



**WFP EVALUATION**



# **Evaluation of Lao People's Democratic Republic WFP Country Strategic Plan 2017-2021**

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# Executive Summary

## INTRODUCTION

### *Evaluation features*

1. An evaluation of the Lao People's Democratic Republic country strategic plan (CSP) for the period 2017–2021 was conducted between July 2020 and April 2021. Combining accountability and learning objectives, it was timed to inform the design of the next CSP for the country, with fieldwork conducted in October 2020. The main users of the evaluation are the WFP country office, the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific and headquarters technical units and other WFP stakeholders.
2. The evaluation scope covers WFP activities implemented under the CSP for 2017–2021, assessing WFP's strategic positioning and the extent to which WFP made the shift expected under the CSP; WFP's effectiveness in contributing to the CSP strategic outcomes; the efficiency with which the CSP was implemented; and factors explaining WFP's performance.
3. An independent external evaluation team undertook the evaluation using mixed methods, drawing on monitoring data, document review and semi-structured interviews with more than 200 stakeholders at the national and local levels. Data collection ended on 30 October 2020. Attention was paid to accountability to affected populations, ethical considerations, and gender equality and women's empowerment. Information was triangulated using various sources to ensure the validity of the findings.
4. Travel restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic were partially compensated for by a hybrid approach to data collection: part of the team collected data in person, particularly in the field, while the other part worked remotely. Limited availability of monitoring data limited the assessment of outcomes and cost-efficiency.
5. The evaluation process was coordinated with three other United Nations evaluations running concurrently for the United Nations Partnership Framework, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Population Fund.

### *Context*

6. The Lao People's Democratic Republic is a land-locked country with 67.1 percent of the population living in rural areas. It is a lower-middle-income country with a growing economy and increasing socioeconomic disparities among geographic regions, ethnic groups and education levels. The COVID-19 pandemic is affecting labour-intensive sectors of the economy.

**TABLE 1: LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC SOCIOECONOMIC INDICATORS**

Year	Indicator	Value
2020	Total population <sup>a</sup>	7.2 million
2018	Life expectancy <sup>b</sup>	68 years
2018	Gross domestic product per capita <sup>b</sup>	USD 2 460
2018/19	National poverty head count <sup>c</sup>	18.3%
2012	GINI coefficient <sup>b</sup>	36.4
2018	Gender inequality index score <sup>d</sup>	0.604
2017	Prevalence of under 5 stunting <sup>e</sup>	33%
2017	Prevalence of under 5 wasting <sup>e</sup>	9%
2015	Over 15 literacy rate <sup>b</sup>	85%

Sources:

<sup>a</sup> Worldometer elaboration of the latest United Nations data. Available at: <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/>.

<sup>b</sup> World Bank. World Development Indicators.

<sup>c</sup> Lao Statistics Bureau and World Bank. 2020. *Poverty Profile in Lao PDR: Poverty Report for the Lao Expenditure and Consumption Survey 2018–2019*.

<sup>d</sup> United Nations Development Programme. 2019. *Human Development Report 2019*.

<sup>e</sup> Lao Statistics Bureau. 2018. *Lao Social Indicator Survey II 2017, Survey Findings Report*.

7. People living in remote regions are more vulnerable to food insecurity, with 11 percent of rural households classified as having “severe” food insecurity compared with 6 percent of urban households.<sup>1</sup> The prevalence of undernutrition remains high overall (see table 1) and varies by geographic location and ethnic group.<sup>2</sup> People with livelihoods dependent on agriculture or natural resources are particularly vulnerable to natural hazards induced by climate change.

8. While primary education net enrolment reached 98.8 percent in 2016, the retention rate at grade 5 is lower, at 81.1 percent in 2017.<sup>3</sup> Gender patterns are highly diverse among the 49 ethnic groups, and the country consistently ranks low in gender equality indices.

9. The Government's 8th Five-year National Socio-Economic Development Plan (2016–2020),<sup>4</sup> aims to achieve socioeconomic development, industrialization and modernization and to paving the way to graduation from least-developed country status by 2026. The Government has localized the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and integrated them into its national planning framework.

10. The United Nations Partnership Framework for 2017–2021 for the country supports the Government through action under three thematic pillars: inclusive growth, livelihoods and resilience, and human development and governance.

### Country strategic plan

11. The CSP articulates a shift from the provision of food assistance to policy engagement and an intensification of country capacity strengthening through ten activities under four strategic outcomes (see figure 1).

<sup>1</sup> Lao Statistics Bureau and World Bank. 2020. *Poverty Profile in Lao PDR: Poverty Report for the Lao Expenditure and Consumption Survey 2018–2019*.

<sup>2</sup> Lao Statistics Bureau. 2018. *Lao Social Indicator Survey II 2017, Survey Findings Report*.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Development Programme. *Sustainable Development Goals. Lao PDR. Goal 4: Quality education*.

<sup>4</sup> Available at: [https://laopdr.un.org/sites/default/files/2019-08/2016\\_8th%20NSEDP\\_2016-2020\\_English.pdf](https://laopdr.un.org/sites/default/files/2019-08/2016_8th%20NSEDP_2016-2020_English.pdf).

**Figure 1: Line of sight – Lao People’s Democratic Republic country strategic plan (2017–2021)**

WFP Strategic Goal 1 (SDG 2)			WFP Strategic Goal 2 (SDG 17)
WFP Strategic Results			
<b>1: Everyone has access to food (SDG Target 2.1)</b>	<b>2: No one suffers from malnutrition (SDG Target 2.2)</b>	<b>4: Food systems are sustainable (SDG Target 2.4)</b>	<b>5: Developing countries have strengthened capacity to implement the SDGs (SDG Target 17.9)</b>
Strategic outcomes			
<b>1: Schoolchildren in remote rural areas have sustainable access to food by 2021</b>	<b>2: Stunting levels among children under 2 in provinces with high levels of malnutrition meet national targets by 2025</b>	<b>3: Vulnerable households in climate-sensitive districts are more resilient to seasonal and long-term shocks and stresses</b>	<b>4: National and local governance institutions are strengthened to improve service delivery, especially in hard-to-reach areas, by 2025</b>
<b>Activity 1:</b> Provide policy support, technical assistance and capacity transfer	<b>Activity 4:</b> Provide technical assistance for evidence-based policy dialogue	<b>Activity 5:</b> Stimulate access to local specialized nutritious food for children aged 6–23 months	<b>Activity 7:</b> Build community resilience through the creation of productive assets and sustainable livelihood opportunities
<b>Activity 2:</b> Accelerate implementation of the Government's plan of action for the school meals programme	<b>Activity 6:</b> Develop a social behaviour change communication strategy and nutrition schools for farmers		<b>Activity 8:</b> Invest in national governance capacity for food and nutrition security
<b>Activity 3:</b> Support a national process for handover of the school meals programme to communities and the Government			<b>Activity 9:</b> Enable communities to lead and own their food and nutrition security solutions
			<b>Activity 10:</b> Enhance the capacity of government at all levels to prepare for and respond to natural disasters

12. By September 2020, WFP had been able to mobilize 90 percent of the funding it needed to implement the CSP – USD 88 million following a fourth budget revision – with 56 percent of the total coming from the United States of America’s McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program.

## EVALUATION FINDINGS

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

#### *Relevance to national policies, plans and strategies*

13. Developed in consultation with the Government, the CSP is overall relevant to the national priorities of the Lao People's Democratic Republic through appropriate alignment with key national policies and strategies such as the 8th Five-year National Socio-Economic Development Plan (2016–2020), the national policy on promoting school lunch, the national nutrition strategy and the national strategy for gender equality. The CSP is also aligned with government commitments to the achievement of SDG 2.

#### *Addressing the needs of the most vulnerable people and communities*

14. The CSP used appropriate vulnerability indicators to identify the most vulnerable groups for targeting under each strategic objective. WFP demonstrated impressive reach by operating in 22 percent of all the villages in the country across 17 of the Government's 23 priority poor districts. However, the absence of a clear prioritization strategy and the limited availability of up-to-date data during the development of the CSP may have affected WFP's ability always to reach the most vulnerable people. WFP also faced challenges in reaching some of the most remote communities and in striking a balance between reaching remote areas and maximizing the number of beneficiaries reached by targeting those that were relatively accessible.

#### *Adaptation*

15. WFP successfully adapted its strategic position to respond to emergency situations such as the floods that occurred in 2018 and 2019, even though emergency response was not a feature of the original CSP design. Various national counterparts provided positive feedback on WFP's emergency responses, which together with support for emergency preparedness and food distribution are recognized as WFP's comparative advantages in the country. The CSP also allowed WFP to respond appropriately to changing needs such as the increased pressure on vulnerable households that resulted from COVID-19. WFP responded through adaptation of its school feeding work under activity 2 and its agriculture for nutrition support under activity 6 and by increasing the number of cash-based transfer beneficiaries under activity 7.

#### *Partnerships*

16. The CSP offers a conceptually coherent approach to the achievement of zero hunger through support for United Nations partnerships. The CSP's strong alignment with the overall objectives of the United Nations Partnership Framework for the country contributed to working relationships with the other Rome-based agencies and the United Nations Population Fund and has resulted in complementarity with activities of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in some provinces. To enhance coherence further, WFP has also joined and helped establish several multi-partner working groups.

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

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

17. The overall assessment of performance on delivery (see table 2) shows that WFP has made progress and experienced success in delivering its programme, but successful delivery at the output level has not always resulted in progress towards expected outcomes.

TABLE 2: PERFORMANCE IN THE DELIVERY OF OUTPUTS AND ACHIEVEMENT OF OUTCOMES <sup>a</sup>			
Strategic outcome	Progress towards delivery of outputs (2017–2019) <sup>b</sup>	Progress towards strategic outcome (at end of 2019) <sup>c</sup>	Likelihood of achieving end-of-CSP (2021) outcome <sup>d</sup>
1 Schoolchildren in remote rural areas have sustainable access to food by 2021	Significant progress	Significant progress <sup>e</sup>	Will fall somewhat short
2 Stunting levels among children under 2 in provinces with high levels of malnutrition meet national targets by 2025	Significant progress	Limited progress	Will fall somewhat short
3 Vulnerable households in climate-sensitive districts are more resilient to seasonal and long-term shocks and stresses	Significant progress	Limited progress	Will fall somewhat short
4 National and local governance institutions are strengthened to ensure improved service delivery, especially in hard-to-reach areas, by 2025	Very limited progress	Very limited progress	Will fall significantly short given the nature of the engagement and progress so far <sup>f</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Output indicators are defined in the WFP country office tool for managing effectively (COMET), and may be downloaded from COMET in target baseline and follow-up reports, which are designated as CM-R008 reports. The outputs referred to in table 2 do not cover beneficiaries reached, cash-based transfers distributed or food distributed, which are reported separately in CM-R007 annual distribution (CSP) reports.

<sup>b</sup> Analysis of output indicators is based on the specific activities undertaken rather than the activities planned. Levels of progress are based on performance against CSP year-end targets: “somewhat off-target” implies a difference of less than 30 percent between the target and the actual result, and “significantly off-target” implies a difference of at least 30 percent.

<sup>c</sup> Performance data on outcomes are drawn from country office monitoring data in COMET outcome indicator reports (CM-R010b) for 2017, 2018 and 2019.

<sup>d</sup> Based on the markers of progress that the evaluation team expected to find rather than the indicators of outcome-level change used in the country office monitoring framework.

<sup>e</sup> Based on indicators related to education outcomes monitored from 2017 to 2019.

<sup>f</sup> This finding does not reflect progress in capacity strengthening activities under other strategic outcomes.

18. Under strategic outcome 1 WFP largely delivered on its annual plans. There is significant evidence of the positive effects of school feeding on children’s school attendance and, in some cases, ability to study. Between 2017 and 2019, dropout rates for girls decreased more slowly than those for boys, and as of 2019 targets for dropout rates had not been reached. Field observations showed that while some schools were able to ensure the provision of five meals a week, that was not universally achieved as intended.

19. WFP made significant contributions to improving the policy and budget landscape for a national school meals programme, reflecting the Government’s commitment to school feeding. WFP has been engaging closely with the Government on strengthening institutional frameworks and capacity for a phased handover of the programme, while providing capacity strengthening and coordination activities for authorities, coordination mechanisms and committees at the village, district and provincial levels.

20. At the start of CSP implementation, WFP undertook a community capacity assessment to assess the readiness of each school community to contribute to the management and sustainability of the school meals programme, and to determine how best to tailor support. Capacity training activities for community- and village-level authorities, coordination mechanisms and committees were aimed at supporting the school meals programme but in some cases were not sufficient to build sustainable capacity.

21. The handover model is based on strong ownership of the school meals programme at the community level. Efforts to increase community ownership showed mixed results. While some communities demonstrated clearly that the model works, others were confronted by high turnover of counterparts and community staff, limited government funding and lack of incentives for village-level authorities. These factors posed challenges for capacity strengthening efforts and the management and monitoring of post-handover activities. The capabilities of communities were not reassessed just before handover, resulting in limited understanding of their readiness for handover. Challenges in the handover process put at risk sustainable access to food for children in remote areas.

