bureau in Dakar.

29. **Data collection methods and analysis:** The evaluation adopted a mixed-method approach (see Annex 6 for details on the methodology). Data collection was conducted by two international consultants and a team of researchers from the Niger-based research institute LASDEL. The international consultants conducted the bulk of the documentation review (see Annex 7 for list of documents) as well as interviews in Niamey during a two-week field visit in November 2019. They also conducted remote interviews of selected key informants in Diffa (see Annex 8 for list of people met). The LASDEL field research team conducted the field work in Diffa region.

30. **Timing and location of data collection:** Primary data collection included key informant interviews (KII) with stakeholders in Niamey and Diffa, and interviews and focus groups with beneficiaries, communities, and school level stakeholders in 15 schools in Diffa in November 2019 (Annex 9). Interview notes were recorded on a team drop box. Gaps in evidence were noted and are reflected in the report.

31. **Data triangulation:** The inclusion of different groups of stakeholders in data collection sought to ensure a balanced representation of views and to ensure data triangulation. Data

⁴⁴ The 'communes de convergence' (C2C) approach that began in 2013. Led by the 3N High Commission (HC3N) and UN agencies, it was rolled out in 35 pilot communes in Niger over a four-year period from 2013-2018. The core concept of the approach involves communes selected on the basis of vulnerability developing annual plan through a consultative process. The *commune* plan is then jointly monitored.

⁴⁵ WFP (2018). Providing life-saving support to households in Cameroon, Chad and Niger directly affected by insecurity in northern Nigeria - Standard Project Report. EMOP 200777.

⁴⁶ UNICEF (2019). L'éducation en péril en Afrique de l'Ouest et Centrale.

⁴⁷ <https://www.unicef.org/appeals/niger.html>, accessed 08 May 2020.

⁴⁸ OCHA (2019). *Plan de Réponse Humanitaire Niger*.

triangulation further included cross checking of information against documentary sources provided by WFP and other stakeholders.

Table 1 - Overview of the evaluation questions and their relevance for Niger

Evaluation Questions (EQ)		Relevance for the Niger evaluation
EQ1	To what extent is school feeding appropriate to address the needs of boys, girls and adolescents in the evolving crisis settings and contexts in the four programme countries?	The humanitarian crisis that broke out in Niger in 2015 following the attacks of Boko Haram and the subsequent continued instability of the region has created serious barriers to participation in education. This question therefore examined if ESF as an intervention type is a good fit for the existing needs and challenges in Niger Diffa region.
EQ2	To what extent has school feeding been coherent with the overall humanitarian response of WFP and other actors?	With 450.000 people in Diffa region in need of humanitarian assistance, school feeding as an emergency response should complement assistance offered by others in the humanitarian community. Consistency with the overall humanitarian response is an important operational principle in its own right. It is also a prerequisite for effective partnerships on the ground.
EQ3	To what extent has school feeding as an emergency response supported the education of girls and boys, and has contributed to their food and nutrition security in crises and emergency situations?	School feeding has been shown to be effective to promote educational and nutritional objectives and to contribute to greater food security in stable, developmental contexts. There is insufficient evidence of the extent to which this applies to emergency conditions. This question goes to the heart the issues that has led WFP to organize this evaluation series. It examines the ways in which school feeding has performed under conditions of instability and conflict.
EQ4	To what extent has school feeding in emergencies strengthened the ability of households to cope with crises? ⁴⁹	SF in Niger has in practice been used as a safety net and is believed to strengthen the ability of households to cope. WFP's school feeding policy of 2013 refers to school feeding as an element of social protection and safety nets. ⁵⁰ This question is therefore relevant for WFP globally as well as its work in Niger.
EQ5	To what extent has school feeding as an emergency response had effects not yet foreseen in WFP's school feeding policy but important in crisis and emergency settings?	Little is known about possible additional benefits of school feeding for social cohesion and the psycho-social well-being of children affected by conflict and instability. Answering this question for Niger is meant to clarify whether ESF is an activity that can deliver benefits beyond education, nutrition and food security, for example in promoting social cohesion and peace.
EQ6	To what extent has school feeding as an emergency response been coupled with creating a sustainable system for school feeding, in line with priorities and capacities of the line ministries?	National ownership of school feeding programmes is understood to be a key factor to improve quality, effectiveness and sustainability of SF. In the Niger, the System Approach for Better Education (SABER) framework has been used to engage the Government in an effort to anchor school feeding more firmly in the national Education Sector Plan. This question examines to what extent this has been the case.

32. Participants and sampling frame: Participants at all levels were selected through a stakeholder analysis done at inception stage (see Inception Report). Participating schools were selected based on considerations of typology (including vulnerability) and were purposely selected to take account of security and accessibility. One school which did not offer school feeding was included for comparison purposes. A total of 133 persons were interviewed at national and local level. A remote debriefing with the WFP CO in December 2019 allowed key stakeholders to react to the emerging findings and a learning event in June 2020 with WFP and representatives of the Government provided a further opportunity for exchange.

⁴⁹ The inception phase determined that the dimension of local economies for this EQ was not of relevance to Diffa Niger given that this was not a specific objective of the ESF programme in Niger and in agreement with the CO and the Regional Bureau EQ4 was reformulated for the Niger context.

⁵⁰ WFP School Feeding Policy (2013), p. 14.

33. **Ethical considerations:** The evaluation was designed and implemented in keeping with the four core humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence and with the additional principles of protection and accountability. During the evaluation the following ethical issues were considered for the design, data collection, data analysis, reporting and dissemination: the need to ensure consent by parents and communities for interviews with children; the importance of ensuring confidentiality so as not to compromise informants, the importance of allowing informants the option of not participating in the interviews, and the necessity not to create expectations among interviewees. To address these issues the research team provided prior information to schools and communities about the data collection process and the purpose of the evaluation and asked them to inform the relevant parental structures for the purpose of consent. For interviews with children care was taken to conduct the interviews in a non-threatening manner by selecting a quiet environment and obtaining consent for photo material that is presented in Annex 16. All interviewees received an explanation of the purpose of the study and were given the option not to participate or to terminate their participation at any time. In reporting, interviews and locations have been anonymized to ensure data confidentiality.

34. **Limitations:** The evaluation faced exceptional limitations, not all of which could be attenuated. Due to the deterioration of the security situation just before the field work data collection, the international consultants were unable to travel to Diffa. A one-day workshop in Niamey focused familiarizing the LASDEL team with the evaluation questions and data collection tools.

35. Once in the field, data collection by the LASDEL team was affected by Government imposed restrictions on movement due to security concerns. Additional time was lost as the team could not spend the night in field work locations. As a result of time constraints, the comparative analysis between ESF and regular school feeding was not realized.

36. The anticipated daily debriefings by the data collection team to the international consultants and to the LASDEL supervisor in Niamey could not take place because of communication challenges and excessive workload of the data collection team. As a result, some areas of inquiry – which should have emerged from the interaction with the LASDEL supervisor in Niamey and the international consultants - were left unexplored or insufficiently dealt with, including - for some topics – adequate exploration of perspectives of men and women respondents. In addition, due to challenges of supervision and coordination within the LASDEL team, the planned grid of raw data that was to be submitted was not compiled and never shared with the full research team. This made it impossible for the report drafting team to complete the missing information. Subsequent attempts to identify information on these topics⁵¹ through the existing documentation were only partially successful.

37. School feeding activities have been part of a broader humanitarian and multi-country EMOP. As a consequence, WFP's own reporting on school feeding has lacked detail. This affected the extent to which the evaluation could draw on WFP documents. Where gaps have remained or where the evaluation team was unable to sufficiently triangulate the information, this has been indicated in the relevant sections of the report. Finally, in spite of multiple attempts, it proved impossible to obtain quantitative data on the educational situation in Diffa after 2016, and on the Government of Niger financial contribution to ESF. Thus, the data presented in the report have remained incomplete. This has limited the extent to which the evaluation can draw conclusions about the effects of the intervention on education indicators beyond the initial period covered by the evaluation (2014-2016). It has also limited the extent to which the evaluation can reflect trends with respect to the financial commitment by the Government of Niger.

38. **Gender considerations:** In line with United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) guidelines and with good evaluation practice, the team recorded and reported the gender of each interviewee. The evaluation design sought to ensure that full participation was accorded to women and girls in community and school settings, with separate interviews and discussions

⁵¹ The most significant gaps in information relate to the degree to which schools have benefitted from complementary activities and perspectives on gender.

with them where appropriate. The field research team included two women researchers. Care was taken to seek a mix of women and men caregivers and parent participation in focus groups (to align with what is locally appropriate) but this was not always feasible in practice. Separate Focus Group Discussions (FGD) for girls and boys were organized. During the FGD, researchers explored issues affecting girls and boys separately although this was not done consistently in all discussions, as noted in paragraph 36. The findings on gender therefore remained anecdotal and limited to a smaller number of schools (6 in total).

2 Evaluation findings

2.1 Area 1: Design of the programme

2.1.1 EQ1: Appropriateness

EQ1 To what extent is school feeding appropriate to address the needs of boys, girls and adolescents in the evolving crisis settings and contexts in Niger?

Key findings

- ESF was well aligned with Government plans and with Diffa priorities. It was also aligned with the expressed needs of refugees, displaced and host populations, including in the choice to offer two modalities to meet the needs of different target groups.
- WFP's support to ESF targeted only formal Government primary education. Due to the lack of resources, only a third of formal Government primary schools in the same geographical area were covered.
- ESF has not targeted children of the same age group who were enrolled in Qur'anic schools, non-formal education, bridging classes, secondary and pre-primary education offered in the same prioritized geographical area and who faced identical food security, nutrition and educational needs.
- Complementarity with other services was envisioned and progress made in setting up a data base for Diffa.
- Principles of equity in provision of food were adhered to as ESF was provided to all children in a given school. This was seen as an important benefit of ESF compared to other forms of humanitarian aid which distinguish between categories of beneficiaries.
- ESF interventions were not informed by specific gender analysis. Monitoring by WFP has remained at the level of disaggregation of beneficiaries by sex and has not captured other gender issues or effects which were of importance in the Niger context.
- ESF support has not prioritized children between 13 and 17 years in spite of high unemployment, risks of radicalization and recruitment into armed groups.

2.1.1.1 Alignment with primary needs of target group

39. **Emergency School feeding in Diffa was aligned with Government plans and priorities and with those of the beneficiary populations.** Niger was committed to universal primary education⁵² and was also signatory to the International Declaration on Security in Schools which was adopted in Niger in 2015.⁵³ As further discussed in EQ 6, the Government of Niger has included ESF in its national SF Strategy and has also included SF more broadly as a priority in its education plans, including in its requests for funding from the Global Partnership for Education (GPE). Diffa was one of the regions of the country which even prior to the crises had critically low indicators for education.⁵⁴ ESF was in this context highly relevant given that access to schools was aggravated by the humanitarian crises. The absence of

⁵² As per the Programme Sectoriel pour l'Éducation et la Formation.

⁵³ Niger adhered to the declaration at the Oslo Conference on security in schools in May 2015.

⁵⁴ UNICEF (2018). Tous les Enfants à l'École. Initiative mondiale en faveur des enfants non scolarisés. Rapport de l'étude sur les enfants et adolescent(e)s en dehors de l'école (EADE) au Niger. Ministères en charge de l'Éducation (2018).

school feeding was also identified as a critical factor for enrolment and retention of children in school by the Diffa HRP.⁵⁵

40. **For the Government ESF was a key first response to be put in place in situations of instability/crises.**⁵⁶ Immediately following the start of the Diffa crises in February 2015, the regional authorities in Diffa took action to move children and schools to safer locations in the same region, and did so in coordination with partners (see under 2.1.2). Demand from Government for ESF has since extended to other areas of the country which have become affected by the deteriorating security situation.⁵⁷

41. **Community interviews by the evaluation team revealed that the provision of ESF was well aligned with the expressed needs of displaced/refugee families who perceived continuity of education as a primary need in a context where they are under considerable stress.** In interviews with beneficiaries by the evaluation team, the existence of ESF was considered a relief for families and a symbol of stability for the whole community.⁵⁸ ESF was also reported to respond to the needs of host communities who received displaced and refugee populations and who themselves faced food security and economic challenges.

42. **The intervention in Diffa represented a direct continuation of the same two models of intervention that had been in place prior to the crisis,** with two hot meals a day for children in displaced schools, and three meals a day for children whose parents are absent. The two modalities that were rolled out were appropriate in principle to the food needs of both types of beneficiaries, given different objectives and realities,⁵⁹ although as will be discussed in Section 2.2.1.3 the choice of ingredients and the implementation has fallen short in different respects (less meals than planned). The warm meal was an adequate incentive for children to come to school and has ensured that the beneficiaries were children (contrary to other solutions such as the dry take home ration) and was considered very relevant. However, most of the schools visited by the evaluation did not, in practice, have a distinction between the two types of modalities for reasons further discussed in Section 2.2.1.5.

43. **In terms of prioritization, the Government has prioritized sites in Communes de Convergence (C2Cs). However, only a portion of schools in need could be covered due to WFP funding shortfalls.**⁶⁰ Decisions on resettlement of schools have been taken by the Government and were informed by security considerations. WFP has aligned its choice of target schools with Government decisions and worked with the Diffa Education Cluster on establishing priorities among the schools in specific geographical areas in light of funding limitations. As a result, a large number of schools in need (approximately two thirds of the schools in Diffa) have not received school feeding.

44. **In line with WFP's policy, WFP's support to ESF in Niger has targeted only formal Government primary education even though children who went to other types of schools/basic education were in the same age groups and faced identical food security, nutrition and educational needs.** Qur'anic schools, non-formal education, bridging classes, as well as secondary and pre-primary education were offered in the same prioritized geographical areas – and at times in the same school that offered primary education - but were not officially covered by ESF. While many informants considered it logical that WFP has to prioritize in the light of limited resources, the focus on Government primary schools in a conflict setting (to the exclusion for example of Qur'anic schools) was perceived by some informants as creating a risk of armed incursions and destruction of schools.⁶¹

⁵⁵ UNHCR (2019). Plan de Réponse Humanitaire Niger.

⁵⁶ La gestion du système éducatif en situation de conflit. Ministry of Education (2019) – PPT presentation to the DREP of Tillabéri.

⁵⁷ This is the case for Tillabéri for example.

⁵⁸ UNICEF (2018). Tous les Enfants à l'École. Initiative mondiale en faveur des enfants non scolarisés. Rapport de l'étude sur les enfants et adolescent(e)s en dehors de l'école (EADE) au Niger. Ministère de l'Éducation (2018).

⁵⁹ Based on interviews with humanitarian actors, communities and beneficiaries by the evaluation team.

⁶⁰ WFP (2019). Transitional Interim Country Strategic Plan.

⁶¹ Issue raised in interviews with the Diffa protection cluster and other informants with a protection role, including from the regional level.

45. **While some adolescents have benefited from ESF due to high levels of over-age children in primary education, many have not had access.**⁶² The need to refocus on adolescents has therefore been highlighted as a priority in the 2020 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP).⁶³ This aligns with WFP's SF strategy for the next ten years (2020-2030) which envisages moving towards a new 8,000 days paradigm as part of an integrated health and nutrition response.⁶⁴ The envisioned focus on adolescents is particularly relevant in the Niger context given the high unemployment and significant risks of radicalization. A Canadian project "Breaking Barriers to girls" started late 2019 to address these specific issues. It is implemented by WFP, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in Diffa and five other regions in Niger.

46. **WFP Niger did not initially consider ESF a priority for the emergency response.** Predating the Diffa crises, the importance of ESF had not been immediately recognized by WFP. In fact, as was evident from internal WFP and external partner interviews, WFP was reluctant initially to start ESF in Tillaberi in 2012 when the crises broke out in that region. At the time WFP CO management did not want to introduce school feeding with the argument that families were receiving rations so there was no need to also feed the children. Other partners, in particular the UNHCR and NGOs lobbied intensely to influence WFP to provide ESF as it was doing in countries such as Mauritania. In the absence of a response by WFP, various partners stepped in to provide biscuits to a selection of schools in an effort to ensure children would come to school.

2.1.1.2 Complementary services

47. **Joint action was a key principle of the Government of Niger response to the attacks in Diffa and Bosso in 2015.** An Education Cluster was rapidly established to coordinate the response. Interviews underscored that WFP mobilized quickly to roll-out ESF and that this rapid mobilization was appreciated by the Government and partners although - as noted above - response was limited by financial constraints. Documentation has also shown that the cluster has met regularly, and that WFP has participated in the cluster.

48. **WFP's internal planning documents foresaw complementing ESF with water and sanitation solutions and infrastructure for schools in Diffa⁶⁵ through joint planning and coordination with other partners.** Planning documents also assumed strong community involvement in the provision of solutions. **Humanitarian and individual agency reporting of initiatives provide evidence of various initiatives to ensure complementary support for ESF.** For example, since 2014, 956 teachers have been trained by various partners in psycho-social support and teaching techniques.⁶⁶ Later in the evaluation period, the lack of teachers was identified by the education cluster as a critical problem and measures - which brought together different partners - were taken in response⁶⁷ (Section 2.1.2.1).

49. Efforts have also extended - according to reports - to plan for improved school infrastructure, water, latrines, and provision of materials. The education cluster put together a data base of schools with GPS coordinates and an inventory of school needs to facilitate provision of support.⁶⁸ However, as further discussed under EQ 2 there was only very limited evidence from the school visited that these complementary activities has resulted in such services being available and operational in the schools visited. This suggests that while complementarity was planned, it was difficult to put in place in practice.

⁶² Given high levels of overage children in primary education, some adolescents are in fact covered by ESF. However, this remains a minority.

⁶³ UNHCR (2019). Plan de Réponse Humanitaire Niger. And UNHCR (2020). Plan de Réponse Humanitaire Niger.

⁶⁴ WFP (January 2020). WFP School Feeding Strategy 2020-2030,

⁶⁵ For example: WFP's T-ICSP specifies that "Complementary activities (WASH, SBCC, and others) will be provided in partnership with other actors and through WFP existing activities under SOs 2 and 3."

⁶⁶ UNHCR ((2019). Plan de Réponse Humanitaire Niger

⁶⁷ An evaluation of the contractual teachers in 2017 by the Ministry of Education directly contributed to the deficit in teachers as 783 were let go (HRP, 2019).

⁶⁸ Feedback to this report by the WFP CO informed the team that the new generation of programming includes scholarships for girls, and that a new joint WFP, UNFPA and UNICEF initiative in Niger and Chad "Breaking Barriers for Girls' Education project" seeks to improve complementarity.

50. **At community level, school action plans should have provided a framework for integration with school health, and other services.** However, school feeding was not always taken into account in school plans. Planning capacity was weak and insufficient support by WFP was provided to schools in developing comprehensive school plans. “*The quality of the plan depends on the functioning of the school committees. When we were working with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) the plans were stronger*”, said a key informant.

2.1.1.3 Gender & equity

51. **Key informants suggested that ESF plays a critical role in keeping girls in schools and thus can contribute to reducing the number of pregnancies and should have significant other protective effects.**⁶⁹ However, overall the evaluation found that these expected benefits were not reflected in attention to gender in the design of the ESF interventions (by WFP and at community level) nor adequately monitored. **Thus, the design of the ESF interventions in Diffa has not been informed by a specific gender and equity analysis.** As noted, ESF was introduced through a budget revision following an opportunity to obtain funding. The budget revision document did not include specific attention to gender apart from mentioning that enrolment of girls would be prioritized, but without specifying how this would be achieved. Annual budget revisions allowed ESF to continue as part of the EMOP, and ESF has been included in the T-ICSP in 2019. Annual planning documents also did not include reference to a specific gender analysis, other than noting that enrolment of girls was slightly higher than that of boys (in a trend that had been present before the crisis in Diffa started).

52. **Community action plans were not used to systematically identify and plan for addressing issues of gender and equity, neither were they used for strengthening accountability on ESF.** Interviews and documentary review have underscored the significant protection and Gender Based Violence (GBV) concerns in Diffa, which have affected girls in particular.⁷⁰ However, these protection and gender concerns were not systematically included in community plans.

53. **Monitoring by WFP has remained at the level of disaggregation of beneficiaries by sex and has not captured other gender issues or effects of ESF which were of importance in the Niger context.** Studies in Niger have brought out concerns about girls’ discrimination within families in favour of boys.⁷¹ Opportunities have been missed for WFPs monitoring to capture changes that may take place at the level of household dynamics as a result of girls going to school, or at the level of how women’s participation in local education committees might make a difference to decision making and power relations. The evaluation did not find evidence that WFP more closely monitored gender and equity issues in its ESF work after the 2018 gender training.

54. **Principles of equity were nonetheless adhered to as ESF was provided to all children in a given school.** According to informants, and as confirmed through observations during field visits (see Box 1), food was provided to all children in a beneficiary school, including those that might have fallen outside of the age bracket (e.g. children in pre-primary and older children), those that were participating in other types of education⁷², those that were from host communities, and those that happened to be at the beneficiary school (brothers and sisters of children who were enrolled and who as the team was told could show up at meal times, a practice that was in evidence in all schools visited by the LASDEL team). From this perspective ESF has respected principles of equity and – as emerged from field interviews – was generally very positively perceived especially in a context where humanitarian aid was reported at times to have been perceived as discriminatory as it targeted very specific groups within a community.⁷³ In addition, no discrimination or distinction between beneficiaries was observed

⁶⁹ Source: KII with members of different clusters in Diffa, partners in Niamey and government informants.

⁷⁰ UNHCR, Norwegian Refugee Council (2019). Rapport mensuel de monitoring protection Diffa – Août 2019

⁷¹ <https://www.genreenaction.net/IMG/pdf/DocumentDiagnosticGenreNiger.pdf>, accessed 22 September 2020 and Rapport de l’étude sur les enfants et adolescent(e)s en dehors de l’école (EADE) au Niger (Version provisoire). UNICEF, 2018.

⁷² Thus, ESF in a given school in practice also covers children in pre-primary and those enrolled in remedial classes and in “classes passerelles” (bridging classes for children who have not been to school or have language barriers).

⁷³ Caremel 2018: *Petite Anthropologie de la réponse humanitaire à Diffa - une entrée par les besoins de base.*

during field work although some key informants were concerned about lack of specific attention to children with disabilities.

Box 1 - Emergency School Feeding beneficiaries in practice

As evidenced by school visits and interviews ESF beneficiaries in practice covered all levels of education that were given in a particular school. In the words of one of the school directors:

“At this school the canteen in fact covers two schools, the traditional school and the Franco Arab school. Adult education and pre-school are not officially part of the ESF but all children without distinction eat at the canteen. For example, there are pupils here with their younger siblings in pre-school and we cannot stop them from eating at the canteen. In this manner the canteen actually caters to everyone without distinction of sex or level”.

As a result of this situation a number of children who ate at the canteen were in practice pre-adolescents and adolescents who were registered at professional training courses and whose schools were in the same physical area as the primary school supported by WFP.

55. **ESF did not cover all schools in the same geographical area.** The evaluation team and the field research team were made aware of the fact that different schools in practice co-existed within the same geographical area, and only some schools would receive ESF.⁷⁴ This reality – which was the result of Government policy to spread the benefits over a larger geographical area and reflects funding constraints by WFP – has resulted in **differences between children who de facto had the same needs** and were facing the same challenges. It was also reported in multiple interviews to the research team by school directors and education committees that this situation contributed to significant population movements between schools with various negative effects including by increasing the distance travelled by children to get to school, and overpopulation of classes in the ESF schools.⁷⁵

2.1.2 EQ2: Coherence

EQ2: To what extent has school feeding been coherent with the overall humanitarian response of WFP and other actors in education, social protection and health and nutrition?

- Complementary activities were planned for under Government leadership in the context of the Education Cluster but have been difficult to achieve in most schools.
- Complementarity was challenging to achieve due to funding shortfalls, a challenging security/operational context, and weak integration of ESF in school plans.
- Complementarity has been affected by weak linkages between the Diffa education cluster and the national education cluster.
- Various appropriate measures were taken by WFP and partners to address the security of schools, to safeguard against attacks because of the presence of food, and to protect teachers in a volatile security situation.
- Other protection issues have not been systematically identified or addressed and there were concerns about the protection of children and girls in a context where child labour and GBV are high.
- WFP has participated regularly in joint planning but has not consistently shared the necessary information to feed into the joint humanitarian response and to ensure the ESF needs are reflected.
- For most of the evaluation period, WFP did not deliberately plan complementarity with other activities. However, the T-iCSP has provided a framework for new initiatives with a stronger focus on complementarity and gender.⁷⁶
- Complaints on ESF were not systematically recorded and addressed and the ESF design did not foresee a specific complaint system.

⁷⁴ EQ 3 highlights that WFP ESF covers only one third of the schools in Diffa region.

⁷⁵ Information triangulated between interviews with different informants and observation in the schools visited by the field research team.

⁷⁶ In 2020 WFP initiated a new multi-country two-year ESF project with a broad focus on gender

- Insufficient attention to gender also meant that protection risks/needs were not adequately informed by gender analysis.

2.1.2.1 Protection, participation, and accountability

56. **Processes have been in place for the participation of Government, school officials and representatives of target communities.** This has included the education cluster, and a complex system of different coordinating bodies at school level. The lack of systematic gender analysis reduced the possibility to establish to what extent processes ensured equitable participation that was inclusive of diverse stakeholders.

57. **The Government has led the emergency response in Diffa. The education cluster has been the main coordinating body for the education response.** The education cluster was very active initially when the crisis first started. At the time of the evaluation (2019) the education cluster was reported to have become much weaker and has not sufficiently coordinated its work with the Protection sub-cluster.⁷⁷

58. **Protection concerns were at the heart of decisions to move schools to more secure locations at the start of the crisis in 2015.** Interviews and documentary evidence have highlighted that the involvement of Government in the design of the ESF programme in Diffa has been strong. In fact, the Education Director in Diffa has led the process, mobilized partners, and coordinated the decision on priorities. However, staff turn-over in government services has affected continuity of some activities.

59. **Various appropriate adjustments have been made to reduce threats of attacks on teachers and pupils over time.** Such threats arose due to the deliberate targeting of schools as symbols of the Government, and the fact that the presence of food attracts armed groups.⁷⁸ A Comité “*École Sûre*” was created and has been part of the Education Working Group (*Groupe de Travail Education – GTE*) which is in charge of thinking about the safety of the school. To overcome the challenges and protection risks to beneficiaries, WFP worked with local and national authorities and the communities in Diffa to determine solutions which included moving food stocks to locations within the community and away from schools, as well as distributing the food commodities on a bi-weekly basis (reducing the amount of food stored), to avoid the accumulation of food stocks and risk of theft.⁷⁹

60. **Changes were also made to improve the safety and security of teachers and reflect joint efforts by partners.** A “daylong operation” (*journée continue* in French) was introduced to reduce the length of the school day and allow the teachers to overnight in urban areas and other safe places. And for areas of high risk (e.g. in Bosso which has already been in the hands of Boko Haram twice) a *motivation bonus* (*prime de motivation* in French) of 25.000 CFA⁸⁰ was introduced for teachers. Also, with UNICEF, a fund for the transportation was put in place to help teachers move around.