22. Under strategic outcome 2, WFP engaged with government actors at various levels on activities for addressing stunting in provinces with high levels of malnutrition and on individual activities that resulted in positive outputs. Although a Scaling Up Nutrition business network was successfully established early in the CSP it has engaged in little subsequent activity. The agriculture for nutrition project with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) has had positive results at the community level, with indications that it is helping to address malnutrition and food insecurity.

23. WFP has established a number of successful farmer nutrition schools with a high proportion of women participants. WFP reached remote communities with nutrition awareness raising campaigns and provided specialized nutritious foods for pregnant and lactating women and girls and children under 2 years of age. WFP is also contributing to the development of rice fortification standards.

24. While those activities have laid important foundations for future work, current results do not provide a coherent picture of WFP's contribution to government-led efforts to tackle malnutrition.

25. Under strategic outcome 3 there have been fewer activities than intended in seeking to build the resilience of vulnerable households in climate-sensitive districts with regard to seasonal and long-term shocks and stresses. WFP used part of the funding for strategic outcome 3 to provide emergency flood response assistance, and there have also been successful examples of food assistance for assets activities, such as the creation of rice banks, which have good potential for the enhancement of community resilience.

26. In partnership with the Government and supported by the global logistics cluster, WFP started implementing a logistics preparedness project to support national emergency preparedness and response operations.

27. The CSP set out an ambitious strategic outcome 4 focused on capacity strengthening. WFP has successfully used opportunities to strengthen capacity in areas such as emergency preparedness, but the programming of activities in ways that would have been expected to guide and accelerate capacity building under the other strategic outcomes has been limited. The absence of an overarching approach to strengthening institutional capacity affected progress towards the objectives and strategic outcomes of the CSP.

### *Gender and cross-cutting aims*

28. The targeting of beneficiaries was largely needs-based and gender-balanced (see table 3). Efforts were made to reach various age groups and ethnically diverse communities, to include persons with disabilities and to adapt delivery so as to reach beneficiaries safely. WFP set up a beneficiary feedback mechanism in every village of operation, but use of the mechanisms has decreased significantly over time.

TABLE 3: TOTAL COUNTRY STRATEGIC PLAN BENEFICIARIES BY GENDER, 2017–2019						
Year	2017		2018		2019	
	Planned	Actual	Planned	Actual	Planned	Actual
Women and girls	102 771	287 414	120 788	330 472	114 895	118 925
Men and boys	96 229	223 998	120 838	339 857	115 630	118 841
<b>Total</b>	<b>199 000</b>	<b>511 412</b>	<b>241 626</b>	<b>670 329</b>	<b>230 525</b>	<b>237 766</b>
<b>Women and girls as a percentage of total</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>

Source: WFP CSP annual country reports 2017, 2018 and 2019.

29. While implementation of the gender action plan that was developed to guide the implementation of the CSP slowed for a period, gender considerations were generally mainstreamed into the implementation of the CSP, and WFP took active steps to gradually improve gender parity in staffing.

30. WFP has also taken several measures to consider environmental concerns, such as environmental risk screening for asset creation and village development plans and training on environmental and social safeguards for staff.

### *Sustainability*

31. WFP contributed to seven pieces of legislation that will support the sustainability of the school meals programme and made good progress in programme handover. In 2019 and 2020, 515 schools were handed over to the Government, and the handover of 924 was planned for June 2021.<sup>5</sup>

32. Community ownership is a vital component of sustainable handover. Recognizing ongoing challenges to the handover process – such as a lack of clarity in the process, government funding limitations and capacity shortages at the local level – WFP is now providing post-handover technical support for school feeding programmes and continuous follow-up aimed at strengthening community ownership where needed.

### *Linkages between humanitarian and development work*

33. The CSP clearly articulates a link between humanitarian and development work under strategic outcome 3, but shortfalls and delays in funding have hindered activities at the nexus between the two. Although the absence of an emergency-related outcome and focus area in the CSP limited WFP's ability to create strategic links between emergency response and development work, the organization was able to develop some innovative links such as a campaign to promote the use of cash-based transfers to support dietary diversity and nutrition.

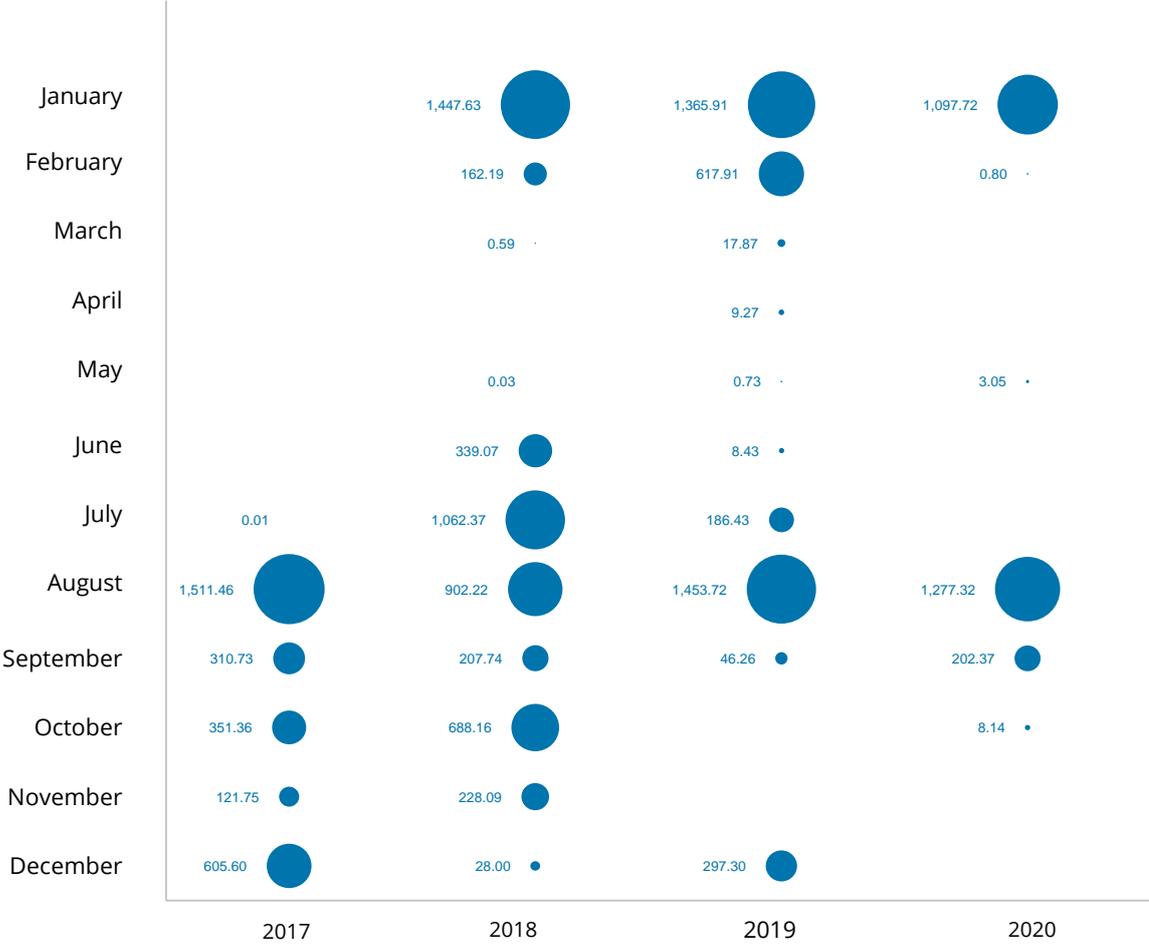
## **To what extent has WFP used its resources efficiently in contributing to the country strategic plan outputs and strategic outcomes?**

### *Timeliness of delivery and coverage*

34. The evaluation found that the delivery of activities has generally been timely and that the efficiency of food delivery has improved over the course of the CSP (see figure 2).

<sup>5</sup> Since June 2021 is outside the period evaluated, the evaluation team did not ascertain the extent to which the planned handover of the 924 schools was completed.

**Figure 2: Food delivery to schools for school feeding activities, by month (mt)**



Source: WFP country office 2020.

35. While WFP reached about 74 percent of the schools in targeted provinces, the level of vulnerability and the remoteness of the schools that were not reached are not clear. Activities under strategic outcomes 2 and 3 were geographically targeted appropriately according to the vulnerabilities that they aimed to address.

*Cost-efficiency and cost-effectiveness*

36. There were insufficient data for a comprehensive analysis of the cost-efficiency of WFP assistance. However, analysis of available data indicates that the cost-efficiency of activities has improved over the duration of the CSP. For instance, distribution costs for school feeding decreased substantially between 2017 and 2020.

37. WFP carried out several assessments and activities aimed at demonstrating its awareness of the need for cost-effectiveness in programme design. These included a cost-benefit analysis of the school meals programme and the implementation of a procurement programme aimed at improving the cost-effectiveness of food assistance through local and regional procurement. However, there was no clear evidence that such awareness translated into systematic analysis of more cost-effective alternatives.

## Staffing

38. In view of the shift from direct food assistance to national capacity strengthening, WFP conducted a workforce review that identified a need to either gradually abolish or transform some staff positions. At the same time, there was also a move towards the employment of national staff in the office. This led to the strengthening of national staff capacity, while positions such as nutrition or gender specialists remained vacant for some time.

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

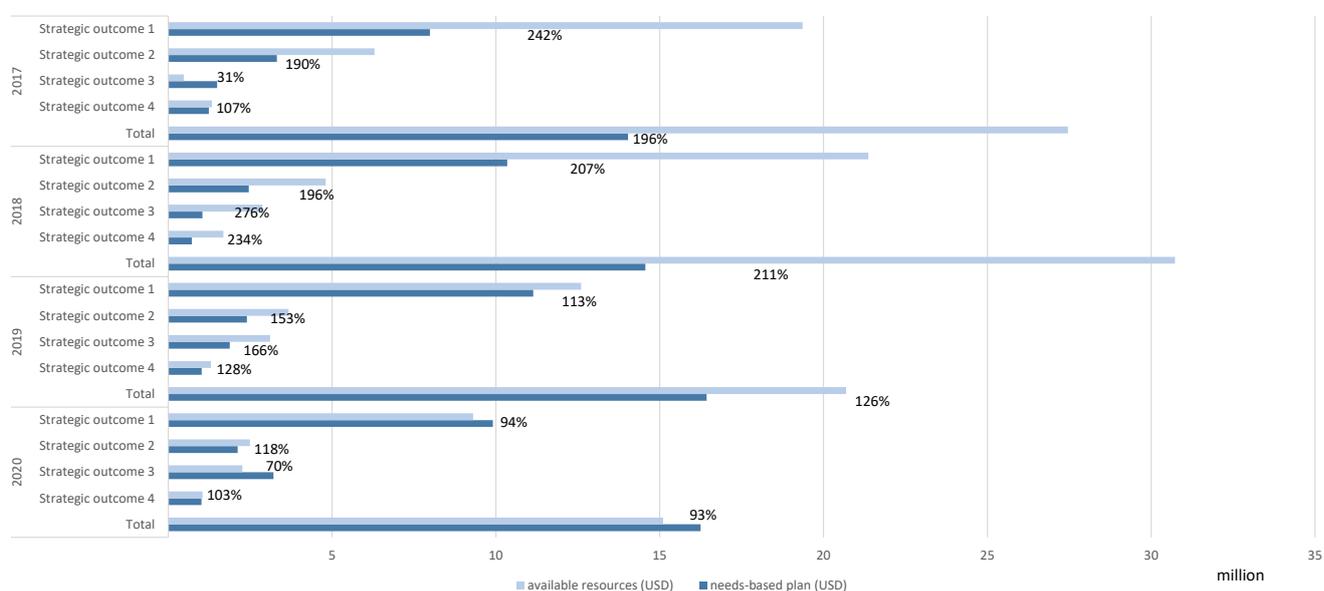
### Use of existing evidence

39. WFP extensively used a variety of existing analyses to develop the CSP, drawing predominantly on official government statistics and census data, World Bank and UNICEF analyses of poverty and nutrition, and a strategic review of food and nutrition security commissioned by WFP.

### Resource mobilization

40. WFP mobilized a very high percentage of the funds called for in the needs-based plan (see figure 3). However, the amount of resources available at the end of each year masks both the underfunding of some activities such as capacity strengthening under strategic outcomes 2 and 4 and significant delays in the receipt of funds. In addition, although much of the funding was predictable it was not flexible, as resources, in particular the McGovern-Dole funding for school feeding, have tended to be multi-year allocations earmarked for specific strategic outcomes and activities. In addition, a significant proportion of the funding received has come through the continuation of funding streams developed prior to the CSP period.

**Figure 3: Needs-based plan and available resources (USD million)**



Sources: WFP. CSP results and resources overviews for 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020.