61. **Other protection issues have not been systematically identified or addressed in the approach to ESF.** Insufficient attention to gender also meant that protection risks/needs were not adequately informed by gender analysis. For example, the evaluation field work identified widespread use of children in schools for fetching water for schools (see Section 2.2.3.4) with reported negative effects on children’s’ presence in school. Protection issues were also in evidence related to the practice of requiring a monetary participation from parents which may have led to threats of exclusion from class when parents could not contribute.⁸¹ The research team established that such threats were not uncommon (reported in six schools). However, in the absence of specific monitoring data, the evaluation team was unable to

⁷⁷ UNHCR (2019). Plan de Réponse Humanitaire Niger.

⁷⁸ Direction Régionale de l’Enseignement Primaire, de l’Alphabétisation, de la Promotion des Langues Nationales et de l’Éducation Civique de Diffa (2018). La gestion du système éducatif en situation de conflit : L’expérience de Diffa”, Décembre 2018.

⁷⁹ WFP (2018). Providing life-saving support to households in Cameroon, Chad and Niger directly affected by insecurity in northern Nigeria - Standard Project Report.

⁸⁰ Around 43 USD.

⁸¹ The evaluation team is of the opinion that children being excluded from education is a protection issue because of the risks that children face when they are not in school (for example in terms of heightened risk of child labor and GBV).

establish to what extent children had actually been excluded from classes because of inability to provide monetary or in-kind contributions.

62. **Field work found that most beneficiaries were aware of ESF activities but that complaints on ESF were not systematically recorded and addressed.** Over the period WFP has progressively introduced and sought to improve processes for capturing complaints from beneficiaries with respect to its activities in Diffa.⁸² However, for ESF specifically, the evaluation team was told that complaints were supposed to be channelled through the local community committees. While Standard Project Report (SPR) mentioned food distribution related complaints, it was not clear what percentage of complaints was related to ESF. Neither the DREP nor WFP appeared to be aware of specific complaints that may have been channelled in this manner regarding ESF. Various key informants expressed concerns about the absence of a well-functioning complaint mechanism in a context of “**significant issues of corruption**” and **poor governance of ESF** where food risks being siphoned off at different levels and which could have meant that girls would eat less, and that children with disabilities would be discriminated. It was, unfortunately, not possible for the evaluation to shed further light on this, as the LASDEL field team did not collect specific information on this issue. In similar situations in other countries, in addition to the overall programme monitoring system, WFP has established a complaints/feedback mechanism: an automated telephone answering service where people leave voice message and their phone number and are then called back by WFP personnel to discuss the issue.

2.1.2.2 Complementarity with other WFP interventions

63. **Review of SPRs suggests that complementarity with other WFP work was not specifically part of the design of ESF under the EMOP (2016-2018).** According to the WFP CO some beneficiaries of ESF were likely also benefitting from some form of General Food Distribution (GFD). However, the reporting did not reflect deliberate efforts at ensuring complementarity between different WFP interventions.⁸³

64. **With the transition to the T-ICSP, complementarity – at the level of planning – has been more explicit.** Thus, the T-ICSP stated that “*Complementary activities (WASH, Social Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC), and others, will be provided in partnership with other actors and through WFP existing activities under Strategic Objectives (SO) 2 and 3.*” And that “*The emergency nutrition, school feeding and Food for Assets (FFA) support will be implemented with similar activities under SO2, 3 and 4, across which gender integrated to address the inequalities and support changes.*” The T-ICSP also referred to complementarity with gender-transformative and nutrition-sensitive activities in and around the schools. It also referred to the link to “*Support to Smallholder Farmers*” component under SO4 to promote local purchase and food production from smallholder farmers, with a specific focus on targeting women to address the gender inequalities that undermine food security. Finally, the T-ICSP referred to the adolescent girls’ initiative under SO3, as being linked closely to SO2 and with a focus on improving girls’ nutrition and schooling while preventing girl marriage and pregnancy.

65. **However, in practice, interviews and review of SPR reporting suggested that complementarity has been pursued mostly in the regular school feeding activities rather than in the ESF activities.** This was the case, for example of local purchasing and Home-Grown School Feeding (HGFS), which have been explored for the regular SF in other parts of the country. Within WFP Niger, a single unit oversees both emergency and regular school feeding. This has allowed for exchange of experience but has not translated into a re-thinking of the ESF model or in the exploration of stronger linkages with other WFP work. There was little evidence of systematic learning, or cross-over between the ‘regular’ SF by WFP in Diffa and the ESF.⁸⁴ Interviews and observations by the evaluation team suggested that WFP workload, communication issue with Diffa, the extremely challenging operational environment,

⁸² WFP ((2018). Providing life-saving support to households in Cameroon, Chad and Niger directly affected by insecurity in northern Nigeria - Standard Project Report, and WFP interviews.

⁸³ SPR EMOP 200777 for 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018.

⁸⁴ Based on interviews and documentation review.

and the lack of guaranteed multi-year funding have all contributed to this. In this context the evaluation team notes that the exclusion of ESF from other evaluations constituted a missed opportunity to inform and strengthen WFP's support (see paragraph 14).

2.1.2.3 Complementarity with other humanitarian actors and Government partners

66. **Coordination of ESF with other humanitarian efforts has taken place within the Education Cluster and other humanitarian structures.** The Education cluster has met regularly, and partners have worked together to plan support to schools with the objective of ensuring complementary services and also to deal with issues around safety and security of schools. Various other clusters were in place, and there was a system of interaction with other clusters of which the Protection and Food Security clusters were the most important for the purpose of ESF.⁸⁵ However, coordination in practice remained weak, particularly in the latter part of the evaluation period (see also paragraph 57).

67. **Field visits in Diffa underscored that there were still many gaps in the provision of complementary services and that in practice these often did not exist in most WFP supported schools.** Thus, of the 15 schools visited by the research team, only four had a functioning water point. Most schools also lacked basic equipment for cooking and meal provision. This was acknowledged by WFP and partners: *“A lot of partners were not able to provide their support. A lot of things remained on paper”* (see also Box 2).

Box 2 - Field observations on hygiene in ESF schools

Field visit observations by the evaluation team highlighted considerable gaps in terms of hygiene. In most schools (11 out of 15) school canteens were not equipped with the necessary equipment. Food was cooked and consumed in the open air and conditions for storage were very precarious. Almost all the schools that were visited had latrines, but many were not functioning because of the lack of maintenance. Most schools had no functioning water points affecting hand washing and menstrual hygiene management. Some schools reported spending up to 1000 FCFA per day on water for the canteen.

68. **Various factors were identified by the evaluation as having made complementarity challenging in practice.** As noted earlier, shortfalls in funding meant that WFP could not cover schools where other partners were implementing activities.⁸⁶ In addition, while there was recognition for WFP field presence and capacity to work on the ground by actors, some sources expressed disappointment at the quality of WFP's participation in joint planning. Various partners felt that WFP should be more engaged in identifying solutions and in working with other partners. On the side of some partners too, complementarity was not always pursued for a range of reasons including funding shortfalls. Finally, the challenging implementation context – with on-going and fluid security concerns – has been a major overarching factor affecting the achievement of all results.

69. **WFP has been physically present and represented regularly through the humanitarian structures but has not participated fully, nor systematically advocated on the importance of ESF.** Government was of the view that WFP has participated very well in the local response in Diffa in particular at the start of the crisis in 2015. Other partners expressed views that WFP's participation has been regular but insufficiently proactive.⁸⁷ In particular, partners would have liked to see WFP taking a much stronger role in advocacy and leading on ESF. For example, for the 2019 HRP WFP did not provide the information that would ensure that ESF needs are reflected in the humanitarian needs assessment. Members of the United Nations family indicated that this represented a significant missed opportunity, given that funding was secured based on this plan, including from Education Cannot Wait (ECW).⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Based on KII interviews and review of documentation.

⁸⁶ And in particular challenges in terms of convincing humanitarian donors that ESF is worth the investment.

⁸⁷ KII interviews.

⁸⁸ KII interviews.

70. **Complementarity has also suffered from insufficient coordination and weak linkages between the level of Diffa and the national Education Cluster as well as insufficient priority for education in humanitarian settings.** In this context, various interviewees expressed frustration that Emergency Education – and ESF – was relegated to the Any Other Business (AOB) section of the national Education Cluster meeting. In 2019, an Emergency Focal Point from within the Ministry of Education was appointed to the Education Cluster. Informants were hopeful that this would improve the integration of emergency education issues into the Education Cluster although at the time of the evaluation various informants mentioned that follow-up of points raised at the cluster meeting had been weak.

71. **ESF design in Niger was based on an assumption of complementarity between WFPs in-kind/food contribution and a Government contribution in funds for schools for ESF. In practice the complementarity from the Government has been rare and unpredictable, significantly affecting the ESF operation.** The ESF design assumed that WFP provided a basic set of ingredients for school meals (cereals, pulses, and oils) which was modelled on its support in regular SF, and that the Government of Niger would make available money to schools for the purchasing of ‘condiments’ (vegetables or other ingredients that improve the taste of food). Field work and review of school level data showed that the Government contribution has fallen short of planned needs and has been unpredictable in most cases, as illustrated by the following quote: “*the functioning of the ESF canteen is guaranteed through WFP and the parent association. The contribution of the State is limited to condiments which are not received with regularity. For example, in this year (November), we have not yet received any contribution*”, said a school director.

72. **National level efforts to promote working across the humanitarian-development-peace Nexus were initiated in 2018 but reportedly stranded because of political sensitivities** around priority communes, as reported in interviews. Nonetheless there was some emerging evidence of efforts to work across the nexus including to ensure integration of ESF into regular education programming. The experience from Diffa was also shared at the regional G5 Sahel meeting in early 2020.⁸⁹ According to key Ministry of Education informants this laid the groundwork for an emerging regional approach for education in crisis settings.⁹⁰

2.2 Area 2 – Results of the Programme

2.2.1 EQ3: Education & food and nutrition security

EQ3: To what extent has school feeding as an emergency response supported the education of girls and boys, and has contributed to their food and nutrition security in crises and emergency situations?

Key findings

- WFP has reached almost equal numbers of boys and girls with meals on most school feeding days, with female beneficiaries outnumbering male beneficiaries. Coverage increased over time to approximately one third of the needs of emergency schools in Diffa. Tonnage dropped somewhat suggesting that portion size and regularity of feeding may have been affected.
- Government statistics suggested a beneficial effect of ESF on enrolment, attendance and completion in Diffa region between 2014 and 2016. Informants believed ESF was the main factor that drove attendance. Outcome indicator data was not available for the full period.
- In practice, a single modality for ESF was in place, rather than the two planned modalities. This modality ensured two meals five days a week in most schools.
- Challenges to effective ESF included sub-optimal quality of millet grain and cowpeas; delays in delivery; challenges to storage because of security issues; insufficient and irregular government funding; difficulties in monitoring, reporting and feedback on receipt

⁸⁹ G5 Sahel was established in 2014. It is a framework for cooperation between five countries focused on improving security and development. The five countries are Chad, Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali and Mauritania.

⁹⁰ Source: Key Informant Interviews.

of goods by schools; time and logistical challenges related to the transformation of the millet grain; and non-materialization of the envisioned complementarity with partners. Unintended effects have included movements of pupils between schools that did not offer meals and those where the ESF programme was in operation.

- To meet certain essential costs that were not covered by WFP and the Government, most of the schools visited by the evaluation team adopted one or more strategies that were not part of the design including: exchanging or selling part of the food that was provided by WFP (in order to improve the quality of the meals); declaring incorrect numbers of pupils and underreporting absenteeism (to be able to cover all children in a given school); and reduction in the number of meals/quantity of food (when stocks were insufficient or likely to run out).
- ESF consumed in schools had the benefit of being targeted at children who in times of stress – and in the context of a family – might not otherwise be prioritized.
- For families, ESF was an important complementary form of aid, and freed up time and resources for families. Effects on local economy were not noted.
- Perception of the quality of the food varied with refugee groups being more satisfied with the quality than host communities. No specific evidence that ESF changed nutrition habits of families was identified.

2.2.1.1 Reaching beneficiaries

73. **The evaluation faced challenges in obtaining consistent information on the results and effects of WFPs ESF activities**⁹¹. The evaluation team therefore used the data that was compiled by WFP's Diffa field office in coordination with the DREP as the basis for this evaluation. These data are presented in Annex 10. The analysis shows that:

- **The scale of WFP's ESF activities in Diffa grew** from the initial support in 2015, which targeted and reached just 13 schools and just over 7000 pupils to 21.000 pupils and 67 school in 2019.⁹²
- Between 2015 and 2019, **WFP consistently reached or surpassed planned total beneficiaries** in both types of schools (spontaneous and relocated).
- **Almost equal numbers of boys and girls were reached, with women beneficiaries outnumbering men beneficiaries** by a small margin in all years. This difference between boy and girl pupils (in favour of girls) predated the ESF intervention.⁹³ The difference appears to be specific to Diffa region.⁹⁴
- **Tonnage distributed increased from 2015 to 2017 and dropped in 2018 and 2019** (1049,627 Metric Tons (MT) in 2017/2018 compared to 744.199 MT in the school year 2018/2019). The number of schools however, remained almost constant between 2017 and 2019 (68, compared to 67 in 2019), as did the number of pupils (approximately 23.000).⁹⁵
- **The reduction in tonnage, while maintaining the same number of beneficiaries suggested that portions may have been adapted or that the number of school feeding days would have dropped.** However, data provided by WFP did not confirm this.
- **WFP ESF has covered between 30 and 20 percent of the schools in Diffa that needed emergency school feeding.**

⁹¹ Data on number of schools, beneficiaries, coverage of needs, and other key elements were not reflected in the EMOP reports as ESF was just one activity among the many different interventions that were implemented across the three beneficiary countries. In addition, no baseline was available for the intervention, and some indicators were not consistently monitored or reported. Data on ESF was therefore requested from WFP and from the Regional Education Directorate (DREP) in Diffa, with various discrepancies noted. Discrepancies relate mainly to differences in reporting on the number of schools and number of beneficiaries who have received support.