Available resources consist of the yearly allocation of contributions plus the unspent balance of allocated contributions carried forward from previous years and advances and other resources for the current year.

## Partnerships

41. The CSP's shift to increased technical assistance has repositioned WFP's partnerships with government stakeholders and enabled stronger partnerships at all levels. That is particularly evident in activities that have involved the development of national legislation and policy on school feeding or that support the handover strategy.

42. WFP has working partnerships with United Nations agencies, mainly the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and IFAD. WFP's strategic approach to partnerships has been limited. Some development partners are not fully confident in WFP's current capacity to work fully effectively in development programming. While WFP has had some difficulty developing partnerships with non-governmental organizations owing to lengthy processes including administrative authorization, it has developed strong and beneficial partnerships with a small number of local and international civil society organizations.

### *Flexibility of the country strategic plan*

43. The shift to a CSP has increased WFP's flexibility and its ability to work in the Lao People's Democratic Republic. This has been demonstrated in various ways, such as when WFP responded to flood emergencies by expanding the reach of activities under strategic outcomes 1 and 3 and when it adjusted activities under strategic outcome 1 to account for the impact of changing weather conditions. WFP utilized its existing partnerships and significant field presence to bolster its response to COVID-19 and showed some adaptability in ongoing programming to account for COVID-19-related restrictions. The CSP's potential to facilitate greater flexibility in shaping activities and the scale of outcomes is unclear given the continued dominance of donor earmarking of funding for specific activities.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

44. Overall, the CSP and its strategic outcomes are appropriate to the operational setting and aligned with the direction of the Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic. Representing a significant and relevant shift in WFP operations, the CSP was designed as, and has been, a relevant approach to supporting the Government in meeting the food and nutrition needs of the country. The shift to increased technical assistance has strengthened government partnerships and positioned WFP for greater engagement in strategic national legislation and policy development.

45. The CSP allowed WFP to adapt its operations and respond to government requests for support in responding to flooding and COVID-19. Inclusion of support for emergency response in the CSP and the portfolio budget, would have allowed WFP to better link its humanitarian and development work.

46. The objectives and approaches of the CSP were aligned with those of other United Nations organizations and development actors in the country. While shared features and WFP's comparative advantage have led to some partnerships, they have not been very strategic in nature.

47. Development partners in the country appreciate WFP for its traditional strengths and extensive reach. The country office, which makes good use of its solid connections with the Government and its expertise in warehousing and logistics support and related capacity strengthening, is valued as a trusted partner in humanitarian assistance. At the same time, WFP is encouraged to demonstrate further its ability to engage with partners on effective development work.

48. The potential trade-off between focusing WFP efforts on reaching the most vulnerable people in the hardest-to-reach areas versus maximizing the number of beneficiaries served will be an important topic for discussion in the development of the next CSP.

49. There has been significant progress in addressing the root causes of food insecurity for schoolchildren in remote areas. The school meals programme that has been implemented throughout the country has improved the prospects for food security for a large number of pre-primary and primary schoolchildren. While WFP's support at the policy level has facilitated a significant degree of success in the handover of the programme, WFP needs to address constraints that challenge its sustainability.

50. Agricultural production and household nutrition were improved and diversified in communities with high levels of malnutrition through an agriculture for nutrition project. Farmer nutrition schools have also proved to be a successful pathway to improved farming and nutrition knowledge, with early signs of improving the nutrition status of children under 2 years of age. Strengthening WFP's contribution to the broader government-led effort to tackle undernutrition through institutional and policy-related work is a complex task. It requires that WFP articulate coherently the areas in which it is making progress and exerting influence and that it support them through strategic partnerships with other international actors.

51. WFP has not yet realized the comprehensive approach to resilience needed for the success of the CSP. Considering the COVID-19 pandemic and climate-related challenges that impeded the success of some

CSP activities, it is important to have a comprehensive approach to the mainstreaming of resilience in various strategic outcomes.

52. The design of the CSP with a specific strategic outcome for engagement in the strengthening of national and local governance institutions to ensure improved service delivery, especially in hard-to-reach areas, was appropriate, although results are limited so far. While WFP approached capacity strengthening as a cross-cutting concern, there was a need for more rigorous consideration of how the three interdependent levels of country capacity strengthening – national, community and village – could improve service delivery in hard-to-reach areas. Limitations in WFP’s monitoring framework restricted understanding of effectiveness, sustainability and targeting.

53. Gender considerations have been widely mainstreamed and incorporated into implementation of the CSP. Despite staffing challenges, WFP increased gender parity, increased the number of female staff, engaged with the limited gender groups available locally, made progress in the tracking of gender outcomes, and improved gender equality in decision making.

54. The CSP for the Lao People’s Democratic Republic was one of the first CSPs developed by WFP. The execution of the CSP as a strategy would have benefited from a stronger analysis of internal and external capacity to implement and engage in the shift to a more strategic engagement in the country.

55. Significant donor earmarking of contributions has limited WFP’s flexibility in allocating funds among the CSP’s strategic outcomes. As development of the next CSP takes into account the progress made and reframes WFP’s approach, WFP will have to develop a new funding and partnership strategy that supports the effective shaping and implementation of the plan.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

	Recommendation	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Level of priority	Deadline for completion
1	<p><b>WFP needs to deepen its utilization of up-to-date evidence that supports the shaping and implementation of a realistic scope and focus for the CSP for 2021–2025.</b></p> <p>1.1 Develop a theory of change that articulates and maps out clear pathways from activities and outputs through to intermediate outcomes and strategic outcomes. This necessitates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) development of a situational analysis that articulates the factors facilitating or impeding achievement of the current strategic outcomes;</li> <li>ii) for clarity in the design of the next CSP and to ensure that activities under the next CSP are appropriately adjusted, updating of WFP’s targeting guidelines, clarifying the prioritization of indicators used to identify the most vulnerable people and utilizing the results of recent primary and secondary information;</li> <li>iii) development of a prioritization plan for reaching the most vulnerable people or maximizing the number of beneficiaries reached;</li> <li>iv) analysis of policy gaps to better understand the mechanisms that support or impede the financing of the school meals programme and the financing that the Government is able to provide for the programme;</li> <li>v) analysis of the institutional capacity of the Government at the national, community and village levels to manage and monitor the school meals programme independently; and</li> <li>vi) identification of the internal and external synergies between WFP programming and development partners.</li> </ul> <p>1.2 Tailor and integrate adapted interventions to target the most vulnerable population groups, including women, men, girls and boys of ethnic groups and people living in remote rural areas.</p> <p>1.3 During implementation of the new CSP, periodically review staffing (the number of staff and their skills) and funding against the needs identified under recommendation 1.1 and unfolding challenges.</p>	Strategic	Country office with support from the regional bureau	High	2021

	Recommendation	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Level of priority	Deadline for completion
	1.4 At the corporate level refine the corporate results framework and at the country level strengthen the CSP monitoring and evaluation frameworks to develop systems that generate and use information and evidence beyond the output level, monitor the results of capacity strengthening activities and provide disaggregated data, including by ethnicity.		Corporate Planning and Performance Division		
2	<p><b>Engage strategically with partners in order to better integrate partnerships into programming and to enhance resource mobilization.</b></p> <p>Actions to achieve this include:</p> <p>2.1 Identification and mapping of existing and potential partnerships and their positions with regard to the strategic objectives of the United Nations development system and WFP outcomes.</p> <p>2.2 Efforts to strategically expand joint programming with other United Nations agencies, particularly FAO, IFAD and UNICEF.</p> <p>2.3 Streamlining of the partnership process and/or development of long-term agreements with selected organizations that facilitate strategic working.</p> <p>2.4 An annual meeting with partner international non-governmental organizations and non-profit associations for the exchange of information and experiences.</p> <p>2.5 Finalization of the fundraising strategy in line with the next CSP, focusing on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) diversifying funding sources;</li> <li>ii) continuing advocacy with donors for flexible and multi-year funding; and</li> <li>iii) mobilizing resources for under-resourced activities in resilience strengthening and the provision of technical assistance and national capacity strengthening.</li> </ul>	Strategic	Country office with support from the regional bureau	High	2021–2022
3	<p><b>Develop and integrate a country office approach to resilience strengthening and emergency preparedness and response.</b></p> <p>3.1 Incorporate emergency preparedness and response into the new CSP, developing links between humanitarian and development work.</p>	Strategic	Country office with support from the regional bureau	Medium	2021

	Recommendation	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Level of priority	Deadline for completion
	3.2 Build on good relationships with partners to support the mainstreaming of resilience strengthening activities for climate-proofed activities under strategic outcomes 1 and 2.				
<b>4</b>	<p><b>Strengthen the capacity of WFP staff to design and implement country capacity strengthening.</b></p> <p>4.1 Continue to increase the proportion of national staff in the country office by temporarily increasing the use of short-term consultants to work with national staff to build internal capacity in the key area of country capacity strengthening.</p> <p>4.2 As an agent of change with regard to government institution systems, increase efforts to recruit staff with blended technical expertise and influencing skills in the priority areas identified through the gap analysis referred to in recommendation 1.3. At the corporate level review the efficiency of existing WFP tools for assessing capacity gaps. Based on the review, refine a suite of tools for assessing country capacity strengthening.</p> <p>4.3 At the corporate level establish a skills development programme for building the capacity of country office staff involved in capacity strengthening activities.</p>	Operational	<p>Country office with support from the regional bureau and headquarters</p> <p>Country office with support from the regional bureau and headquarters</p> <p>Technical Assistance and Country Capacity Strengthening Service</p>	Medium	2021-2025
<b>5</b>	<p><b>Reappraise and reinforce WFP's approach to supporting the Government's strategy for taking over the school meals programme.</b></p> <p>5.1 Conduct an in-depth survey of the school meals programme in the schools where the programme has already been handed over to the Government.</p> <p>5.2 Conduct a structured and systematic series of participatory lessons-learned workshops with the central Government and local authorities to facilitate the identification of solutions to the challenges that face the successful transition of the school meals programme to the Government.</p>	Operational	Country office with support from the regional bureau and headquarters	High	2021

	Recommendation	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Level of priority	Deadline for completion
	<p>5.3 With the Government, develop a long-term transition plan that ensures the sustainability of the school meals programme. Drawing from the WFP country capacity strengthening framework and working through a SABER (Systems Approach for Better Education Results) exercise, the plan should systemically address existing gaps in five policy pathways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Policy pathway 1 – Policy framework: Building on the policy analysis for school health and nutrition conducted by the country office in 2020, support the engagement of national stakeholders in devising an action plan for the policy framework improvements required for the sustainability of the school meals programme.</li> <li>– Policy pathway 2 – Budget and financing: Carry out an analysis of the budgetary support required for the sustainability of the school meals programme after handover.</li> <li>– Policy pathway 3 – Institutional capacity and coordination: Based on an institutional capacity assessment (recommendation 1) develop an approach to strengthening institutional capacity at the central and school levels (including by developing guidance, processes and human resources for continued support for schools after handover when necessary).</li> <li>– Policy pathway 4 – Programme delivery (design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation): To support handover of the school meals programme at the school level, design a gradual handover process that uses the grading of schools as an indicator of their readiness for handover; develop links between food security and nutrition activities and poverty alleviation activities for communities that lack the resources to contribute food for the programme; and develop (and institutionalize into national systems and frameworks) structured guidance for the handover process, communicating the guidance to local authorities and communities early in the process.</li> <li>– Policy pathway 5 – Role and participation of non-governmental stakeholders (including communities): Develop (and institutionalize into national systems and frameworks) an approach to building capacity relevant to community ownership of the school meals programme.</li> </ul>				

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. EVALUATION FEATURES

1. The World Food Programme (WFP) Office of Evaluation (OEV) commissioned IOD PARC to evaluate the implementation of the WFP country strategic plan (CSP) in Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR). The evaluation covers the period of March 2017–October 2020 and includes the entirety of support provided by WFP as part of its engagement during this period. The evaluation is carried out in line with the WFP Policy on Country Strategic Plan and WFP Evaluation Policy. The evaluation has been conducted over the period July 2020 to April 2021.

### **Purpose, objectives, scope and users of the evaluation**

2. The country strategic plan evaluation (CSPE) assesses progress and results against intended outcomes and objectives, as well as progress towards gender equality and other corporate cross-cutting themes. It aims to identify lessons to inform subsequent WFP country support.<sup>6</sup> The unit of analysis of the evaluation was the country strategic plan, understood as the set of strategic outcomes, outputs, activities and inputs that were included in the country strategic plan document approved by WFP Executive Board in the session 20-23 February 2017, as well as any subsequent approved programmatic and budget revisions.

3. The CSPE combines the dual objectives of accountability and learning. It provides evidence and an overall reflection on WFP performance for country-level strategic decision making, specifically for informing the development of the next country strategic plan (2022-2026) of WFP in Lao PDR. Moreover, the evaluation provides accountability for results to WFP stakeholders by providing an independent assessment of the WFP portfolio of operations in Lao PDR.