⁹² See statistics in Annex 10.

⁹³ See Annex 10.

⁹⁴ It was not clear what explains this difference. More analysis would be needed in the context of the education cluster to analyze the data and understand this phenomenon.

⁹⁵ See Annex 10.

- **Reporting** (see Table 2) has suggested that school feeding was provided on 95 percent of planned days in all years for both relocated and spontaneous schools (see paragraph 9 for definition). Interviews with school committees, school principals and teachers in the 15 schools visited confirmed that food was provided on most days, and this was confirmed through beneficiary interviews.
- **Most of the ESF schools were spontaneous schools. In practice, it appeared that there was little distinction between spontaneous and relocated schools** as most visited schools served just two meals a day regardless of their status as spontaneous or relocated school.⁹⁶

Table 2 - Number of days covered by ESF (2014-2019) in Diffa

Year	Planned SF days for relocated schools	Actual SF days for relocated schools	Planned SF days for spontaneous schools	Actual SF days for spontaneous schools
2015/2016	270	240	180	150
2016/2017	270	250	180	160
2017/2018	270	230	180	140
2018/2019	270	250	180	160

Data from WFP Diffa/DREP

74. Directors of schools confirmed that in most cases delivery of supplies by WFP has been timely and aligned with the scheduled delivery and in conformity with the quantities that were communicated.

75. In terms of actual beneficiaries, **information from the field work in 15 schools in Diffa underscored that most school directors reported inflating enrolment figures (or under-reporting absenteeism) to be able to meet fluctuating needs during the year** (see Box 3). This was reported to be a key – and necessary - strategy to ensure that schools had a ‘margin’ so that food could be used to ‘pay’ for associated costs of school feeding preparation and delivery, and in particular for the provision of fire-wood, work by the cooks, and purchasing of condiments. In addition, numbers of beneficiaries also fluctuated because of continuous movement of populations in the region. This phenomenon worsened over time because of the deterioration of the security situation.⁹⁷

Box 3 - Examples of local adaptive strategies as observed by the evaluation team⁹⁸

School directors and school committees reported that stock-outs immediately affected attendance: “As soon as there is a stock-out, the school closes”, said a school director. In the majority of the school visited a system of exchanges had developed around the food to make up for the lack of Government contribution, and to cover gaps in contributions by parents. In rare cases transportation issues also affected delivery. To avoid stock-outs various adaptive strategies evolved over time:

- A number of directors were able to avoid stock-outs by under reporting the actual absenteeism of pupils (this absenteeism was especially high in schools where there were a lot of nomadic children who travelled with their parents for a number of months).
- Adaptation of the number of rations, by eliminating the evening meal (none of the schools visited were serving evening meals) and the meals in the weekend.
- Adaptation of the portion size and number of meals when stocks were running low.

76. In the field, and as observed by the field research team, ESF has faced diverse challenges:

- **Sub-optimal quality of millet grain and cowpeas** – an important complaint across all schools concerned the quality of the millet grain and cowpeas. In five out of the 15 schools visited the quality of the products was sub-optimal. Directors reported - and in

⁹⁶ Based on observations by the field research team.

⁹⁷ SPR EMOP 200777, 2017; SPR 2018 EMOP 200777.

⁹⁸ Information based on field interviews in multiple schools.

some cases showed - that the food was infected with insects or mixed with small stones. Other food provided by WFP did not have the same problems.

- **Delays in delivery and challenges to storage in some schools because of security issues:** as was noted in Section 2.1.2.1, WFP and Government have worked to identify solutions including alternative storage, more frequent delivery, and from 2019, have worked through a local NGO to support delivery to schools.
- **Absence of the contribution by Government for condiments and other costs:** Various strategies were pursued by school directors to address this problem including sale of part of the WFP food to buy condiments (see Box 3).
- **Difficulties in monitoring, reporting and providing feedback on receipt of goods by all schools:** WFP used an English waybill. School Directors and school committees have faced challenges in terms of monitoring and reporting on any anomalies because of this. This has also affected the extent to which communities have been able to voice complaints.
- **Challenges in terms of storage of the food:** most schools did not have a warehouse.⁹⁹ As a result, in a number of schools the research team observed that food had been stored in classrooms, or (because of security issues) in the nearby village.¹⁰⁰
- **Time and logistical challenges related to the transformation of the millet grain into flour:** WFP provided millet grain as the main staple food to schools. The millet required time, labour and money to be transformed into flour before consumption. Transformation was reported to burden school directors, education staff and in some cases made the security issues more challenging because food preparation teams had to spend more time at the school, arriving early in the morning. Longer preparation processes also implied more firewood for cooking.
- **Non-materialization of the envisioned complementarity with other donors:** as noted in Section 2.1.1.2 in practice school meals were frequently prepared and consumed in the absence of adequate facilities for support by other key donors for the areas of water, hygiene, nutrition.
- **Families were frequently unable to contribute in food or in kind for ESF:** this is further discussed in paragraph 105 of this report.

2.2.1.2 Food security

77. The precise impact of ESF on food security was difficult to establish with the qualitative measures employed by this evaluation. Furthermore, the methodology used did not allow the team to establish whether there was evidence of increased frequency of consumption of certain food groups among targeted children.

78. Nonetheless, the qualitative information collected from parents confirmed that **ESF has played a critical role in meeting basic needs of pupils, whose families often face acute food insecurity related to frequent movement and reconfiguration of means of subsistence.**¹⁰¹ ESF was reported to be an important complementary source of food for families. Most interlocutors interviewed by the field research team mentioned two or more of the following important food security effects of ESF:

- **Reduction in the burden/number of meals** that needed to be prepared at home.
- **Reduced burden of inputs for cooking** (firewood, time for preparation, water).
- **Reduction in the workload** for family members who prepared the food.
- **Support to specific families** where school directors made the choice to distribute the millet flour to the children as a take-home ration.

⁹⁹ The assumption is that the warehouse would be built by the community.

¹⁰⁰ This is the case for three out of the 15 schools visited.

¹⁰¹ Caremel et al. (2017). "En gudun Hijira" – "les gens de l'Hégire" - Policy brief. And Caremel (2018). *Petite Anthropologie de la réponse humanitaire à Diffa - une entrée par les besoins de base.*

79. It is relevant to note in this context that, according to the Education Cluster, *"the creation of a school canteen is a form of assistance to parents. On one hand, it stimulates parents to bring their children to school, thus significantly improving access, and on the other hand, it improves the quality of education. (...) Despite the difficulty to find donors and the relentless attacks on at-risk emergency schools, WFP continued to supply emergency canteens and made the operation of these schools possible."*¹⁰²

80. **The Diffa ESF model was not designed to contribute to the local economy** as has been the case in some other ESF and SF interventions in the region. The perception of the local research team was that the protracted nature of the crisis in Diffa and the fact that populations have now settled in these areas might allow for local purchasing to happen. However, no further information was collected on this matter and this would require further investigation.

2.2.1.3 Nutritional status

81. **In all sites visited parents were clear about the importance of ESF in terms of supporting families.** *"The canteen reduces the burden on parents which is important in this context of generalized food insecurity. It is very challenging for parents to guarantee food for their children."* said a community leader. **ESF consumed in schools has had the additional benefit of being specifically targeted at children who in times of stress – and in the context of a family – might not otherwise be the priority recipients of food:** *"During the day, our children will not go hungry because they are in school and this helps us not worry about them at home"* said a parent.

82. **Whether children actually ate the food and did so regularly has depended on the range of 'adaptation measures' that individual schools adopted.** It has also depended on the impact of such adaptation measures on the composition, the size of the portions and consequently the calorie intake of the pupils. It has been impossible - with the data collected – to assess what the impact of these measures were on the calorie intake, frequency and diversity of food consumed by children, in particular in light of the unreliable statistics on enrolment and attendance and the difficulties in conducting the field work.

83. **The field team found that the perception of the quality of the food varied between different groups of beneficiaries. In practice it has reflected a range of factors,**¹⁰³ including the quality of millet and cowpeas, the capacity of schools to mobilize funds/contributions for 'condiments' (to reduce the monotony of the meal), and the extent to which food provided by WFP was used to meet costs of cooking (i.e. through using food as payment for cooks) and/or exchanged (used as barter) to reduce the effort required in converting millet grain into flour or to enable schools to offer rice rather than millet which interviews show is preferred by the population.

84. **Two issues regarding the nutritional value of the food were mentioned across different interviews, namely: a) the monotonous nature of the food** (identical meals every day); and **b) the quality of the millet.** In addition, interviews clearly underscored that the inferior quality of the food contributed to the perception that the food was for refugees only with various examples being given of children from host communities preferring to eat at home rather than eating the inferior school meals. The following quotes reflects the perceptions of school directors:

"The food is not accepted by all; the meals are for displaced and refugee children. The children of host communities boycott the meals because they are not of sufficient quality."

"Children are fed up of eating millet. That is what they eat at home. At times the quantity that they get is not enough so some children will go home to find something to eat."

¹⁰² DREP Diffa (2015). Document de référence pour toutes les interventions dans les écoles d'urgence de la région de Diffa au titre de l'année scolaire 2016-2017, Août 2016.

¹⁰³ Raimond et al. (2005) " Ressources vivrières et choix alimentaires dans le bassin du lac Tchad" and Caremel (2018): Petite Anthropologie de la réponse humanitaire à Diffa - une entrée par les besoins de base.

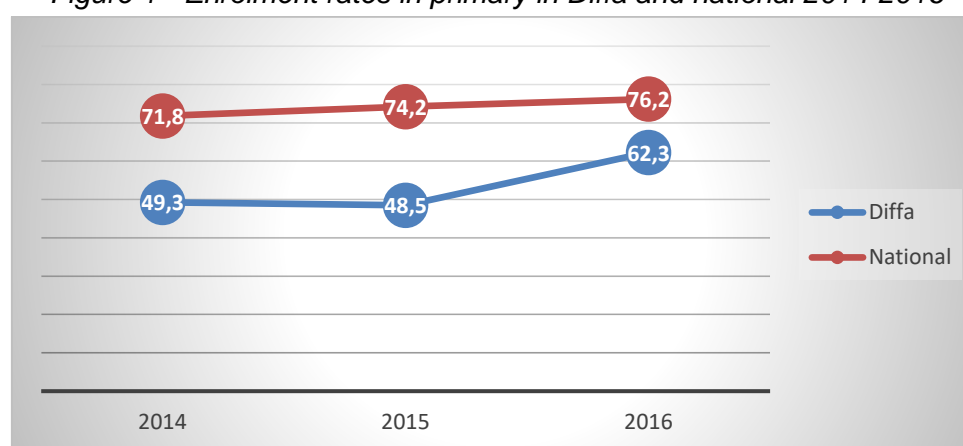
85. **No examples were collected by the research team of ESF having changed the nutritional habits of children or members of the target groups.** Field work interviews and observations revealed that there were no complementary nutrition education activities for parents and communities, contrary to the regular SF programme where WFP reporting suggested this is the case.¹⁰⁴ In addition, the evaluation was unable to obtain information on what the precise composition of meals was over time.

86. **It was noted that ESF also had direct benefits for canteen staff from the community who were generally paid in kind.** The remuneration varied from one school to the next.¹⁰⁵ Further, canteen staff had the benefit of being allowed to take the food left-overs home, as well as any other products resulting from the transformation of the cereals that were not needed (and which could be used, for example, to feed animals).

2.2.1.4 Attendance, enrolment, retention

87. WFP Standard Project Reports (SPR) reported retention rates and percentage change in number of children enrolled in WFP-assisted primary schools only for 2016 and 2017. A trend analysis for the full evaluation period was therefore not possible.¹⁰⁶ For Diffa as a region, data on attendance and retention were not available beyond 2016.¹⁰⁷

Figure 1 - Enrolment rates in primary in Diffa and national 2014-2016



source: DREP Diffa

88. The 2016 data that was shared by the Ministry of Education (MoE) shows that Diffa is the only area of the country where the GER increased between 2014 and 2016 (apart from Niamey).

89. In terms of enrolment by gender (data not shown – see Annex 10) the data showed that while overall enrolment levels were substantially lower than those at national level, Diffa has had smaller differences in enrolment rates between boys and girls than other areas of the country. Nonetheless, in 2019 the large majority of children in Diffa region - 78 percent - were out of school, illustrating the critical and worsening situation in this region.

90. While the primary completion rates were considerably below national level, Diffa's completion rates between 2014 and 2016 increased, and in fact saw a stronger increase than the rates at national level.

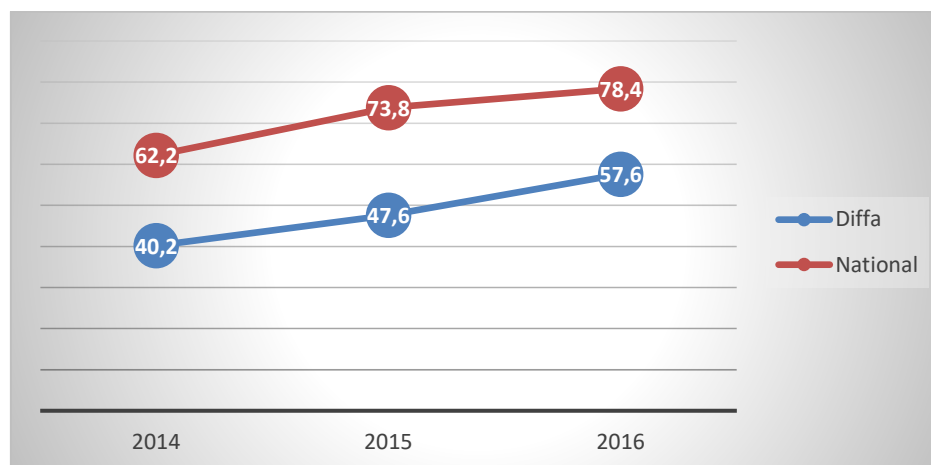
¹⁰⁴ WFP (2016). Project Document PRRO 200961.