4. The main user of the CSPE is the WFP country office (CO). The evaluation will provide programmatic learning for the WFP regional bureau for Asia and the Pacific, the regional bureau in Bangkok (RBB), and headquarters (HQ) technical units and will also offer help for the regional bureau in Bangkok, technical units, and the WFP Executive Board (EB) in its review of the new country strategic plan.<sup>7</sup> The evaluation will further assist the WFP Office of Evaluation in terms of synthesis of evaluation results and lessons learned across country strategic plans. The evaluation will also be of use to a range of external stakeholders, including the Government of Lao PDR, other United Nations agencies and civil society organizations particularly involved in food security and nutrition and resilience building in the rural areas of Lao PDR.

5. The evaluation adheres to the WFP approach to accountability to affected populations (AAP) through assessing the participation of affected people in WFP programmes, including in design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation processes and more specifically in the areas of information provision, consultation and the functioning of complaints and feedback mechanisms.

6. Gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE) is embedded as a key principle of WFP work. The WFP principles for the integration of gender in evaluation have been applied consistently and coherently across the entire evaluation process, including in terms of a gender responsive methodology.

7. The evaluation process established linkages with three other United Nations evaluations running concurrently with this one (United Nations Partnership Framework (UNPF), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)). The WFP evaluation team coordinated with these teams to manage demands on stakeholders in Lao PDR and to share and reflect on emerging findings where respective timelines allowed.

## 1.2. COUNTRY CONTEXT

8. **Geography and demography:** Lao People's Democratic Republic is a land-locked country in Southeast Asia. The most recent national census (2015) shows a population of 6,492,228<sup>8</sup> (current 2020

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<sup>6</sup> The terms of reference (ToR) for this CSPE are presented in Annex 1

<sup>7</sup> The new CSP is scheduled to be presented to the WFP Executive Board in November 2021

<sup>8</sup> The 4th Population and Housing Census (PHC) 2015 (Lao Statistics Bureau).

estimates are 7,275,560 people<sup>9</sup>) where 67.1 percent of the population lives in rural areas; 49.9 percent of the population is female, and 50.1 percent is male. Of this population, 32 percent are 0-14 years old. The majority, 62 percent of households are Lao-Tai, whilst ethnic groups include Mon-Khmer (23.7 percent), Hmong-Mien (9.7 percent) and Chinese-Tibetan (2.9 percent). The life expectancy at birth in 2018 was 68. The total fertility rate (births per woman) as of 2018 was 2.7 and the adolescent fertility rate (births per 1,000 women ages 15-19) was 64.9.<sup>10</sup>

9. **Development context:** Lao PDR is a single-party, socialist republic that has experienced rapid development and has made significant poverty reduction progress. In the past 20 years poverty has more than halved, hunger and malnutrition reduced, gender equality advanced, and education and health outcomes improved. Lao PDR is ranked as a lower middle-income country (by World Bank (WB), since 2011) and aims to graduate from least developed country status by 2026.<sup>11</sup>

10. With one of the fastest growing economies in East Asia and the Pacific, gross domestic product (GDP) growth has averaged 7.7 percent annually (growth to 2018), while gross domestic product per capita reached USD 2,460 in 2018.<sup>12</sup> Development gains are not equitably distributed however, with greater social and economic disparities found across geographical regions, across rural and urban areas, between ethnic groups, and across education levels.<sup>13,14</sup> The national poverty head count in 2018/2019, estimated using the revised poverty methodology, was 18.3 percent (ranging from 5 percent (Vientiane capital) to 30.6 percent (Sekong province).<sup>15</sup> The Gini coefficient (World Bank estimate) was 36.4 in 2012, the most recent data available.<sup>16</sup> Economic growth in Lao PDR fell from 6.3 percent in 2018 to 4.8 percent in 2019, due primarily to natural disasters that affected the agricultural sector.<sup>17</sup> The COVID-19 outbreak is expected to further intensify the country's macroeconomic vulnerabilities.

11. **Food security:** People living in remote regions are more vulnerable to food insecurity, with 11 percent of rural households classified as having "severe" food insecurity as compared to 6 percent of urban households.<sup>18</sup> In Lao PDR, vulnerability is mainly linked to poverty, rural residence and ethnicity.<sup>19</sup> Many farmers face significant persistent challenges to agricultural productivity and food security, including those related to soil degradation, land pressures, water security and irrigation access, large scale investment projects, and unexploded ordnance. An independent strategic review of food and nutrition security commissioned by WFP identified that women's traditional roles and work norms mean that in Lao PDR, income generation is often seen as the responsibility of men, whereas women are responsible for sourcing

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<sup>9</sup> Worldometer elaboration of the latest United Nations data.

<sup>10</sup> World Bank Laos PDR Country Profile.

[https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=LA&name\\_desc=true](https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=LA&name_desc=true)

<sup>11</sup> The United Nations Committee for Development Policy Report on the twentieth session (12–16 March 2018) notes that in its triennial review of the list of least developed countries, the Lao People's Democratic Republic fulfilled the criteria for graduation for the first time. They will be considered for graduation at the next triennial review in 2021, with a view to graduating in 2024.

<sup>12</sup> World Bank Lao PDR Overview. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/lao/overview#1>

<sup>13</sup> Lao PDR Social Indicator Survey II. <https://www.unicef.org/eap/sites/unicef.org/eap/files/2018-06/Summary%20Survey%20Findings%20Report%20an%20statistical%20snapshots%20of%20Lao%20Social%20Indicator%20Survey%20II.pdf> Accessed 7 April 2020.

<sup>14</sup> P Warr, S Rasphone, and J Menon. *Two Decades of Declining Poverty but Rising Inequality in Laos*. <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/credit/documents/papers/2018/18-06.pdf> Centre for Research in Economic Development and International Trade, University of Nottingham, Accessed 7 April 2020.

<sup>15</sup> Poverty Profile in Lao PDR: Poverty Report for the Lao Expenditure and Consumption Survey 2018-2019.

<sup>16</sup> World Bank Laos PDR Country Profile. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI?locations=LA>

<sup>17</sup> U.S Department of State. 2020 Investment Climate Statements: Laos. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-investment-climate-statements/laos/#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20World%20Bank,that%20affected%20the%20agricultural%20sector.>

<sup>18</sup> Poverty Profile in Lao PDR: Poverty Report for the Lao Expenditure and Consumption Survey 2018-2019.

<sup>19</sup> Lilao Bouapao, L, Insouvanh, C., Pholsena, M, Armstrong, J and Staab, M. 2016. Strategic Review of Food and Nutrition Security in Lao People's Democratic Republic.

and preparing food for the household.<sup>20</sup> Two gender norms that were highlighted as increasing vulnerability concerned food utilization and decision making. For food utilization, in some communities, men and boys eat before women and girls. For decision making, typically the most senior male member of the family has the authority to make final decisions, followed by other men, and senior women.

12. **Nutrition:** High levels of malnutrition exist amongst children, with 33 percent chronic malnutrition (stunting) and 9 percent acute malnutrition (wasting) incidence for children under five years old as of 2017,<sup>21</sup> with rates marginally higher in boys for children under five.<sup>22</sup> Undernutrition varies by geographic location and ethnic group and remains high overall. For example, Table 1 shows that stunting and being underweight affects ethnic minority children more than the majority ethnic group of Lao-Tai. One in four children under 5 are anaemic, while provincial data<sup>23</sup> for anaemia suggests that 40 percent of pregnant women and 30 percent of lactating women are anaemic. Furthermore, since 18 percent of girls who give birth are under 18 years old, this makes adolescent girls a key subgroup with high nutrient needs.<sup>24</sup> At the same time, the percentage of people overweight and obese has increased in the past decade and is a growing concern particularly for women of reproductive age.

**Table 3: Nutritional status of children under age 5 by ethnicity (2017) (Total 2 Standard Deviation (SD) and 3 SD)**

	% Underweight (-2SD)	% Stunted (-2SD)	% Wasted (-2SD)	% Overweight (+2SD)
Lao-Tai	16.51	23.2	9.1	3.5
Mon-Khmer	29.5	43.3	10.2	3.1
Hmong-Mien	22.9	50.2	7.2	3.6
Chinese-Tibetan	23.7	48.6	5.8	7.3
Other	34.9	36.4	12.1	2.2
Lao PDR	21.1	33.0	9.02	3.5

Source: Lao Statistics Bureau. 2018. Lao Social Indicator Survey II 2017, Survey Findings Report. Vientiane, Lao PDR: Lao Statistics Bureau and UNICEF, p.238.

13. **Agriculture:** The critical interdependencies among food security, nutrition, and agricultural development are clearly at play, and significant challenges remain despite progress. Building resilience to climate change in the agriculture sector is a central issue in Lao PDR, where almost a third of gross domestic product (29.9 percent) is generated through the agriculture sector. Agriculture involves 77 percent of the population. Whilst agriculture-forestry's contribution to gross domestic product has declined in recent years, it nonetheless provides employment for nearly two-thirds of the population.<sup>25</sup>

14. **Climate change:** With the frequency and severity of extreme weather events increasing,<sup>26</sup> Lao PDR is also highly vulnerable to climate change, particularly for people with agricultural or natural resource-dependent livelihoods, a significant proportion of the country's population. The WFP consolidated livelihood mapping (2016)<sup>27</sup> notes that decreasing rainfall in the northern provinces can have serious impacts, especially on rain-fed highland paddy production. Higher and more intense rainfall (central areas) will have

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, Poverty profile in Lao PDR.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, Lao Social Indicator Survey II.

<sup>22</sup> Stunted percent below -2SD: Total 33; male 34; female 32. Wasted – percent below -2SD: Total 9.0; male 9.4; female 8.6. Lao PDR Statistics Bureau. 2018. Lao Social Indicator Survey II 2017, Survey Findings Report. Vientiane, Lao PDR: Lao Statistics Bureau and UNICEF.

<sup>23</sup> Lao PDR Statistics Bureau. 2018. Lao Social Indicator Survey II 2017, Survey Findings Report. Vientiane, Lao PDR: Lao Statistics Bureau and UNICEF. Nutrition pp25.

<sup>24</sup> WFP (2017). *Fill the Nutrient Gap* Lao PDR Full Report.

<sup>25</sup> Lilao Bouapao, L, Insouvanh, C., Pholsena, M, Armstrong, J and Staab, M. 2016. *Strategic Review of Food and Nutrition Security in Lao People's Democratic Republic*.

<sup>26</sup> World Bank Climate Change Knowledge Portal <https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/country/laos>

<sup>27</sup> WFP (2016). LAO PDR CLEAR | Consolidated Livelihood Exercise for Analysing Resilience.

detrimental consequences for paddy production, will increase flood risks and will impact key cash crops. In the south, increasing and more concentrated rainfall can lead to higher flood risks, while higher temperatures in the dry season can exacerbate drought risks and can significantly stress rural livelihoods.

15. **Environmental hazards:** The national risk profile of Lao PDR identifies major hazards as floods, storms, droughts, epidemics, earthquakes, and unexploded ordnances. Storms and flooding are most frequent, with notable events including typhoons Ketsana in 2009 and Haima in 2011, and Tropical Storm Son-Tinh in 2018. Localized flooding has been reported in 2013, 2015, 2016, 2018, and 2020 and is a significant hazard to settlements on the Mekong and Sekong rivers (according to an Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre (ADPC)/United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) 2019 report).<sup>28</sup> The localized flooding incidents impacted hundreds of thousands of people and incurred extensive economic losses, particularly within the agriculture, fisheries, livestock, forestry, and irrigation sectors

16. **Education:** UNDP<sup>29</sup> notes that by 2014, Lao PDR had met Millennium Development Goal (MDG) targets on enrolment, with a primary education net enrolment ratio of 98.5 percent. By 2016, the primary net enrolment ratio had reached 98.8 percent. However, the retention rate to grade 5, though it has increased by over 10 percent since 2012, remains low, at around 81.1 percent in 2017. More recent data from the World Bank country profile for 2018 puts primary school enrolment at 102.4 percent (gross)<sup>30</sup> and secondary enrolment at 67 percent (gross). The 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSEDP) references 2013 data where the ratio of girls to boys enrolled in primary school was 0.95. For lower secondary, the ratio was 0.91 and for upper secondary it was 0.84. The NSEDP 2015 baseline data reports the gross enrolment ratio for lower secondary education as 78.1 percent and upper secondary as 45.8 percent. The NSEDP reports that as of fiscal year 2014-2015 the literacy rate of the population above 15 years old had increased from 81.7 percent to 93.6 percent. These figures differ from the equivalent World Bank data from 2015, as shown in Table 2, which put the literacy rate of over 15 years old at 85 percent. Table 2 also shows gender differences in primary school enrolment, progression to secondary school, school attendance, and adult literacy rates.

**Table 4: Sex-disaggregated education indicators in Lao PDR**

Children out of school, primary (2018)		Progression to secondary school (2017)		Children out of school (2018)		Adult literacy rate (2015)	
Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	% of female primary school age	% of male primary school age	% of females ages 15 and above	% of males ages 15 and above
9.3%	7.7%	85%	88%	9%	8%	79%	90%

Source: WB Indicators <https://data.worldbank.org>

17. **Gender:** Lao PDR consistently ranks low in global human development, poverty, and gender equality indexes. In 2012, the Women’s Economic Opportunity Index, which analyses factors such as schooling, access to contraception, political participation, access to finance, etc., gave Lao PDR a score of 38.6/100 and ranked it 108 out of 128 countries analysed.<sup>31</sup> In 2018, the UNDP Gender Inequality Index, based on factors related to women’s reproductive health, empowerment and economic activity, placed Lao PDR at 140 of 189 countries, with an index of 0.604.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>28</sup> UNDRR (2019). Disaster Risk Reduction in Lao PDR: Status Report 2019. Bangkok, Thailand, United Nations Office for Disaster.

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.la.undp.org/content/laopdr/en/home/sustainable-development-goals/goal-4-quality-education.html>

<sup>30</sup> If there is late enrolment, early enrolment, or repetition, the total enrolment can exceed the population of the age group that officially corresponds to the level of education.

<sup>31</sup> Economist Intelligence Unit, 2012, *Women’s Economic Opportunity Index 2012*, *Economist Intelligence Unit*

<sup>32</sup> UNDP. 2019. Human Development Report 2019. Inequalities in Human Development in the 21st Century - Briefing note for countries on the 2019 Human Development Report, Lao People’s Democratic Republic. [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr\\_theme/country-notes/LAO.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/LAO.pdf)

18. The Lao PDR parliament ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1981. Despite several decades since its ratification, UN Women in Lao PDR reports on its website that knowledge of CEDAW is confined mainly to senior government officials or senior members of the Lao Women's Union (LWU). UN Women emphasized the "need for greater public advocacy and training of district officials, to encourage greater awareness of CEDAW and of women's human rights".<sup>33</sup>

19. **Gender norms and roles:** The strategic review<sup>34</sup> recognized the under-representation of women in decision making at all levels. In Lao PDR women are responsible for over 50 percent of agricultural activities. Rural women, reliant on agriculture and natural resources for income, can be disproportionately impacted by the effects of climate change due to their roles in the field and the household. Finally, the report identified poverty, ethnicity, language, education, and geographic isolation as factors underlying gender inequality. Building resilience to climate change in the agriculture sector is a central issue in Lao PDR.

20. **Gender and ethnicity:** Gender patterns are highly diverse and differ across the 49 ethnic groups in the country. The largest Lao Tai ethnic group is matrilineal and women often own land and run businesses. However, there have been changes in this pattern in the past decades, in particular in relation to land legislation and the male dominated adjunction of land titling.<sup>35</sup> Ta Oi, Brao, Lave, Katang, Ong, Sou, Nyouane, Lahu and Pray also have matrilineal systems. Other communities – such as Hmong, Akhar, Yao, Tai Dam, Lao Sung and Lao Thung - are patrilineal with women working hard and being agriculturally productive but men more likely to own property and make decisions. In other communities both women and men decide together (e.g. Khmu, Lao Hoy and Suay).<sup>36</sup> Although there are differences across the ethnic groups in terms of lineage, inheritance and locality, positions of power, particularly in formal settings, are maintained by men across groups.<sup>37</sup>

21. **Protection:** There are several protection issues:

- **Gender-based violence.** A 2015 report on violence against women in Lao PDR<sup>38</sup> found that gender-based violence was common, with 1 in 3 women reporting having suffered from physical, sexual or emotional intimate partner violence.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, the report found that close to half those interviewed considered violence against women to be acceptable. An assessment conducted in 2017 found that more women (30 percent) than men (16 percent) felt that domestic violence was acceptable.<sup>40</sup> Reasons given included burning food or arguing with a spouse.

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<sup>33</sup> UN Women, 2018, <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20eseasia/docs/publications/2018/08/factsheetunwomeninlaopdrrevisedversion2f08compressed.pdf?la=en&vs=1124>

<sup>34</sup> Lilao Bouapao, L, Insouvanh, C., Pholsena, M, Armstrong, J and Staab, M. 2016. *Strategic Review of Food and Nutrition Security in Lao People's Democratic Republic.*

<sup>35</sup> WFP country office comment.

<sup>36</sup> WFP. 2017. *WFP Lao PDR Gender Action Plan 2017.*

<sup>37</sup> WFP country office comment.

<sup>38</sup> National Commission for the Advancement of Women, Lao PDR, 2015. Lao National Survey on Women's Health and Life Experiences 2014 A Study on Violence against Women

<sup>39</sup> National Commission for the Advancement of Women, Lao PDR, 2015. Lao National Survey on Women's Health and Life Experiences 2014 A Study on Violence against Women

<sup>40</sup> Lao Statistics Bureau. 2018. Lao Social Indicator Survey II 2017, Survey Findings Report. Vientiane, Lao PDR: Lao Statistics Bureau and UNICEF <https://www.unicef.org/eap/sites/unicef.org/eap/files/2018-06/Summary%20Survey%20Findings%20Report%20an%20statistical%20snapshots%20of%20Lao%20Social%20Indicator%20Survey%20II.pdf>

- **Child, early and forced marriage.** According to UN Women, one-third of all girls in Lao PDR get married before the age of 18,<sup>41</sup> with a large difference between urban (21 percent) and rural areas (39 percent).<sup>42</sup>
- **Risk of exclusion due to disability.** The causes of disability in Lao PDR are mostly injury, pregnancy and birth outcomes, childhood illnesses, and unexploded ordnances (UXOs). The most common causes of death and disability combined in the general population are neonatal disorders, respiratory tract infections, strokes, ischaemic heart disease, and congenital defects.<sup>43</sup> A recent report<sup>44</sup> found that the overall prevalence of disabilities was 2.8 percent in Lao PDR, with no significant gender differences. However, the assessment found that disability prevalence was higher in the poorest geographical areas and much higher amongst Mon-Khmer (3.5 percent) compared to other ethnic groups.
- **Migration and Human trafficking.** In Lao PDR both cross-border and domestic migration are longstanding, highly gendered phenomena, with women victims of human trafficking moved across borders to neighbouring Thailand, Viet Nam and China and men migrating for work. This loss of able men and women particularly threatens rural communities. However, precise figures are unavailable because the majority of persons migrate through informal channels.

22. **Additional protection risks:** In addition to the protection risks mentioned above, beneficiaries in Lao PDR are faced by other protection risks, such as land tenure issues, limited social protection, limited access to health care, long-term climate change impacts and shocks, and since 2020, the health and socioeconomic risks of COVID-19.

23. **National policies and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG):** The Government of Lao PDR's eighth Five-Year National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSEDP) (2016-2020) is a continuation of the seventh Five-Year Plan. The plan is regarded as a measure for achieving socio-economic development, industrialization, and modernization up to the year 2020. The plan paves the way towards the graduation from least developed countries status and lays a strong foundation for the achievement of the 2025 National Strategy on Socio-Economic Development.

24. The eighth NSEDP also builds on the unfinished work of the Millennium Development Goals and as one of the earliest countries to localize the Sustainable Development Goals, the Government has integrated the Sustainable Development Goals into its national planning framework. As reported in the Sustainable Development Goal National Voluntary Review, by 2015 Lao PDR had achieved the Millennium Development Goal targets on poverty and hunger reduction. It achieved: universal access to primary education; gender equity in primary education; the international Millennium Development Goal target of reducing its maternal mortality ratio by 75 percent; and its own national target on reducing child mortality.<sup>45</sup> Lao PDR achieved the Millennium Development Goal targets on access to safe water and sanitation. Extra efforts are still required in planning and coordination to reach the poorest and most disadvantaged groups and administrative data systems in many goal areas still need to be strengthened.<sup>46</sup>

25. **International assistance:** Donors provide multi-year development assistance, directly to the Government or through international organizations, and bilateral technical cooperation. Lao PDR received USD 376 million in official development assistance (ODA) disbursement in 2018 and an average

<sup>41</sup> <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20eseasia/docs/publications/2018/08/factsheetunwomeninlaopdrrevisedversion2f08compressed.pdf?la=en&vs=1124>

<sup>42</sup> Lao Statistics Bureau. 2018. Lao Social Indicator Survey II 2017, Survey Findings Report. Vientiane, Lao PDR: Lao Statistics Bureau and UNICEF <https://www.unicef.org/eap/sites/unicef.org/eap/files/2018-06/Summary%20Survey%20Findings%20Report%20an%20statistical%20snapshots%20of%20Lao%20Social%20Indicator%20Survey%20II.pdf>

<sup>39</sup> Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation. 2019. <http://www.healthdata.org/laos>

<sup>44</sup> Lao Statistics Bureau. 2020. Disability Monograph of Lao PDR From the 2015 Population and Housing Census

<sup>45</sup> The Lao People's Democratic Republic. The Millennium Development Goals and Lessons Learned for the Post 2015 Period: A Summary Review. 2015.

<sup>46</sup> Government of Lao PDR. Lao People's Democratic Republic: Voluntary National Review on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. 2018.

disbursement of USD 281 million per annum in the 2008-2018 period.<sup>47</sup> Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) provide capacity strengthening and policy support and implement food and nutrition security projects. The Scaling-Up Nutrition (SUN) Alliance, which includes private sector members, was established in 2018 in support of the Government's nutrition agenda.

26. The United Nations Country Team (UNCT) in Lao PDR consists of all the United Nations specialized agencies, funds and programmes serving the country, together with the World Bank. The UNCT aims to ensure that the engagement and programming of each United Nations organization reinforces the others, with coordination guided by eight expected outcomes of the United Nations Partnership Framework (UNPF).<sup>48</sup> UNPF (2017-2021) supports the Government in becoming a middle-income country, whose people benefit equally from quality services. It is based on country analysis, assessment of progress towards the Millennium Development Goals and findings of an evaluation of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) for 2012-2016. The partnership framework results, which form the core of the proposed actions, are built around three thematic pillars: Pillar 1, focusing on inclusive growth, livelihoods and resilience; Pillar 2, focusing on human development; and Pillar 3, focusing on governance. Food and nutrition security is one of the outcomes in the UNPF human development pillar, which underlines the need to focus on the first 1,000 days after conception and to transition from subsistence to market-oriented agricultural production, adapted to climate change and to the needs of smallholder farmers. In 2020, the Resident Coordinator Office (RCO), of the United Nations Country Team conducted a UNPF evaluation with inter-agency support.

27. An inter-agency simulation exercise<sup>49</sup> identified gaps in emergency preparedness and response capacity, needs assessments, response planning, and coordination arrangements. A government-humanitarian country team action plan was prepared to address these challenges.

28. **COVID-19:** After the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 to be a public health emergency of international concern on 30 January 2020, Lao PDR had 39 confirmed cases (as of 30 November 2020). Lockdown measures were implemented throughout April 2020, and international border crossings remain restricted with quarantine measures in place. A joint WFP/Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) study (May 2020)<sup>50</sup> found significant economic impacts affecting labour, markets and trade, where the main constraint in access to food was financial, with poorer households and those who had daily labour as their main source of income having the most acute access issues. The World Bank (May 2020)<sup>51</sup> assessed that COVID-19 had affected labour-intensive sectors and those linked to global and regional value chains (for example, tourism, transport, retail trade), disrupting labour markets, and impacting the flow of remittances. The report suggests that the COVID-19 outbreak affected essential service delivery and disproportionately impacted women.

### 1.3. SUBJECT BEING EVALUATED

#### Background

29. WFP started work in Lao PDR in 1975, providing relief assistance and then it established a country office in 2000. In response to recommendations made in the 2009 WFP country portfolio evaluation<sup>52</sup> and adapting to the changing operational environment, WFP and the Lao PDR Government started moving towards sustainable outcomes through strengthened government systems and institutional capacity. At this time WFP shifted to a four-year country programme (CP), the Laos PDR Country Programme 200242 (2012-2015), covering: 1) emergency preparedness and response; 2) mother child and health nutrition; 3) school meals; and 4) livelihood initiatives for nutrition.

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<sup>47</sup> OECD. 2020 <https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?datasetcode=TABLE2A#>

<sup>48</sup> The United Nations in Lao PDR. 2020. Draft 2019 Progress Report Lao PDR – United Nations Partnership Framework 2017-2021. A Partnership for Sustainable Development.

<sup>49</sup> Facilitated by WFP in 2016.

<sup>50</sup> WFP/FAO. 2020. Rapid Assessment of Food Security and Agriculture in Lao PDR.

<sup>51</sup> World Bank (2020) Lao PDR in the time of COVID-19.

<sup>52</sup> 2009 Lao PDR (2000-2008) "SER Country Portfolio Evaluation of Lao People's Democratic Republic" (WFP/EB.2/2009/6-F).