¹⁰⁵ In the schools visited this was variously: 1 bag of millet, five liters of oil, 2 measures of salt, 2 measures of CSB, 2 measures of cowpeas (school NL); 1 bag of millet, 5 liters of oil, and some measures of CSB (school H).

¹⁰⁶ The latter indicator is only reported in two SPRs (2016 and 2017) but was been dropped in the 2018 SPR.

¹⁰⁷ The number of children in Diffa region affected by the crises increased exponentially from 3.312 pupils in 2014 to over 48.000 in January 2019. Frequent population movements make it extremely challenging to establish a reliable denominator for educational statistics. And, this is even more difficult in a situation where schools have over-reported enrolment and attendance (and under-reported absenteeism) to be able to manage food stocks in ways that avoid shortfalls and allow schools to stretch their school meals programme to accommodate meals for children who are studying in the same school perimeter but in other streams (non-formal, etc.).

Figure 2 - Primary completion rates (percentage) in Diffa and at National level between 2014 and 2016.



Source: DREP Diffa

91. Government staff in Diffa and at the MoE, as well as members of the humanitarian clusters (protection, education) in Diffa were unanimous in their view that ESF had favourable effects on enrolment, attendance and retention. Furthermore, consistently in all the schools that were visited as part of the field work, **ESF was recognized by education staff, parents and pupils to be the main factor that has driven attendance.** ESF was reported to be a strong pull factor for children to come to school because of the direct benefit of access to food and because it represents a return to normality for children in the areas where they have been relocated.

92. **Teachers and Government officials alike confirmed the positive effect of ESF on enrolment, attendance and retention:**

“It is often the children themselves who will ask parents to register them at school. For parents it is a relief to know that their children are in school and they know where to find them if they need to” said a school director.

93. **Teachers and school directors also reported that school attendance was immediately affected when there was no school feeding.** In school Z which was visited by the evaluation team, this was clearly in evidence. The school had suffered multiple attacks in 2018, which had led to a suspension in food delivery for over a month. During that period, children stopped coming to school as there was nothing to eat. They only returned – according to local sources – when WFP supplied food again. These interruptions affected the time children spend in school. Informants explained that the longer the interruption, the more difficult it was for children to catch up.¹⁰⁸

94. **Data show there has been an almost fourfold increase in class size and a strong fluctuation in the number of teachers in WFP ESF schools,** as reflected in the table below provided by WFP Diffa (see Table 3). Key informants suggested that the increase in pupil teacher ratio has likely in part reflected the pull factor of ESF schools because children have moved from neighbouring schools to access the school meals.

¹⁰⁸ In all the schools visited the issue of poor performance was mentioned by interviewees. The issue appears to relate to introduction of automatic promotion five years ago, so all children – with the exception of those that abandon school – will transit on to the next grade. For many teachers this system has reduced the quality of education.

Table 3 -Total number of male and female teachers and pupil teacher ratio between 2015 and 2019 in the WFP ESF schools in Diffa region.

School year	Number of teachers			Pupil/teacher ratio
	Male	Female	Total	
2015/2016	149	135	284	27,16
2016/2017	176	114	290	31,41
2017/2018	139	228	367	62,74
2018/2019	99	156	255	88,64

Source: DREP Diffa

95. For Government officials (DREP and MoE) the existence of ESF has been important because of its impact on enrolment and retention. However, concerns were voiced at different levels by most of the Government informants that not all schools in the same geographical areas benefited from ESF. This has resulted in ESF schools severely overpopulated as children from other schools enrolled in ESF schools.

96. As reported during the field visits, new classes were established to deal with the additional students in some schools:

“This year we have two grade 1 classes and we see that children who have eaten can take it easy. Parents who have four or five children and who don’t have any resources (which is the case for most parents) have to bring their children to this school” said a school director.

97. **A second concern has been the quality of education. The education system has been put under considerable stress in Niger, and this has been exacerbated by the crisis in Diffa.** Interviewees consistently mentioned very considerable challenges in terms of teacher absenteeism, poor conditions in schools, insufficient teachers, and lack of all kind of materials and books. Diffa has faced very high levels of Out of School Children (OOSC).¹⁰⁹ However, data on the effect of ESF in bringing OOSC back to school were not available. Such information was captured neither by the Government data, nor by WFP.

2.2.1.5 Ration approach

98. **On paper, two types of ESF existed:** EQ 1 has underscored the pertinence/importance of both modalities given that the needs of the beneficiaries were in principle different. In particular for those children whose parents were far away, the provision of three meals a day, seven days a week was very important.

99. While both modalities were important in principle, **the two modalities appeared to have morphed into a single modality of providing two meals a day, five days a week in the schools that were visited by the evaluation team.**¹¹⁰ In addition, in at least two of the visited schools directors had taken the decision to provide children with a take home ration *in lieu of* breakfast to reduce the burden on the school in terms of food preparation.

100. **Various factors appeared to have led to the adoption of a single modality in practice.** The reduction of the number of meals allowed schools to manage stocks and to cater for the actual number of students that were present on a given day.¹¹¹ Having one less meal provided important flexibility. In addition, security issues made it difficult to operate three meals in schools. Teachers and other education staff left the site early in the afternoon to be back in Diffa city on time and schools therefore were closing before dinner time. Finally, the process of meal preparation was time consuming and required significant logistics and so reducing the number of meals, and the time spent in schools, made the management of the school meals programme significantly easier.

¹⁰⁹ A UNICEF study from 2018 estimates that 78 percent of children in Diffa are out of school. UNICEF (2018). Tous les Enfants à l’Ecole. Initiative mondiale en faveur des enfants non scolarisés. Rapport de l’étude sur les enfants et adolescent(e)s en dehors de l’école (EADE) au Niger. Ministères en charge de l’Education (2018).

¹¹⁰ Some schools reported serving meals on Saturday. However, the three schools visited on Saturday had no meals.

¹¹¹ Four other schools also reported having dropped the meals on the weekend.

2.2.2 EQ4: Effects on households

EQ4: To what extent has school feeding in emergencies strengthened the ability of households to cope with crises?

Key findings

- Effects on households were only superficially investigated by the research team.
- interview evidence consistently confirmed the important role of ESF in helping families cope in times of crises and emergencies.
- The available evidence showed that ESF appeared to have provided financial relief to families; reduced the burden on families in looking after the children; and provided a sense of normalcy for parents and communities, as well as for pupils.
- Participation in ESF in some cases also had beneficial effects on integration in communities.
- However, requirements for financial and in-kind contributions for ESF functioning placed a significant burden on families who were already highly vulnerable. In some cases, in light of the critical situation, teachers and school directors contributed to ESF functioning from their own salaries.

2.2.2.1 Reaching the most vulnerable households

101. Effects on households were only superficially investigated by the research team due to the limitations outlined in Section 1.4 which affected data collection. **In the context of Diffa, the vast majority of families were extremely vulnerable**, and this vulnerability had increased over time due to the accumulation of attacks and climate shocks since the initial 2015 crisis.¹¹²

102. In targeting Diffa region, ESF has **provided an important relief for vulnerable families. Only part of the vulnerable households were able to benefit from this support given challenges in ensuring coverage of ESF.**

2.2.2.2 Ability to cope with crises and emergencies

103. Across all the communities that were consulted by the field team, **interview evidence consistently confirmed the important role of ESF in helping families cope in times of crises and emergencies.** Parents and community members reported that ESF reduced the burden on families in looking after the children and made it possible for families to find time for and concentrate on other critical survival issues. Survey data for Diffa also showed that access to food reduced negative coping mechanisms by families¹¹³, and this was confirmed in interviews with the Protection Sub-Cluster in Diffa as being a critical benefit of ESF. In addition, the testimony of the majority of teachers and communities interviewed in the context of this evaluation have suggested that ESF provided a sense of normalcy for parents and communities, as well as for pupils.

104. **Displaced and refugee parents also engaged in the community organization around ESF which favoured integration in the community.** Participation could be in the form of financial contribution, labour (e.g. for building the warehouse), and participation in ESF management. Most Government officials interviewed in Diffa recognized that **assumptions around participation needed to be managed carefully in crises contexts because of the potential effect of overburdening fragile families and communities:** “*we are very careful not to put demands on parents, as parents are in an emergency situation*” (for more details about community participation see 2.3.1.5 in EQ6) . The evaluation team observed that in most of the schools the School Management Committees (*Comité de Gestion des Etablissements Scolaires* or COGES) had instituted a monthly payment – usually 200 nairas¹¹⁴ per child per month – which could be paid in four tranches. Sometimes parents would pay in kind if they did

¹¹² UNHCR (2019). Plan de Réponse Humanitaire Niger.

¹¹³ WFP, SPR 2018, EMOP 200777.

¹¹⁴ Around 0.50 USD

not have access to cash. In this case, the men would pay in firewood and the women in condiments. This type of financial contribution has existed everywhere in Niger and has ensured that schools had some resources to function. In addition, parents also participated in the form of time/labour for specific tasks related to school feeding.

105. **Interviews and field observations highlighted that expectations around contributions placed a burden on families and that most parents were challenged to contribute in the form anticipated in ESF model.** As a result, most schools reported that many parents were unable to provide the anticipated financial contribution or in-kind support. In some schools, parents reported to the evaluation team that – as a consequence – they were told that their children would be removed from school. The team was unable to establish whether this had actually been the case. It was this reality that has contributed to schools devising various alternative strategies to make up for the financial contributions including: exchange of food for inputs which should be provided by the community (e.g. firewood), and the use of children as labour to fetch water or to fetch firewood (discussed in the next section).¹¹⁵ On the other hand, the research team found that in some schools, teachers have contributed from their salaries to the costs of ESF.¹¹⁶ Frequently the director also contributed.¹¹⁷

2.2.3 EQ5: Additional effects

EQ5: To what extent has school feeding as an emergency response had effects not yet foreseen in WFP's school feeding policy but important in crisis and emergency settings?

Key findings

- ESF was found to have played an important role in attracting children to school which has favoured:
 - Integration of children, as well as parents, in the community.
 - Access to psycho-social services where these are in place.
- Some negative effects were noted of conflicts around the management of school feeding, and erosion of the authority of directors of relocated schools who were not in charge of managing school feeding in their new location.
- Anecdotal evidence also suggested ESF reduces negative coping strategies, including reducing the likelihood of child marriages, and recruitment of children into armed groups.
- Unintended consequences of ESF have included:
 - Putting children at risk where schools were targeted because of the presence of food;
 - Negative impacts on the environment because of the use of firewood;
 - The use of children for ESF tasks with negative consequences for their schooling;
 - Exclusion of children because of non-payment of fees by parents;
 - Reduced pupil-teacher contact time due to time spent managing school feeding; and,
 - Movements of pupils between schools that did not benefit from school feeding and those that did.

2.2.3.1 Social cohesion

106. **Field work interviews at community level¹¹⁸ confirmed a consistently held view that ESF has had beneficial effects on social cohesion.** The increase in pupils and the mobilization of parents in sites where new schools were established or displaced was reported to have had an energizing effect on community structures, because new members were reported to come in with new ideas. **Thus, the presence of pupils and the mobilization of parents in some cases had a positive effect on the appropriation of public services,** which were considered essential in a context of crisis. In at least three communities this was mentioned as having facilitated the integration of new arrivals within the host communities.

¹¹⁵ On the other hand, the research team found that in some schools, teachers may contribute from their salaries to the costs of ESF (the case of school N and YX). Often the director will also contribute (the case of school LD).

¹¹⁶ The case of school N and YX.

¹¹⁷ The case of school LD.

¹¹⁸ Interviews with parents, teachers, community leaders, Government and partners.

107. On the other hand, anecdotal evidence suggested that the **dynamics of this integration has at times included cultural practices such as inter-marriages between the host and arriving communities**, which could have had negative effects for girls.¹¹⁹ Unfortunately, this aspect was not further interrogated by the field research team in their interviews at community level. It was also not clear whether the Education Cluster had picked up on this issue, although it was clearly an issue of considerable concern to the Diffa Protection Sub-Cluster.

108. **Negative effects on social cohesion were also noted but were subsequently addressed.** Some schools reported tensions between children at the start of the crises and examples of situations in which host children refused to eat with new arrivals. These phenomena have been surpassed, however, and observation in schools by the evaluation team showed that meals in general took place without any distinction between the beneficiaries. Nonetheless, some distinctions between host and displaced children remained because some relatively better-off host children choose to eat at home in light of the poor quality and monotony of the meals.

109. **The management of stocks for the canteens has been a source of tension in most schools.** Where displaced schools were integrated or merged with host schools, problems were in evidence in most schools because the director of the host school was designated as being in charge, and therefore oversaw the food stocks. This created tensions and affected the authority of the director of the displaced school as well as his/her capacity to account towards parents. The other type of conflict between parents and directors concerned the management the warehouse. According to the guidance on ESF management, parents were supposed to have a role in the warehouse management. However, in a number of schools the warehouse key was held by of the director. Parents have contested this on the ground that the key should be in their hands and not with a school director who was not from the village and could in the future be transferred to another location.

2.2.3.2 Psycho-social well-being

110. Anecdotal evidence provided by parents, teachers, community members, and the Protection Sub-cluster in Diffa was that **the presence of food in schools improved the feeling of well-being of children**. It contributed to children feeling happier and promoted a return to normalcy for children who had been traumatized by repeated, displacement and conflict. ESF ensured that children went to school, and in this manner helped with structuring their days, promoting contact with other children, promoting integration in the host community, and giving them respite from thinking about what they left behind.

111. **These effects on psycho-social well-being were independent of any benefits that children may have experienced from being supported by specialized services**, which were in place in some schools¹²⁰. However, the field research team did not systematically collect information on the extent to which children were getting access to psycho-social support in the different schools that were visited. Therefore, the evaluation could not make an assessment of the extent to which children were benefiting from these services.

112. **On the other hand, ESF placed additional responsibilities and a burden on school principals and teachers** who had to manage the provision of meals in situations that were reported to be often highly challenging. In addition to the management of stocks and staff, emergency situations brought additional challenges such as safety of staff and safety of food supplies. And as noted elsewhere in the report, the quality of the meals and the lack of contribution by Government created an additional need, and burden, for schools and management committees to mobilize complementary resources for the school meals.

¹¹⁹ Specifically mentioned by protection and gender experts that were consulted by the evaluation. Also reported in: UNICEF (2018). Tous les Enfants à l'École. Initiative mondiale en faveur des enfants non scolarisés. Rapport de l'étude sur les enfants et adolescent(e)s en dehors de l'école (EADE) au Niger. Ministères l'Education (2018).

¹²⁰ As reported by the protection sub-cluster.

2.2.3.3 Exposure to negative coping mechanisms

113. Interview evidence suggested that **ESF contributed to reducing negative coping strategies which parents would have employed if children were not in school.** Interviewees mentioned that negative coping mechanisms by families who did not send their children to school have included using children for heavy household chores (girls and boys), sending children to work to supplement household income (mostly boys), and marrying girls early. Some examples were cited of children themselves initiating such activities mostly because they were conscious of the stress on their parents, and tried to find employment to help their families, for example by working in the fields where abuses were common. According to interviewees, when parents did not have to worry about their children's well-being during the day or about ensuring that they have something to eat, this strengthened their possibilities to prioritize other activities and reduced the degree to which they resorted to negative coping mechanisms. In this manner, it has ensured that children would benefit from stronger protection. ESF was also reported to have had direct benefits for specific families as in most schools the personnel of the canteen were paid in kind¹²¹. Because of these benefits the position of cook was – according to information collected by the field research team – the subject of favours and generally decided upon by the President of one of the school management committees.

114. Local protection experts were adamant in underscoring that **ESF has an effect on deterring and therefore reducing early marriages**, and that girls who benefitted from school feeding were more likely to stay in school and less likely to be married off early. While commonly quoted as an important potential effect, the evaluation was unable to identify specific statistics on a possible reduction in early marriages. The WFP Diffa sub-office stated in this context that it would prioritize a study on the relationship between education and child marriage in the upcoming period.

115. Finally, various protection experts also were of the opinion that **ESF indirectly contributed to reducing recruitment into armed groups**¹²², on the grounds that most children who were recruited into armed groups were those who were not in school. According to the Protection Sub-Cluster in 2019, 48 children were recruited into armed groups and 153 children returned or fled armed groups, some of whom were six years old when recruited into the groups and had stayed for three years. Others were older, including adolescents.¹²³ The integration of these children who have returned home was critical.

116. ESF's assumed role in reducing early marriages and in contributing to reducing recruitment by armed groups was put forward by local stakeholders and Government as the **may argument in advocating for extending ESF to all pupils at primary level in Diffa (including catch-up classes, bridging classes and vocational education) and to all girls who transition to secondary education.** This has led ESF to be included as the second priority on a list of 10 essential actions by the Education Cluster in Diffa for schools that operate in crisis settings.¹²⁴

2.2.3.4 Unintended consequences

117. The team noted four main unintended consequences. **A first unintended consequence was that ESF in some cases has put children and teachers in danger because schools were targeted by armed groups who were looking for food and because the Government schools were a specific target** (further discussed in paragraphs 59 to 61 above). Various measures have been taken by WFP with the authorities to reduce the

¹²¹ The remuneration will vary from one school to the next. In addition, canteen staff have the benefit of being allowed to take the food left-overs home, as well as any not needed by-products of the transformation of the cereals.

¹²² Boys risk being abducted to integrate the armed groups as young fighters. Girls risk being abducted and raped and are often subsequently permanently detained by Boko Haram.

¹²³ Monitoring by UNHCR and the Norwegian Refugee Council in Diffa region highlighted that the highest percentage of human rights violations (38 percent) relate to "phénomène d'adhésion/enrôlement volontaire". UNHCR (2019). Monitoring de Protection Mensuel Diffa (September 2019).

¹²⁴ The full list of essential actions reads as follows: 1) emergency classes; 2) school canteens; 3) water point; 4) latrines; 5) hand washing; 6) manuals and supplies; 7) decentralized school management; 8) safe and secure environment; 9) shelter; and 10) transport and motivational subsidies.

risk of attacks for food. Some informants believe the risk would be further reduced if ESF had covered all types of basic education, rather than just Government primary schools.¹²⁵

118. **A second unintended consequence related to the impact that the preparation of warm meals has on the environment.** Observation in schools, and interviews with community leaders and school directors, highlighted that the use of firewood put a strain on an already challenged and resource-constrained environment, in particular in the context of Diffa where the drought and the crisis have led to an over-exploitation of natural resources which in themselves have become a source of conflict.

119. **A third unintended consequence was that children (girls and boys) were being mobilized to do tasks in schools that are essential for ESF to be able to function (firewood collection, fetching water) but which in some schools was reported to have reduced the amount of time they spend on educational tasks.** Children were asked to contribute to help with water transportation for example, rather than using parental contributions to pay for this, and have also been mobilized for the collection of firewood. In addition, children have been in some cases threatened with exclusion if their parents did not pay their contribution.

“Parents don’t have the resources to contribute in money ... Because of this each child must bring firewood.” (school director).

120. These findings highlight potential issues of equity because of unequal treatment of children whose parents are challenged to contribute and who are already exposed to food insecurity and poverty.

121. **A fourth unintended consequence was the additional burden of the management of school feeding on the time of teachers and school directors, as well as the use of educational facilities for the storage of food.** These realities were reported in interviews with stakeholders in Diffa to have had the negative effect of reducing teacher-pupil contact time which was already heavily compromised due to other factors such as the drop-in student participation on non-school feeding days and days lost due to security. The fact that the local community structures were often only marginally involved in the management of ESF further increased the burden on education staff.

122. Finally, and as reported in Section 2.2.1, ESF has produced reported **movements between schools without feeding and schools that provide ESF.** Most of these unintended consequences – with the exception of the issues around schools being targeted because of the presence of food - have also been documented in evaluations of regular SF settings.¹²⁶ However, it was clear from the evidence reviewed that **these unintended effects may be exacerbated in crises settings** where schools and communities are already under considerable duress.

2.3 Area 3 – Creation of sustainable system for school feeding

2.3.1 EQ6: Sustainability and connectedness

EQ6: To what extent has school feeding as an emergency response been coupled with creating a sustainable system for school feeding, in line with priorities and capacities of the partner Government?

Key findings

- The National School Feeding Strategy (SNAS) (2015) drafted with the support of WFP has foreseen schools functioning during crises situations. However, the SNAS Action Plan did not specifically acknowledge ESF as part of the national programme.
- Strategic outcome (SO) 5 of WFP's 2019 T-ICSP aimed at strengthening national institutions' capacities to manage gender-responsive emergency and preparedness

¹²⁵ The rationale is that Government facilities are a target for armed groups. In the assessment of selected humanitarian informants in Niger and at regional level this risk would be reduced if ESF were to cover all types of schools.

¹²⁶ For example: Visser et al. (2017). Rwanda Common Country Programme Evaluation 2013-2016. IRAM, Montpellier.

systems by 2030. However, most training that has been provided for the ESF had focused on procedures and administrative steps.

- WFP has undertaken capacity strengthening activities in coordination with the *Dispositif National de Prévention et de Gestion des Catastrophes et Crises Alimentaires* (DNPGCA) but interviews underlined that WFP has had limited presence in the field which has reduced opportunities to build capacity in practice.
- WFP has applied school feeding modalities that were designed at national level for non-crisis settings without adapting these to the specificities of a crises setting.
- WFP was actively involved in the Education Working Group established to address the challenges of education in the emergency context.
- WFP has not substantially contributed to strengthening of community involvement and ownership. Where functional, the structures in charge of school management - whose means were very limited - were often only slightly involved in the operation of the canteens. Women's participation has been marginal. SABER objectives around community participation, accountability and ownership have been only partially achieved.

2.3.1.1 Action plan for transitioning to nationally owned programme

123. In 2009, the joint government/education sector review recommended the development of a National School Feeding Strategy (SNAS). In 2013, Niger committed to developing a strategy to help the government and partners improve the school feeding programme in the country. WFP supported the development process which made it possible to take stock of current interventions and proposals for new areas concerning geographic targeting, the rations to be applied according to the areas of intervention, and the coordination mechanism for all levels, and funding. The SNAS document was drawn up for primary education, validated initially but subsequently revised to integrate the other secondary and vocational education sub-sectors.

124. In 2013, the strategic document for the Education and Training Sector prepared for the period 2014-2024 stated that unfortunately, existing national systems did not take into account the effects of crises on the education system, nor the role that it can play in preventing and preparing for crises. The education system, too, had not fully integrated the challenges linked to the various crises in the country. Until that time, activities related to education in emergency situations had been limited to response interventions (most often minimal) once the crisis had occurred.¹²⁷

125. The SNAS document drawn up in 2015 addressed the issue of food in emergency situations in the general context of food insecurity or other natural disasters which have serious consequences for the functioning of schools, including school canteens. Indeed, many cases of dropouts and poor attendance had been recorded in schools located in the areas concerned.

126. The government acknowledged that emergency management went beyond the MoE (MEP/A/PLN/EC¹²⁸) and required the intervention of several institutions and partners. The country has specialized institutions responsible for managing food crises. The National School Feeding Strategy offered some areas of intervention in the affected villages to ensure the functioning of schools during crises situations, the aim being to allow children to attend schools by limiting the movement of families during these crises or by creating the necessary conditions for their retention despite the migration of parents. Envisioned interventions include:

- the establishment - at the level of each Ministry - of a focal point or a committee which would serve as a link between the Ministry and the services specialized in the management of food crises. This committee would regularly inform these specialized services of the situation of school dropouts in the field due to food insecurity.

¹²⁷ République du Niger (2013). Programme Sectoriel de l'Éducation et de la Formation 2014-2024.

¹²⁸ Ministère de l'Enseignement Primaire, de l'Alphabétisation, de la Promotion des Langues Nationales et de l'Éducation Civique.

- the timely development of intervention programmes for the benefit of families in connection with the partners, notably: rations for families through free food distributions, sales of cereals at moderate prices, establishment of "food for work" or "cash for work" activities.
- support for children with high-energy food at school level.
- a student retention camp and a balanced diet 7 days a week for serious situations.
- strengthening of existing canteens to accommodate additional students.

127. Also, the education cluster was an appropriate framework for providing solutions to the issues of dropouts and poor attendance during emergency situations in schools.¹²⁹

128. To better situate its performance in implementing school feeding, a SABER¹³⁰ School Feeding exercise was conducted in July 2017 in collaboration with WFP, using an internationally recognized and used tool. On the basis of the analysis of the five strategic objectives¹³¹, there was at that time a general estimate of Niger being at the emerging stage of the development of its school feeding programme.

129. Based on the strategic orientations resulting from the SABER workshop and from the draft action plan of the SNAS, a school feeding action plan was drafted for a period of seven years (2017-2024) covering the timeframe of the Education and Training Sector Programme (PSEF). The focus has been to enable Niger to act on several fronts: increase access to education, reduce social and gender inequalities and contribute to the development of the country. More specifically, it aimed to support the school environment in its intervention with children with school feeding. To do this, it was designed according to the five strategic pillars for the sustainability of school feeding programmes so as to bring Niger overall from the emerging stage to the established stage. For each of these pillars, activities were illustrated, allowing the evolution of its current situation to the next stage.

130. The division of expected results and activities into five pillars aimed at promoting the sustainability of the school feeding programme in Niger, and to harmonize interventions between the different actors. However, **the SNAS Action Plan did not specifically acknowledge ESF as part of the national programme**. Rather pillar 4 dedicated to "Design and Implementation" suggested that in times of crisis the focus will be on "working in synergy with other systems in charge of education in times of emergency".¹³²

2.3.1.2 Integration of SF in policies and legislative frameworks

131. The main building blocks of resilience and social protection in Niger are the *Nigériens Nourissent les Nigériens* (Nigériens Nourishing Nigeriens) initiative (I3N), the 2016–2020 *I3N Priority Action Plan* and the 2014 *Global Alliance for Resilience* initiative. These initiatives (complemented by the 2011 Social Protection Policy) promote a multi-sector, multi-stakeholder integrated and coordinated approach to resilience and social protection based on national capacity development, ownership and leadership.

132. Since October 2017, a safety net programme supported by the World Bank has been incorporated into the *Dispositif National de Prévention et de Gestion des Catastrophes et des Crises Alimentaires* (DNPGCCA). This has brought a new dynamic ensuring that food and nutrition safety nets are coordinated at strategic and operational levels. A Government scale-up plan of resilience activities¹³³ has recently been launched with the support of WFP.