30. In 2014, a mid-term evaluation of the country programme<sup>53</sup> highlighted the need for: i) improvement of monitoring functions; ii) narrowing the gap between funding availability and programme needs; iii) capacity building to enable handover to the Government; iv) greater coordination of activities, including more joint programmes with other United Nations agencies; v) discontinuation of purchase for progress (P4P) and food fortification and marketing; vi) improved effectiveness in the areas of school meals programme objectives, outreach of mother and child health and nutrition, nutrition education, school gardens and expansion of food assistance for assets (FFA)/cash for assets (CFA) focusing on community assets; and vii) more comprehensive assistance to address stunting and persistently high malnutrition rates.

31. The duration of the country plan was extended to March 2017 to largely align with the 2012–2016 UNDAF. This also ensured that the newly developed WFP Lao PDR Country Strategic Plan (2017-2021)<sup>54</sup> was able to align with the duration of the Lao PDR Government's eighth National Socio-Economic Development Plan (2016-2020). In February 2017, the WFP Executive Board approved the country strategic plan for Lao PDR, to be implemented from 1 April 2017.

32. The WFP Lao PDR Annual Country Report 2017<sup>55</sup> highlighted the transformative nature of the country strategic plan in the context of the "Integrated Road Map" process that WFP globally had embarked on, starting in 2016. The WFP Lao PDR country office was among the first eight WFP countries to commence and complete efforts to articulate support to the national Government in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 with focus on SDG 2 (zero hunger) and SDG 17 (partnerships).<sup>56</sup>

33. The country analysis<sup>57</sup> carried out for the development of the WFP Country Strategic Plan (2017-2021) underpinned an approach based on continuing and further progressing the move to sustainable outcomes through strengthened government systems and institutional capacities. The move from emergency and recovery to development entailed a gradual shift away from solely focusing on direct delivery of programmes to a focus on: access to food for school children; preventing stunting with a focus on the first 1,000 days; building resilience of vulnerable communities; increased policy engagement; capacity strengthening; and knowledge sharing for a progressive handover of gender-sensitive and culturally appropriate programmes.

34. The country strategic plan aims to ensure that activities are integrated into national development plans for gradual handover, while developing and transferring capacities to the Government and communities. The country strategic plan also aims to recognize the key role women play at the community level and to ensure their inputs are incorporated into programme design, implementation, and monitoring. To ensure sustainability and ownership of programmes, communities are considered as active partners rather than passive recipients, allowing them to make their own decisions and ensure their food and nutrition security with their inputs and capacities. Figure 1 provides an overview of WFP activities, national policies, and key events.

### **Coverage of country strategic plan in Lao PDR**

35. The WFP country office is based in the Lao PDR capital city, Vientiane. WFP has maintained (from 2017 to 2020) field offices in Phongsaly, Oudomxai and Champasack provinces. It has a field presence in 31 of Lao PDR's 147 districts.<sup>58</sup>

36. The country strategic plan seeks to achieve four strategic outcomes (SOs) that link and contribute towards the achievement of the WFP global strategic objectives and goals, articulated in the WFP Strategic Plan (2017-2021). Those are: SO1- Schoolchildren in remote rural areas have sustainable access to food by 2021; SO2 - Stunting levels among children under 2 in provinces with high levels of malnutrition meet

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<sup>53</sup> 2014 Op-Ev Laos CP 200242 (2012-2015) Mid-term evaluation report.

<sup>54</sup> The CSP period started in March 2017 and is due to end in December 2021.

<sup>55</sup> WFP Lao PDR Annual Report 2017.

<sup>56</sup> 2018 WFP *Update on the Integrated Road Map*. Policy Issues. Agenda Item 5. CSPs can be designed for a duration of up to five years.

<sup>57</sup> World Food Programme. 2016. Strategic Review of Food and Nutrition Security in Lao People's Democratic Republic.

<sup>58</sup> World Food Programme. Lao PDR. Annual Country Report. 2019.

national targets by 2025; SO3 - Vulnerable households in climate-sensitive districts are more resilient to seasonal and long-term shocks and stresses; and SO4 - National and local governance institutions are strengthened to improve service delivery, especially in hard-to-reach areas, by 2025. Together these strategic outcomes contribute to WFP strategic results (SRs) 1, 2, 4 and 5, in line with SDG 2 and SDG 17. Annex 13 has details on the “line of sight”.

37. With funding and technical support from the World Bank<sup>59</sup> and United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Mc-Govern Dole (MGD) Food for Education Grant, WFP has been engaged with the Government of Laos PDR national school meals programme (NSMP), providing snacks or free nutritious school lunches to primary and pre-primary school children, since 2013. Implemented by the Ministry of Education and Sports the NSMP is designed to support school enrolment, attendance, and pupil retention particularly in remote rural areas where primary school completion rates are lowest. The Government of Laos PDR 2014 policy of “Promoting School Lunch” and the 2016-2020 Government of Laos PDR Plan of Action of the School Meal Programme, both recognize the role that school meals can play in contributing to food security.

38. In addition to WFP, other partners such as the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the European Union are engaged in addressing stunting in provinces with high levels of malnutrition.

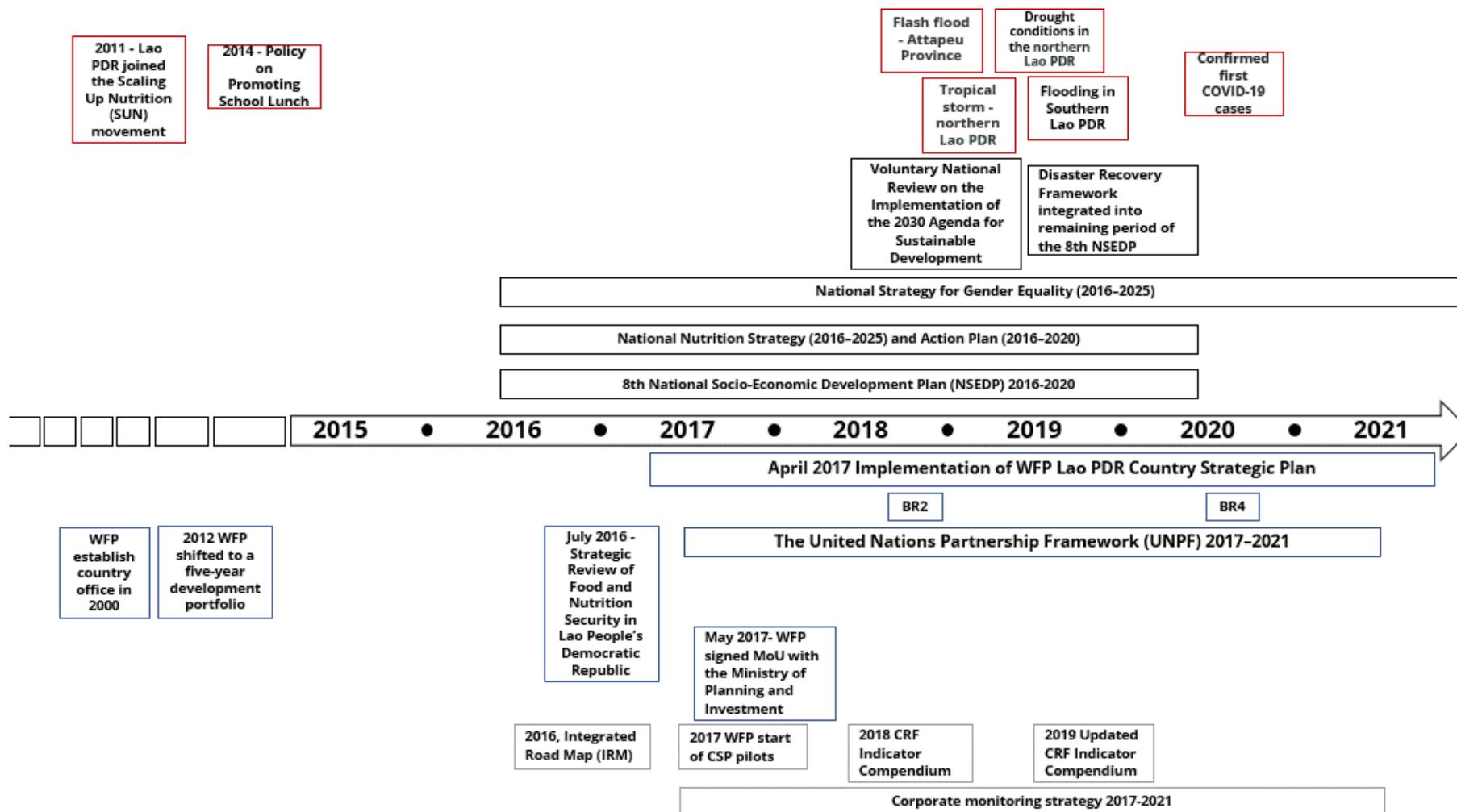
39. As highlighted in Section 1.2, para 14, the context in which WFP is engaged on building resilience of vulnerable households to climatic shocks and stresses, is one of increasing frequency of damaging climatic events.

40. Table 3 shows for each country strategic plan activity the needs-based plan as indicated in the country strategic plan followed by the budget revisions 2 and 4. The last three columns show the total allocated resources, expenditures and balance between the two as at 19<sup>th</sup> January 2021.

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<sup>59</sup> Financial support to WFP is mostly from USDA MGD Food for Education grant. Most of the WB funding and technical support were directly given to the NSMP, while WFP received some WB support to monitor the NSMP.

Figure 2: Lao PDR context and WFP activities



Source : Evaluation Team

**Table 5: Strategic outcomes and activities of the country strategic plan (USD)**

Strategic outcomes	Activity	Needs-based plan (Original)	Budget revision 02	Budget revision 04	Allocated resources*	Expenditure to date**	Balance of resources* **
<b>SO 1:</b> School children in remote rural areas have sustainable access to food by 2021	<b>01.</b> Provide policy support, technical assistance and transfer of capacities to Government of Lao PDR	2,084,770	3,678,611	3,678,611	2,288,356	1,633,088	655,269
	<b>02.</b> Accelerate the implementation of the Government of Lao PDR's plan of action of the school meals programme	27,358,436	32,211,841	37,715,873	35,375,979	26,900,795	8,475,184
	<b>03.</b> Support a national process for the hand-over of school meals to communities	11,386,605	6,895,593	5,421,603	4,799,029	2,231,366	2,567,663
<b>SO 2:</b> Stunting levels among children under 2 in provinces with high levels of malnutrition meet national targets by 2025	<b>04.</b> Provide technical assistance for evidence-based policy dialogue	2,634,609	1,732,861	1,732,862	487,686	358,227	129,459
	<b>05.</b> Stimulate access to local specialized nutritious food for children aged 6-23 months	6,305,463	4,993,928	4,322,595	2,249,680	2,148,358	101,323
	<b>06.</b> Develop a social behavior change communication and establish farmer nutrition schools	10,821,193	6,060,751	8,028,750	6,234,421	2,939,497	3,294,924
<b>SO 3:</b> Vulnerable households in climate-sensitive districts are more resilient to seasonal and long-term shocks and stresses	<b>07.</b> Build community resilience through the creation of productive assets and sustainable livelihood opportunities	7,074,685	6,248,484	9,552,518	5,403,958	4,235,891	1,168,067
<b>SO 4:</b> National and local governance institutions are strengthened to ensure improved service delivery, especially in hard-to-reach areas by 2025	<b>08.</b> Invest in national capacity for food and nutrition security governance	2,243,425	1,226,487	1,226,487	96,711	70,580	26,131
	<b>09.</b> Enable communities to lead and own their food and nutrition security solutions	919,197	3,229,516	3,229,516	1,556,583	901,533	655,050
	<b>10.</b> Enhance government capacity at all levels to prepare for and efficiently respond to natural disasters	775,967	475,699	475,699	94,823	59,061	35,761

Source: WFP System for Programme Approvals and WFP analytics, ACR1 annual country report cumulative financial overview (extracted on 19th January 2021)

\*Sum of Allocated Contributions, Advance and Allocation

\*\* Cumulative monetary value of goods and services received and recorded within the reporting period

\*\*\* Allocated Resources minus Expenditure.

41. Tables 4 and 5 show planned and actual numbers of beneficiaries over the period the country strategic plan has been in operation, disaggregated by age group and gender with actual number of beneficiaries consistently higher than planned.

**Table 6: Total country strategic plan beneficiaries by age group, 2017-2019**

Age range	2017		2018		2019	
	Planned	Actual	Planned	Actual	Planned	Actual
Children (under 5 years)	42,722	36,310	65,239	87,143	55,050	52,505
Children (5-18 years)	135,509	253,660	128,062	180,989	138,521	131,798
Adults (18 years plus)	20,769	221,441	48,325	402,197	36,954	53,463
<b>Total of planned/actual per year</b>	<b>199,000</b>	<b>511,411</b>	<b>241,626</b>	<b>670,329</b>	<b>230,525</b>	<b>237,766</b>

Source: WFP CSP annual country reports 2017, 2018 and 2019.