¹²⁹ Stratégie Nationale de l'Alimentation Scolaire au Niger, Ministère de l'Enseignement Primaire, de l'Alphabétisation, de la Promotion des Langues Nationales et de l'Éducation Civique, Ministère des Enseignements Secondaires, Ministère des Enseignements Professionnels et Techniques, Mai 2015.

¹³⁰ System Assessment and Benchmarking for Education Results.

¹³¹ According to the SABER approach, in general terms a quality school feeding programme has the following in place: (1) a national policy framework, (2), sufficient institutional capacity for implementation and coordination, (3) stable funding, (4) sound design and implementation, and (5) community participation.

¹³² Ministère de l'Enseignement Primaire, de l'Alphabétisation, de la Promotion des Langues Nationales et de l'Éducation Civique (2017). Analyse SABER du 11 au 12 juillet 2017, Plan d'Action 2017-2024,

¹³³ Programme Intégré de Résilience à l'insécurité alimentaire et nutritionnelle – Pro-Résilience 2019-2021.

133. The Strategic Outcome (SO) 5 of WFP's T-ICSP for 2019 aims at strengthening national institutions' capacities to manage gender-responsive food-security, nutrition, social protection programmes, emergency and preparedness systems by 2030. One of the key activities to be undertaken under this SO is intended to provide capacity strengthening to inter-sectorial national institutions on: (i) planning, (ii) coordination mechanisms, (iii) policy coherence, and (iv) knowledge management.

134. Capacity strengthening activities will notably include enhancing supply chain capacity of a) national health supply chain (Ministry of Health), d) national school feeding programme (Ministry of Education), e) value chain promotion (Ministry of Agriculture); f) early warning, disaster risk reduction & emergency preparedness (DNPGCCA and other partners involved); and g) capacity support to other institutions and to the private sector.¹³⁴

2.3.1.3 Alignment with national priorities and capacities

135. The SNAS formulated in 2015 includes a typology of interventions for primary education: school canteens in boarding schools, school canteens type 2/5, mid-morning snack, tutoring (see Annex 13). From the outset, the implementation of the WFP intervention in emergency schools in the Diffa region was carried out according to two of the four nutritional methods provided for in the SNAS, namely the *Ecole spontanée* with two meals a day on weekdays and the *Ecole d'accueil* with three meals a day seven days a week.

136. While facing an emergency situation, **WFP has applied school feeding modalities that had been designed previously at national level without any reference to emergency but whose differences respond to characteristics of the targeted population:** sedentary on one side and nomadic on the other side. According to the WFP CO, there was no real difference between schools in the Diffa region: the difference was that one was formally displaced to a different area while the other has received a new group of people: "*The act of moving schools – by the Government – has created the emergency schools but they can be located right next the normal school*".

137. WFP CO interviews and reflections with the evaluation team resulted in an inventory of characteristics of emergency contexts that need to be taken into account in the design and delivery of school feeding in these settings (see Box 4 below and Annex 13).

Box 4 - Characteristics of school feeding in Emergency Contexts

- **In emergency contexts, aspects of protection are critical because of the humanitarian situation** and to ensure no-one is excluded. This implies very close coordination with other partners.
- In emergency school feeding, a **focus on the risks related to coming to school must be factored into the decisions around modalities and support.**
- **In emergency contexts, food delivery is very different and may require adaptations.** Because of this in Diffa WFP took necessary measures and schools move to supplies every two weeks instead of three months to mitigate security risks.
- **In emergency settings the focus is on continuity of education, i.e. on bringing children to school, and ensuring they stay there.** The emphasis is less likely to be on education quality.
- **Emergency contexts may require different modalities for delivery of education because children need specific attention to be able to achieve basic education.** In Diffa, remedial courses were organized during holidays so that children could catch up because of disruptions and to integrate children with language barriers (e.g. children displaced from Nigeria). The full range of needs should be factored into any assessment of school feeding needs and into decision making around priorities.
- **In the organization and delivery of emergency school feeding assumptions around community participation and the effective presence of implementation partners may be challenged because of the level of vulnerability of populations and the difficult operating environment.** This needs to factor into ESF design and implementation. (Source: Niger WFP CO)

¹³⁴ WFP (2019). Niger Transitional Interim Country Strategic Plan.

2.3.1.4 Implementation and coordination mechanisms

138. **Following attack by Boko Haram in February 2015 the Education Cluster (GTE) was established to address the challenges of education in the emergency context.** The working group brought together the regional directorates in charge of education, which have been impacted by the crisis (directorate of primary education, directorate of secondary education and directorate of vocational education), United Nations organizations (including WFP), and NGOs working in the sector. The GTE was co-managed by the decentralized Education authority (DREP) and UNICEF and met every two weeks. There were other working groups for each specific sector: shelters and non-food items, WASH, health and nutrition, food and protection. These different working groups had a meeting framework (intersectoral meeting, chaired by the Governor) which allowed them to pool their resources and to refer one person (or group of people) to the relevant working group. For example, a teacher who found an unaccompanied child in a village must refer the child to the competent working group, i.e. the protection working group¹³⁵.

139. **To provide an appropriate response, regional primary education officials supported by partners (UNICEF and the World Bank PAEQ¹³⁶) developed several multisectoral intervention documents for emergency schools ("écoles d'urgence").** These documents present ten major criteria selected by the GTE for operating emergency schools (see box below).

Box 5 - 10 criteria for the functioning of Emergency Schools in Diffa Region

1. Emergency classes
2. School feeding
3. A water-point
4. Latrines
5. A hand washing facility
6. Books and basic school supplies
7. Functioning management structures at decentralized level – CGDES, ANE, school government, parent-teacher association
8. A protective and safe environment
9. Shelter
10. Incentives for staff and transportation

2.3.1.5 Community participation and ownership

140. **According to the SABER approach, one of the main school feeding policy levers is strong community participation, accountability and ownership.** Nevertheless, it has been emphasized that *"it is important to find the right balance between programs that count on community participation and ownership — a very positive factor in sustainability — and programs that seek to be largely funded by communities. There is a tendency to consider community-sustained programmes as an option in reducing dependence on external assistance, but this places significant expectations on communities that they may not be able to fulfil"*¹³⁷. This is all the more important in emergency context when considering host populations, internally displaced households and communities, and refugees at the same time (see also Box 4) .

141. As had already been highlighted in the 2013 WFP's School Feeding Policy, **the choice of hot meals as school feeding modality – as was the case in the ESF schools in the Diffa region – "may have required storage, cooking facilities, and levels of community participation that may not have been available in fragile or urban settings"**¹³⁸. These reservations were fully shared by staff from the Division des *Cantines Scolaires* within the MoE

¹³⁵Direction Régionale de l'Enseignement Primaire, de l'Alphabétisation, de la Promotion des Langues Nationales et de l'Éducation Civique de Diffa (2018). La gestion du système éducatif en situation de conflit : L'expérience de Diffa", Décembre 2018.

¹³⁶ World Bank (2015). PAEQ : Programme d'Appui à une Éducation de Qualité (Quality Education Support Project).

¹³⁷ The World Bank (2012). What Matters Most for School Health and School Feeding: A Framework Paper - SABER Working Paper Series - Number 3 June 2012.

¹³⁸ WFP/EB.2/2013/4-C.

for whom "asking for contributions from parents in these situations is not realistic. This is very different from the regular canteens where parents are in challenging situations but are able to contribute. There is a need to make a delineation between areas with and without security. In the latter, parents themselves are dependent: they cannot be expected to meet the standard requirements." And as noted above, this evaluation has also highlighted important challenges that families face in terms of being able to provide in-kind and financial contributions.

142. **Despite the emergency situation, structures in charge of school management have been maintained and/or put in place by local education authorities in the Diffa region to ensure the smooth running of schools.** Details of these committees can be found in Annex 12. Interviews conducted during field visits found that the effective functionality of these management and community participation structures remained weak. Comparison between different schools visited also underscored variable quality/strength of these local committees with many weak committees and reports from community interviewees of issues of corruption in some cases. Women, while represented on most of the committees, were usually given the role of treasurer but mostly did not have access to money and participated only marginally in decision making¹³⁹.

143. Participation often depended on the leadership of the school directors and/or the presence of a project/partner, although some exceptions were noted during field work. Interviews with various stakeholder groups in the field revealed that, when they were functional, **these structures were often only marginally involved in the operation of the canteens.** According to WFP CO, the COGES created a platform for exchange between the different groups at local level, which should contribute to good relationships among them, "however, there is no indicator to capture and measure this effect". In the region of Diffa "WFP has just a look at the composition of the committee. Standard regular school feeding programme guidelines prevail for schools benefiting from ESF. There is leniency in terms of how these committees are put together", said a member of WFP staff.

2.3.1.6 WFP's role in fostering community participation and ownership

144. **The evaluation found that WFP has had not played a strong role in efforts to enhance community participation and ownership.** Field interviews and document review highlighted that most of WFP's activity at local level has been focussed on food logistics and supply, with very limited attention to strengthening of community involvement, structures, and decision making. Even in terms of food distribution, the interviews underlined that **WFP has had only limited field presence.** Food delivery was outsourced to transport companies, which had one week to deliver the food to schools. Once the food had been delivered, school directors presented the signed waybills to WFP as a proof that the food had been received.

145. It was emphasized that WFP, in collaboration with the technical decentralized services (DREP), organized supervision visits. However, the frequency of these visits has not been clearly defined and schools as well as local education officials reported that in practice supervision is widely spaced (i.e. take place infrequently) due to the number of school canteens and the limitations of the terrain (distances and security).

2.3.1.7 Capacity-building

146. WFP undertook capacity strengthening in coordination with the *Dispositif National de Prévention et de Gestion des Catastrophes et Crises Alimentaires* (DNP-GCA). This included: joint missions, workshops, and monitoring surveys to strengthen government capacity at local, national and regional level; joint assessments/evaluations with local counterparts; and, strengthening of the early warning system's data collection capacity in a context of insecurity.¹⁴⁰

147. **WFP's training and support to school level committees and school directors has focused on the roles of different actors and the mechanics of getting food to schools,**

¹³⁹ WFP PDM surveys also consistently highlight difficulties to assure women participation in leadership roles within the communities in the Diffa region (SPR, EMOP 200777, 2017)

¹⁴⁰ SPR 2018.

including issues such as the filling out of forms, registering stocks, and record keeping of beneficiaries (Annex 10 provides an overview of training activities by WFP for ESF). As can be seen from Annex 10 and as was corroborated by interviews, training has insufficiently focused on mentoring and support to committees and on broader issues around protection, accountability and gender, all of which are key dimensions of ESF.

2.4 Main factors influencing ESF results

What factors explain the ESF results?

Key findings

- External factors that have positively affected ESF include the strong leadership by the local education authorities in Diffa (DREP). External factors that have challenged implementation include the deteriorating security context, limited donor receptivity to funding ESF, the short-term nature of funding for ESF, and the non-materialization of Government counterpart financial contribution for the functioning of ESF in Diffa.
- Internal WFP factors that positively influenced ESF implementation include commitment and continuity of WFP Country Office and Field Office staff. Internal challenges to ESF results include: the adoption of a school feeding model that was not adapted to emergency settings; inadequate monitoring systems; lack of corporate learning and guidance on ESF, insufficient attention to lesson learning and exchange between countries; and limited supervision of, and support to, ESF implementation in the field.
- Key ToC assumptions on funding, capacity, community contribution, presence of partners in the field, and quality services were not supported. These partially explain challenges in ESF implementation.

148. This section of the report identifies external and internal factors that have affected implementation. It also reviews main assumptions underlying the Niger ESF ToC.

2.4.1 External factors

149. **The leadership of the DREP in Diffa** in the initial response to the crises was critical for the rapid response in Diffa, in terms of identifying needs, mobilizing partners, and activating the education cluster. This provided a strong impetus to the demand from the Government (and from selected partners) for support for ESF in Diffa, in spite of an initial reluctance by the WFP CO to engage.

150. **ESF has been implemented in a context of increasing insecurity in Niger**, and various layers of calamities in Diffa region. These externalities have made the management of the ESF programme very challenging. They have also affected the capacity of communities and parents to participate in the ESF programme and affected the management of school feeding on the ground. These challenges raised questions about the underlying assumptions about community and parental participation in the ESF activities.

151. **Limited donor interest for ESF has affected funding for ESF in Diffa in spite of growing needs.** Many children in need in Diffa have not had access to ESF. Limited coverage and challenges with partner implementation have affected the extent to which anticipated complementary support and services were provided by other partners, thus indirectly also impacting on the effectiveness of joint strategies.

152. **Funding for ESF in Niger has been provided on a relatively short basis which has affected the capacity to do longer term planning.** ESF in Niger has to date been secured for short periods only (annually under the EMOP, and then for the one-year T-ICSP). This has contributed to the short-term approach to ESF, as opposed to the longer-term funding for SF in non-crisis settings.

153. **Limited capacity by Government to provide its financial contribution at the scale required, and in a timely manner.** The ESF model in Diffa has been based on assumptions of a collaborative effort/contribution. While the DREP in Diffa has been actively involved in ESF, and the Government has also demonstrated commitment to the SF through progress in

terms of a strengthened policy framework, the implementation and quality of ESF at school level has been affected by delayed and infrequent Government funding.

154. **Weak participation by the MoE in the Education Cluster has affected the communication from the cluster to the national level policy dialogue and priority setting.** MoE has not been very present in the Cluster (at national level and in the more recent period also at level of Diffa) which has affected information flows. A formal focal point on emergency education was only appointed in 2019.

2.4.2 Internal factors

155. **Continuity and commitment of staff at the level of the WFP CO** has been important for institutional memory and continuity of support. Staff have worked diligently and hard under very challenging field contexts.

156. **Design issues - In Diffa WFP has implemented a model for school feeding that is almost identical to school feeding in non-crises contexts.** The shortcomings of this model are evident in key ToC assumptions about community and Government contributions not been upheld. To deal with this and with the specific challenges in crisis contexts, schools and communities have developed various adaptative strategies which are used in all schools.

157. **Limited WFP corporate support to and learning around ESF.** WFP has implemented school feeding for a number of decades in many different settings. However, WFP lesson learning from implementing ESF has been limited and there has been insufficient recognition of the specificities and fundamental differences of SF in emergency and conflict settings (see Box 4). There has been only very modest levels of exchange of experience between the countries in the region that have ESF interventions.

158. **Monitoring has not been designed to capture ESF specific progress and results.** WFP reporting indicators have focused on a small number of outcome indicators (enrolment and retention). These indicators have not captured key ESF processes and results. Some indicators were of limited relevance to emergency settings.¹⁴¹ Lack of data has affected the extent to which WFP has been able to demonstrate the benefits of ESF to partners and donors.

159. **WFP has had limited presence in the field and its oversight has focused essentially on the delivery of food and on monitoring procedures and delivery.** The bulk of WFP activity has been conceived and implemented as an activity that targets the provision of food rather than broader ESF related goals. Supervision visits with the DREP have been sporadic and not systematically implemented. Even within the narrow role on food delivery, WFP has been very little present in the field. Delivery has been sub-contracted to transportation companies, who present WFP with the signed waybills as proof of delivery.

2.4.3 Assessment against the Theory of Change assumptions

160. Annex 11 includes a full assessment of the 18 assumptions underlying the ToC. As can be seen from this detailed assessment, many assumptions underlying the Niger ToC are only partially supported which explains weaknesses that have been highlighted. Assumptions that are challenged by the findings of this evaluation include those related to: sufficiency of funds (assumption 1); solid ESF design (assumption 3); safety and security (assumption 8); children eating their meals (assumption 9); partners willingness and ability to complement ESF activities (assumption 12); higher school attendance (assumption 13); and quality of educational services (assumption 19). Further reflections on the ToC assumptions are also included in the discussion on the conclusions (next chapter).

3 Conclusions and recommendations

161. An overall assessment is provided below building on findings from preceding chapters. Recommendations have been linked to each of the main conclusions.

¹⁴¹ For example, currently WFP checklists record drop-out which is based on the idea of long-term presence and which does not make sense in an emergency setting where there are frequent movements of population.

3.1 ESF targeting (appropriateness and coverage)

Conclusion 1: ESF has been relevant to priorities of Government and to the needs of beneficiaries and communities. However, ESF has benefitted only a selection of schools, and has only focussed on primary level.

This conclusion is based mainly on EQs 1 and 3

From the perspective of beneficiaries, community and Government, ESF has continued to be a critical intervention in a context where access to and continuity of education at all levels is severely threatened and where children and adolescents (13 to 17 of age) are exposed to serious risks, including violations, GBV and radicalization. The introduction of ESF was advocated for by Government and partners. WFPs rapid response was considered highly relevant and appropriate. However, targeting choices have lacked clarity and financial resources have not allowed WFP to provide food to all primary school children in need, including neighbouring schools, and other types of basic education (some of which function in ESF schools). This has resulted in over-enrolment in ESF schools and movements of pupils between schools. Out of school children, children in pre-primary and adolescents (13 and 17 years of age) in secondary have not been targeted.

Recommendation 1: *WFP CO in Niger should target all basic education establishments, including children in pre-primary, as well non-government and non-formal education, in a given geographical zone. Priority setting by geographical zone should be guided by clear criteria, with specific attention to levels of vulnerability and informed by a gender and age analyses. (Level of priority: high. Time-horizon: short to medium)*

Recommendation 2: *Given high risks of teenage pregnancy, marriage and GBV, WFP CO and RB should work closely with relevant partners in the context of Humanitarian Response Planning in Diffa to identify appropriate solutions for supporting the education of adolescent girls (13 to 17) in priority geographical zones through THR or other appropriate incentives (Level of priority, high, Time-horizon: short to medium).*

3.2 ESF design (appropriateness)

Conclusion 2: ESF as an emergency response was rolled out rapidly in Diffa and replicated the approach to SF used in non-crises settings. This evaluation has highlighted that ESF will likely have specific objectives, different from those in 'regular settings' and that the intervention operates in context where various key assumptions around community participation and contribution, partnerships, presence of local authorities, may be challenged.

This conclusion is based mainly on EQs 1, 2 and 3

WFPs school feeding approach in Diffa has mirrored school feeding in non-crises settings. Minor adjustments were made during implementation by WFP to address security concerns (attacks on schools). Other adaptations were made by school directors and school committees to deal with challenges which they face on a day to day to ensure regular meals.

ESF design and implementation have not been informed by protection issues, in spite of high levels of child marriages, child labour, and risk of radicalisation and recruitment into armed groups. The ESF activity itself has at times put children at risk. These complex issues require joint planning, action and joint advocacy on ESF.

Recommendation 3: *Future designs of WFP's approach to ESF in Diffa and other areas of the country need to be based on in-depth analysis of the context including a gendered analysis of risks and protection issues. This analysis should be at the foundation of programme design and should be conducted jointly with other partners in the context of Humanitarian Response Planning, and inform choices in terms of targeting, approaches and modalities. Regular and scaled up participation in the work of the Protection Cluster in Diffa should be envisioned by the WFP CO to ensure plans are based on protection considerations. Level of priority: high. Time-horizon: short to medium.*

3.3 ESF benefits for girls and boys (appropriateness, coverage, effectiveness)

Conclusion 3: ESF had positive effects on enrolment in school and attendance and provided important relief to families but nutrition quality has been variable. A single modality (2 meals, 5 days a week) has been in place across all schools. School level strategies for addressing

shortfalls in government and community contributions affected meal provision and quality and had some unintended negative effects. Overall, a focus on food provision, and lack of monitoring of ESF results reduced the extent to which WFP could report on and learn about ESF implementation and broader ESF effects, including on any possible differential effects on girls and boys.

This conclusion is based mainly on EQs 3 and 4.

ESF activities have been implemented in volatile and highly challenging context with limited resources and a narrow reporting framework. In this context, WFP focused most of its efforts on food provision to schools and in practice implemented a single modality. Experience with implementation highlighted significant challenges related to the management and accountability of school feeding in a crisis setting. Opportunities for capturing beneficiary feedback were lacking in the absence of a complaint system. The main effect of ESF has been to attract children to school and to boost attendance on days that meals were served. Composition of meals and portions served were however affected by the adoption at local level of strategies to make up for the shortfall in Government and community contributions to ESF. Beyond the direct realm of the school, and in spite of the narrow focus there was evidence that ESF had provided relief to families and communities at times of stress, releasing time for families to work and reducing the worry about food for children. An indirect relationship between ESF and a reduction in early pregnancy, child marriage and radicalisation was suggested by local key informants. Evidence of these relationships could not be conclusively established but merit further investigation.

The management of ESF is considered very important at community level and strategies to make it work were prioritized. However, negative effects were noted in some contexts in terms of pressure on communities, and time spent by children on water and firewood collection and teacher pupil contact time.

Recommendation 4: *WFP HQ should use the ESF evaluation to put forward a clear vision and strategies of what a SF programme should look like in crisis and conflict settings and reflect this in a corporate ToC for ESF. Particular attention needs to be paid to the underlying ToC assumptions and to the implications for programming and implementation in light of the vulnerability and fragility of communities and families. (Level of priority: high. Time-horizon: short to medium.)*

Recommendation 5: *WFP HQ in collaboration with RB, should develop specific guidance documents on the planning and implementation of ESF based on the revised ToC and provide targeted support through the RB and dedicated resources to the design and implementation of ESF. (Level of priority: high. Time-horizon: short to medium).*

Recommendation 6: *WFP HQ should review corporate tools for monitoring and reporting to adjust these to the specificities of ESF. These tools should be fully gender-responsive and be designed with considerations of utility, efficiency and learning given the context of ESF implementation. Indicators for ESF should capture the full range of ESF effects, including food security, health, nutrition of children and adolescents, protection, gender, as well as principles of complementarity and joint implementation. (Level of priority: high. Time-horizon: medium)*

Recommendation 7: *In light of the challenges with food preparation and storage, food quality, and evidence of negative environmental impact, WFP CO should test the feasibility and acceptability of adopting a mixed modality of food provision combining fortified with a hot meal prepared at the school at mid-day, with energy biscuits/snack that are taken home for the evening/weekend meals for children who are not living with their parents. WFP CO should also take action to improve conditions for food storage for example through the use of hermetically sealed bags. Level of priority: high. Time-horizon: short to medium).*

Recommendation 8: *Over the next programme period, WFP CO should conduct a real-time evaluation in ESF settings in Niger to collect evidence of the relationship between ESF (including complementary services) and reduction in early pregnancy, child marriage and radicalisation. (Level of priority: high. Time-horizon: medium).*

Recommendation 9: *For future ESF support, the WFP CO should draw on experience of other partners (e.g. UNICEF) to put in place a functioning complaint system which ensures confidentiality and is linked to a feedback system of accountability to populations, so the follow-up of complaints is ensured. (Level of priority: high. Time-horizon: medium).*

3.4 Effects on social cohesion (effectiveness and sustainability)

Conclusion 4: ESF had selected additional positive effects, in particular on integration of children in host communities and of refugee displaced families in community governance, in some settings. However, ESF management has also put a burden on families and communities and produced unintended tensions at community level which reflected weaknesses in ESF design. Opportunities were missed to ensure a stronger voice by women in ESF decision making at community level.

This conclusion is based mainly on EQs 5, 6

ESF facilitated the integration of displaced/refugee children into host communities and has promoted social cohesion. In a fair number of communities, however, the management of ESF also brought tensions which worked against social cohesion, in particular between parents and school management and also between displaced and host communities.

Recommendation 10: *WFP CO should strengthen community participation, ownership, and accountability in all its ESF interventions, and do so in a joint approach with partners by focusing on substantially strengthening the quality and support to local plans, governance structures, and accountability. Such an approach should recognize the constraints on communities, should ensure involvement of women and girls in decision-making, and prioritize diversity and inclusion, through active and meaningful engagement in ESF planning, implementation and monitoring. (Level of priority: high. Time-horizon: medium).*

3.5 Provision of complementary services (complementarity and coherence)

Conclusion 5: In spite of a focus by Government and humanitarian partners on joint planning, WFP has not been able to ensure that school feeding activities are sufficiently paired with complementary activities and services. This has reduced the potential beneficial effects that school meals have for children.

This conclusion is based mainly on EQ2, EQ3 and EQ4

Complementary activities targeting WASH, nutrition, psycho-social support, are all recognized as being critical in the context of Diffa, with ESF acting as an entry point for access to and provision of these services. Complementarity between interventions was part of the design of the intervention and has been sought by the Government (DREP in Diffa) and by humanitarian actors. Complementarity was also explicit in WFPs own objectives for ESF.

However, complementarity was the exception rather than the rule in the ESF schools in Diffa that were visited by the evaluation team. The fundamentally different nature of crises and conflict settings affected the presence of actors on the ground, including the Government and have been compounded by capacity issues, limited coverage of WFPs activities, insufficiently proactive engagement in coordination structures, poor monitoring, and a focus on food delivery as the main outcome for WFP. As a result, most schools benefited only from a very reduced package of complementary activities, and ESF was provided in sub-optimal conditions with basic WASH not in place in most schools.

Recommendation 11: *WFP RB and HQ should use the revised ToC (see Recommendation 4) and the findings from the ESF evaluation series to draw up specific guidance on how an integrated package of services can operate in a crises/conflict settings and translate this into a prioritized set of more modest and realistic expectations of school health and nutrition which prepares the ground for working across the nexus. This will need to include stronger engagement in humanitarian and development coordination fora (Level of priority: high. Time-horizon: medium to long)*

3.6 School feeding and community participation in emergency settings (sustainability)

Conclusion 6: Niger national policies have evolved to reflect acknowledgement of ESF and provide broad guidelines for implementation. However, there was still insufficient understanding nationally and within WFP on how to approach school feeding in emergency settings in a manner that was cognisant of the challenges that were present in volatile emergency contexts. Opportunities exist to further strengthen learning across SF and ESF contexts.

This conclusion is based mainly on EQ 6

WFP has supported the formulation of a national SF policy in Niger but the integration of general considerations about emergency school feeding has not yet been translated into precise and practical measures to provide a rapid and concrete response to face the surge of emergency situations. While ESF has been the focus of the education cluster in Diffa, there has been less attention to ESF in the national coordination fora and leadership on these issues remains a challenge. Reference to the SABER approach, particularly as regards the need for community participation and ownership, proved to be inappropriate in emergency settings.

Communities have faced considerable challenges in terms of providing their contribution to emergency school feeding and most were in practice unable to meet their obligations. This has resulted in children being mobilized for tasks related to the provision of ESF. These tasks were considered a normal contribution but may have substantially intervened with participation in education. Much of this dynamic has not been picked up on by WFP and partners.

Recommendations 12: *WFP HQ should update guidance specifically for ESF programming for COs and partners, with a particular focus on community participation, SABER, and equitable involvement of women and men in decision-making around ESF. Guidance on minimum standards needs to reflect these priorities as well as lessons learned from ESF implementation (see also Rec 9). (Level of priority: high. Time-horizon: medium).*

Recommendation 13: *To promote stronger understanding of ESF, the WFP RB should - with support from WFP HQ - prioritize learning and sharing of information between countries including by organizing an ESF event in the region with governments and partners to share lessons from stakeholders/programming in emergency settings. Level of priority: high. Time-horizon: medium).*