**Table 7: Total country strategic plan beneficiaries by gender, 2017-2019**

Year	2017		2018		2019	
	Planned	Actual	Planned	Actual	Planned	Actual
Women/Girls	102,771	287,414	120,788	330,472	114,895	118,925
Men/Boys	96,229	223,998	120,838	339,857	115,630	118,841
<b>Total</b>	<b>199,000</b>	<b>511,412</b>	<b>241,626</b>	<b>670,329</b>	<b>230,525</b>	<b>237,766</b>
<b>Women/ Girls as % of total</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>50%</b>

Source: WFP CSP annual country reports 2017, 2018 and 2019.

42. Building on Table 3, Table 6 shows budget and expenditure by strategic outcome as well as the other costs' elements required for implementation of WFP activities. These data will be analysed later in this report.

**Table 8: Budget versus expenditure by strategic outcome (USD)**

Strategic Outcomes	Needs-based Plan (Original)	Budget revision 02	Budget revision 04	Allocated resources*	Expenditures **	Balance of resources ***
<b>SO 1:</b> School children in remote rural areas have sustainable access to food by 2021	40,829,811	42,786,045	46,816,086	42,463,364	30,765,249	11,698,115
<b>SO 2:</b> Stunting levels among children under 2 in provinces with high levels of malnutrition meet national targets by 2025	19,761,264	12,787,540	14,084,207	8,971,787	5,446,081	3,525,705
<b>SO 3:</b> Vulnerable households in climate-sensitive districts are more resilient to seasonal and long-term shocks and stresses	7,074,685	6,248,484	9,552,518	5,403,958	4,235,891	1,168,067
<b>SO 4:</b> National and local governance institutions are strengthened to ensure improved service delivery, especially in hard-to-reach areas by 2025	3,938,589	4,931,702	4,931,702	1,748,116	1,031,174	716,943
Non-strategic outcome specific****				17,571,280	0	17,571,280
<b>Total direct operational cost</b>	<b>71,604,350</b>	<b>66,753,772</b>	<b>75,384,513</b>	<b>76,158,505</b>	<b>41,478,394</b>	<b>34,680,111</b>

<b>Direct support cost (DSC)</b>	8,156,495	7,086,456	7,670,974	5,890,844	4,455,248	1,435,597
<b>Total direct costs</b>	79,760,844	73,840,228	83,055,487	82,049,349	45,933,642	36,115,708
<b>Indirect support cost (ISC)</b>	5,583,259	4,877,728	5,476,720	4,481,663	4,481,663	0
<b>Grand total</b>	<b>85,344,103</b>	<b>78,717,956</b>	<b>88,532,208</b>	<b>86,531,012</b>	<b>50,415,304</b>	<b>36,115,708</b>

Source: WFP System for Programme Approvals and WFP analytics, ACR1 annual country report cumulative financial overview (extracted on 19th January 2021)

\* Sum of Allocated Contributions, Advance and Allocation

\*\* Cumulative monetary value of goods and services received and recorded within the reporting period

\*\*\* Allocated Resources minus Expenditures

\*\*\*\* Refers to a multiyear contribution not yet allocated to any SO at the time of data extraction.

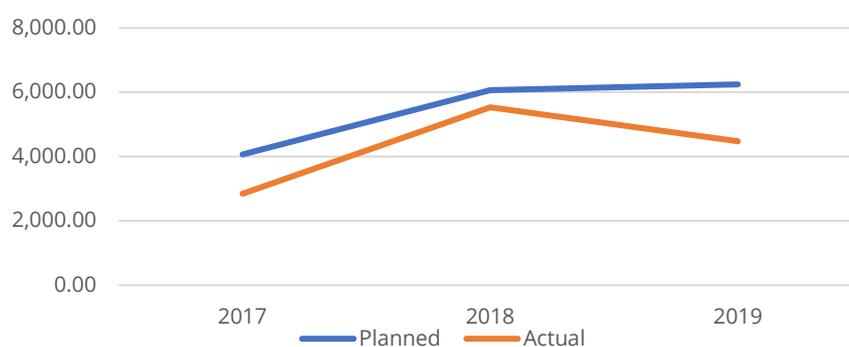
43. Figures 2 to 5 show food distribution, and cash-based transfers (CBT) and commodity voucher transfer per year over the country strategic plan period to date. Annexes 8 and 9 contain assessments of WFP monitoring and evaluation data on the country strategic plan's outcomes, outputs and cross-cutting indicators.

**Figure 3: Total actual food distribution by metric tons (mt) by strategic outcome, year (2017-2019)**



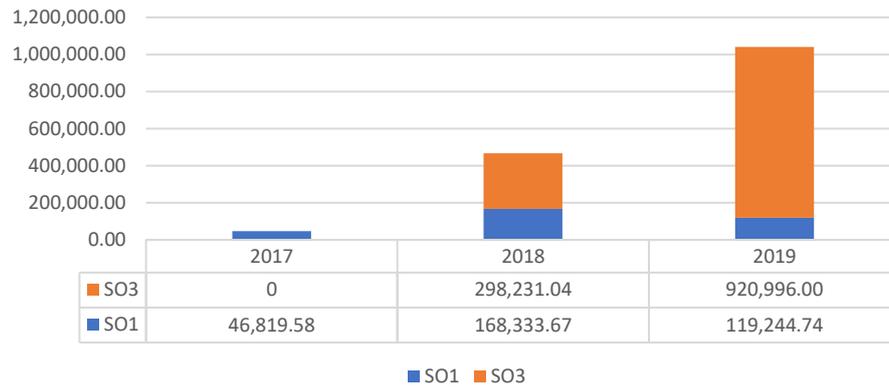
Source: WFP CM-R007 annual distribution (CSP), 2017, 2018 and 2019.

**Figure 4: Planned versus actual food distribution (mt) (2017-2019)**



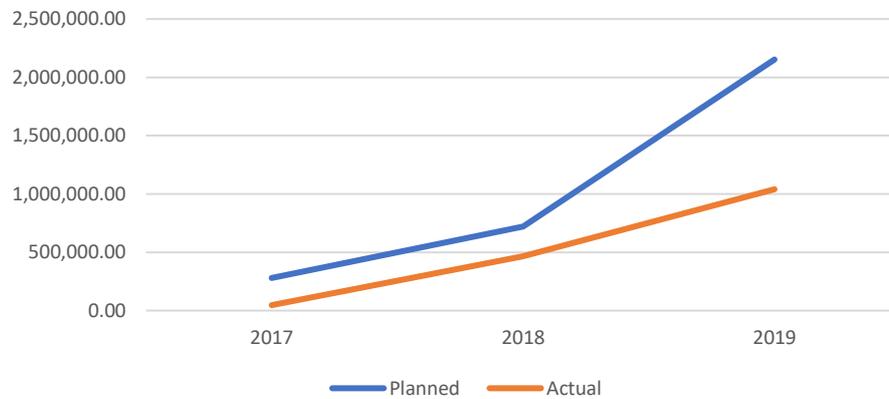
Source: WFP CM-R007 annual distribution (CSP), 2017, 2018 and 2019.

**Figure 5: Total actual cash-based transfer and commodity voucher distribution (USD) by strategic outcome, year (2017-2019)**



Source: WFP CM-R007 annual distribution (CSP), 2017, 2018 and 2019.

**Figure 6: Planned versus actual cash-based transfer and commodity voucher distribution (USD) (2017-2019)**



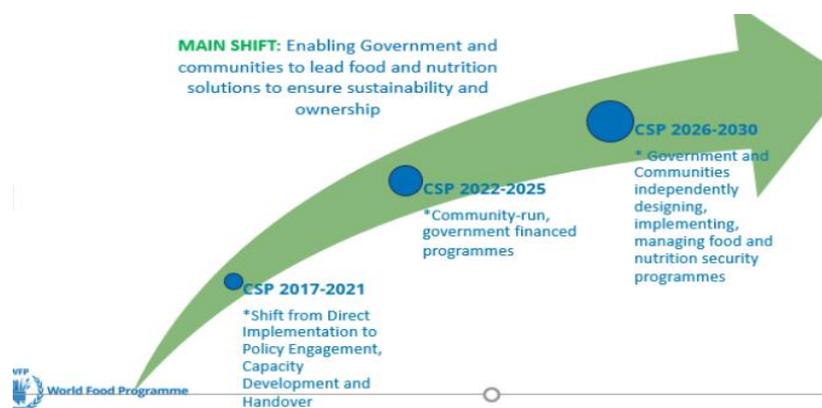
Source: WFP CM-R007 annual distribution (CSP), 2017, 2018 and 2019.

44. The map at Figure 6 shows the coverage of the Country Strategic Plan (2017-2021) across multiple Provinces in Lao PDR (with data as of 12th May 2019.)



46. The country strategic plan highlights the WFP shift from provision of food assistance to policy engagement and an intensification on capacity strengthening. This corporate journey to strengthen country capacity began for WFP with the corporate WFP Capacity Strengthening Policy 2009.<sup>60</sup> In 2016, an evaluation of this policy<sup>61</sup> noted a shift in the global discourse from a focus on capacity strengthening of the skills of individuals to a focus on the performance of groups or organizations and the capacity to deliver results as one dimension of the capacities required for an organization or system to endure over time. The same evaluation also highlighted the importance of effectively linking humanitarian and development work, (now articulated as the “nexus”) - ensuring that engagement in humanitarian emergencies cannot and must not be isolated from broader sustainable development objectives. Whilst the country strategic plan mentions this, it is more clearly articulated in the mid-term review (MTR)<sup>62</sup> (2019), which describes the journey (see Figure 7) that the WFP Lao PDR country office has embarked on. At the same time, it is recognized that shifting from direct implementation to policy engagement is gradual in the current country strategic plan with varied levels of policy engagement across all four strategic outcomes.

**Figure 8: 2017-2030 goals – strategic shifts**



Source: WFP Lao MTR 2019.

## 1.4. METHODOLOGY, LIMITATIONS AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

47. Annex 3 provides a full overview of the evaluation methodology, whose main elements are highlighted below.

### Evaluation questions

48. The evaluation made use of standard United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) and Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)/Development Assistance Committee (DAC) evaluation criteria, including relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability. Moreover, use was made of the criteria of connectedness and coverage as applicable to humanitarian response. The CSPE addressed four main evaluation questions, which are common to all WFP country strategic plan evaluations with 17 sub-evaluation questions. See Table 7.

**Table 9: Evaluation questions and sub-questions**

EQ1 – To what extent is the strategic position, role and specific contribution of WFP based on country priorities and people’s needs as well as WFP strengths?	Main Evaluation Criteria concerned
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<sup>60</sup> WFP, 2009. *Country Capacity Strengthening. Policy on Capacity Development.*

<sup>61</sup> WFP, 2016. *Evaluation of the WFP Policy on Capacity Strengthening (2009).* Vol 1.

<sup>62</sup> WFP, 2019. Lao PDR (2017-2021) Mid-term review.

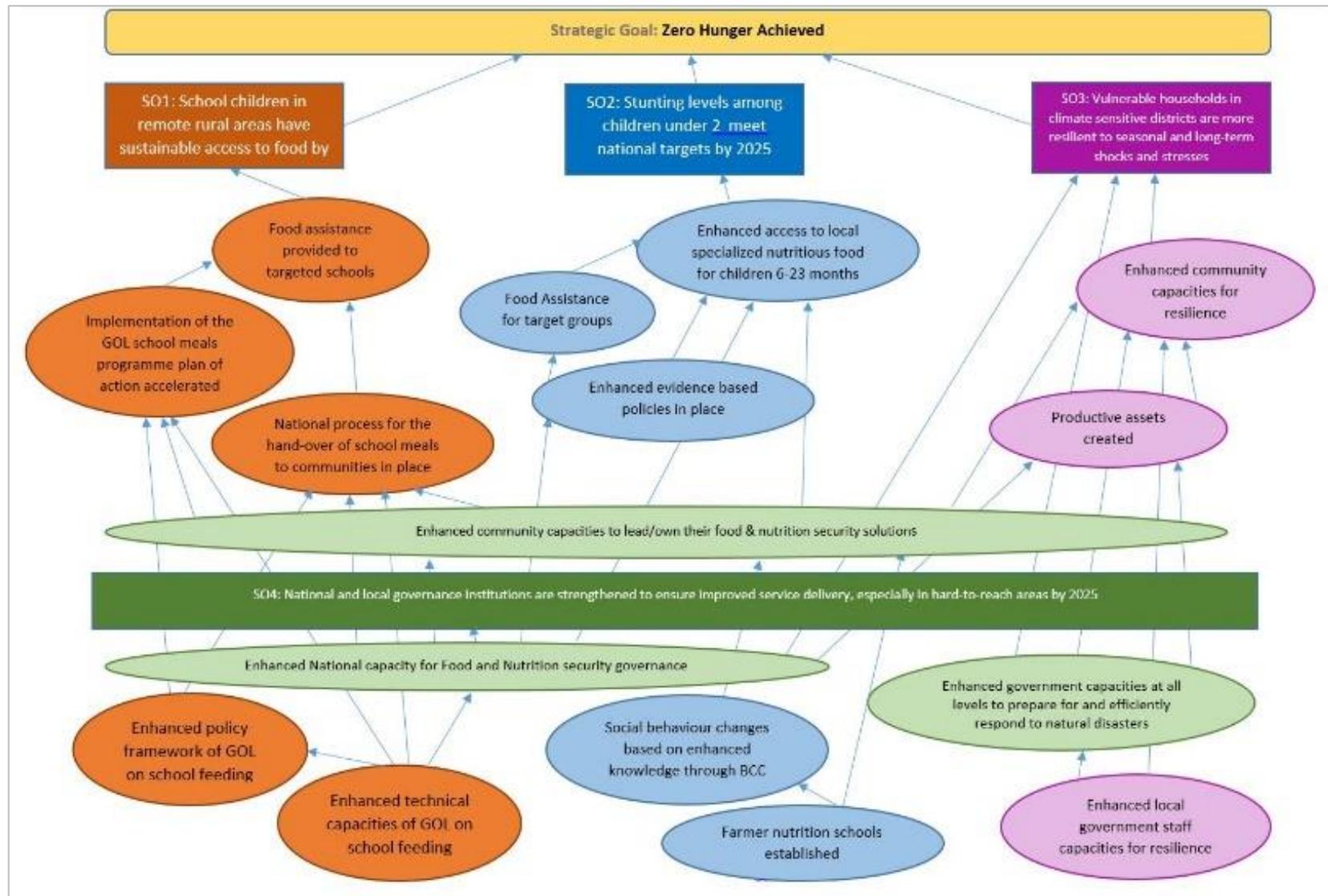
1.1	To what extent is the country strategic plan relevant to national policies, plans, strategies, and goals, including achievement of the national Sustainable Development Goals?	Relevance
1.2	To what extent did the country strategic plan address the needs of the most vulnerable people in the country to ensure that no one is left behind?	Relevance
1.3	To what extent has WFP strategic positioning remained relevant throughout the implementation of the country strategic plan considering changing context, national capacities and needs?	Relevance
1.4	To what extent is the country strategic plan coherent and aligned with the wider United Nations and does it include appropriate strategic partnerships based on the comparative advantage of WFP in the country?	Coherence
<b>EQ2 – What is the extent and quality of the specific contribution of WFP to country strategic plan strategic outcomes in Lao PDR?</b>		
2.1	To what extent did WFP deliver expected outputs and contribute to the expected country strategic plan strategic outcomes?	Effectiveness
2.2	To what extent did WFP contribute to achievement of cross-cutting aims gender equality, humanitarian principles, protection, and accountability to affected populations?	Effectiveness
2.3	To what extent are the achievements of the country strategic plan likely to be sustainable?	Sustainability
2.4	In humanitarian contexts, to what extent did the country strategic plan facilitate more strategic linkages between the humanitarian and development nexus?	Connectedness
<b>EQ3: To what extent has WFP used its resources efficiently in contributing to country strategic plan outputs and strategic outcomes?</b>		
3.1	To what extent were outputs delivered within the intended timeframe?	Efficiency
3.2	To what extent was coverage and targeting of interventions appropriate?	Coverage
3.3	To what extent were WFP activities cost efficient in delivery of its assistance?	Efficiency
3.4	To what extent were alternative, more cost-effective measures considered?	Efficiency
<b>EQ4 – What are the factors that explain WFP performance and the extent to which it has made the strategic shift expected by the country strategic plan?</b>		
4.1	To what extent did WFP analyse or use existing evidence on the hunger challenges, the food security and nutrition issues in the country to develop the country strategic plan?	Relevance
4.2	To what extent has WFP been able to mobilize adequate, predictable, and flexible resources to finance the country strategic plan?	Efficiency
4.3	To what extent did the country strategic plan lead to partnerships and collaborations with other actors that positively influenced performance and results?	Effectiveness / Efficiency
4.4	To what extent did the country strategic plan provide greater flexibility in dynamic operational contexts and how did it affect results?	Effectiveness / Efficiency
4.5	What are the other factors that can explain WFP performance and the extent to which it has made the strategic shift expected by the country strategic plan?	Effectiveness / Relevance

## Evaluation methods

49. The methodology for the evaluation was structured around and guided by an evaluation matrix (Annex 4). The evaluation matrix operationalized each of the evaluation questions and subquestions by articulating dimensions of analysis, lines of inquiry, indicators, and the identification of data sources and techniques for data collection. The inquiry was gender responsive with attention to the use of disaggregated data and potential areas of transformational change for the role of women in decision making.

50. The evaluation used a theory-based approach, in which the assessment of the country strategic plan and its implementation was guided by a conceptualization by the evaluation team (ET) of a high-level, reconstructed theory of change (ToC). To develop it, the evaluation team referred to the strategic outcomes, line of sight, results framework and narrative of the WFP Country Strategic Plan (2017-2020) as well as to a number of WFP strategic corporate documents. The theory of change was discussed and validated with the country office during the inception phase and used to support the analysis of EQ2.1. The reconstructed theory of change (Figure 8) recognizes the primacy of the WFP strategic intent of national and local government institutions to be strengthened by 2025 to ensure improved service delivery, especially in hard-to-reach areas. The analysis will focus on the specific contribution of WFP in relation to the level of ambition of the country strategic plan. It will consider where and how outputs delivered relate directly to discrete areas of influence (outcome level change), situated within the wider (multiple factor/ multiple partner) change process(es) that are considered to be integral to the achievement of each country strategic plan strategic outcome.

Figure 9: Reconstructed theory of change diagram



51. The evaluation team selected field sites for interviewing key informants across the provinces and districts where the WFP programme is engaged. The selection of these field sites included representation of each of the four implementation areas of the strategic objectives. In each of the selected field sites, the team gathered data from selected provincial and district government representatives, WFP field office staff, school teachers and management and other implementing partners, community members, including women, men, girls and boys as well as from other relevant stakeholders in each of the sites concerned. Further details on sampling are provided in Annex 3.

52. The evaluation applied a mixed methods approach to data gathering and analysis, combining qualitative and quantitative methods. Data collection included semi-structured key informant interviews with 210 informants in person and 34 informants remotely, 19 focus group discussions with beneficiaries, a gender questionnaire for WFP country office staff, direct observation during site visits to communities and schools, and a desk review of relevant reports and monitoring data. Follow-up questions were addressed through e-mail and phone communication. Key informants are listed in Annex 11 and documents reviewed in Annex 12.

**Table 10: Number of data responses by remote, in-person and focus group discussion method**

Remote			Lao PDR (in-person)			Focus group discussion participants (in-person)		
Women	Men	Total	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men	Total
20	14	34	90	120	210	116	71	187

53. Given the ongoing COVID-19 preventive measures both in Lao PDR and internationally, the evaluation team used, where possible, a hybrid nature of primary data collection, using a mix of face-to-face and remote interviewing. For national-level stakeholders in Vientiane, the evaluation team members based in Lao PDR (one local consultant and one international locally based consultant) conducted meetings in person, where possible, and team members based outside Lao PDR participated virtually. In remote locations, without sufficient internet-based connectivity, meetings were conducted by the team members resident in Lao PDR only. Internationally based team members conducted primary data collection remotely.

54. An inception phase was conducted between June and October 2020. During this period inception interviews were conducted with staff from the WFP Lao PDR country office, the WFP regional bureau in Bangkok, WFP headquarters and Lao PDR government officials.

55. The evaluation has set out and harvested from the outcome and output monitoring data (Annex 8) against different indicators, noting where data gaps are evident against the prescribed indicators and where there have been changes in indicators over the time series of years for which there are monitoring reports (CSP 2017, 2018, 2019).

56. Data collection through interviews was concentrated over a three-week period, from 12 October 2020 to 30 October 2020. Interviews were conducted remotely through virtual methods and in person. This included team members located in Lao PDR collecting data in the northern and southern regions of Lao PDR over a two-week field visit period, from 10 October to 24 October 2020. As stated in paragraph 7 above, the evaluation also actively coordinated with UNPF and other evaluations. Initial observations from interviews were discussed with the country office in an exit debrief session on 5 November 2020.

57. Information was triangulated across the various sources to validate findings. Three internal team analysis workshops followed the evaluation mission. This facilitated further joint analysis by team members. Preliminary findings were discussed with WFP internal stakeholders in a remote debrief session on 17 November. The analysis was not able to make use of the WFP country capacity strengthening (CCS) framework and its attention to five pathways and three domains. The country capacity strengthening framework was disseminated after the WFP Laos PDR country strategic plan launch in 2017 and was not used in the design stage of the country strategic plan. Therefore, understandably, there was no evidence of such a conceptual approach being considered or applied by the country office and data held also did not “speak” to this, though the potential for the new country strategic plan to make use of this corporate framework is strong.

58. IOD PARC used an internal company quality assurance system that applied the WFP Centralized Evaluation Quality Assurance System (CEQAS).

### **Limitations**

59. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, only two members of the evaluation team were able to conduct data collection in person. As stated above, the rest of the evaluation team conducted primary data collection remotely. Due to COVID-19-related issues, there was a change in team leader after the evaluation inception phase.

60. During data collection, heavy rain caused flooding in one of the intended field sites. This meant a change in one of the data collection sites.

61. Outcome level monitoring of the country strategic plan would be expected to provide a lens through which incremental progress of intermediate outcomes could be detected and understood. However, monitoring of the country strategic plan, which is aligned (in part) to the WFP corporate results framework (in terms of categories and indicators), provided a data set with significant limitations in terms of supporting a robust assessment of progress and contribution at the country strategic plan outcome level. Furthermore, gaps in WFP monitoring data, changes to the format of monitoring, and inconsistencies between annual country reporting data and COMET data, affected analysis of secondary data. The available data did not suffice for a comprehensive analysis of the cost efficiency of WFP assistance. However, the analysis of interview data suggests that there are no substantive concerns over cost efficiency under the country strategic plan period.

### **Ethical considerations**

62. Full ethical considerations can be found in Annex 3: Methodology.

63. IOD PARC's ethical code of conduct is signed up to by all staff and associates. The ethical code of conduct for field work is based on international good practice and draws on a guide published by UNICEF.

64. With the current COVID-19 pandemic, the planning, timing, and management of this evaluation took account of safety of team members and participants. The evaluation team did not request any team member or participant to travel or engage in any activity (face-to-face interviews, meetings) which was in contravention of national/international guidance relating to COVID-19.

65. Where the evaluation team conducted face-to-face data collection/interviewing, the team followed guidance to ensure the safety and security of participants being interviewed. Oral informed consent was obtained from interview participants.

66. We take a "Responsible Data Lifecycle" (Oxfam 201783 and USAID 201984) approach to managing client and evaluation participant data. This applies to personally identifying information, as well as the content of interviews, focus group discussions, and surveys.

67. Within this evaluation, we specifically ensured informed consent, data security and preventing of disclosure.

## 2. Evaluation findings

### 2.1. EVALUATION QUESTION 1: TO WHAT EXTENT IS THE STRATEGIC POSITION, ROLE AND SPECIFIC CONTRIBUTION OF WFP BASED ON COUNTRY PRIORITIES AND PEOPLE'S NEEDS AS WELL AS WFP STRENGTHS?

EQ 1.1 To what extent is the country strategic plan relevant to national policies, plans, strategies, and goals, including achievement of the national Sustainable Development Goals?

68. **During the development of the country strategic plan, there was sufficient consultation with the central ministries to ensure broad alignment with government objectives.** Interviews with WFP and with representatives of central government confirm that consultation workshops with central government representatives were used to present and align the development of the country strategic plan with overarching and sectoral policy and plans. However at provincial and district levels, presentations and consultations were used for targeting of country strategic plan activities, rather than for strategic discussion on designing the country strategic plan.<sup>63</sup> The development of the country strategic plan was also guided by the Zero Hunger Review commissioned by WFP, at the request of the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI). The review drew on cross-sector consultations that included central government and counterparts from 17 provinces across Lao PDR.<sup>64</sup>

69. **The country strategic plan is very closely aligned with Lao PDR's current overarching framework for development, the eighth NSEDP (2016-2020).** As an illustration of this alignment, NSEDP Outcome 2, Output 2 focuses on ensuring food security with adequate nutrition, as well as increased agriculture productivity; and Outcome 2, Output 4 has a direct target to reduce stunting. Outcome 2, Output 3 targets school enrolment rates. However, priorities under this output recognize that school meals are a pull factor for education. The country strategic plan also has some alignment with NSEDP Outcome 3, Output 2, which has targets for establishing early warning systems, and Outcome 3, Output 3, which includes priority actions of providing climate change agricultural education activities.

70. **The country strategic plan shows strong alignment with national sectoral policy instruments and plans.** For example, although school feeding is not a clear priority within the eighth NSEDP, school feeding is clearly positioned within several other key education policies. The Ministry of Education and Sport (MoES) produced a National Policy on Promoting School Lunch (NPPSL, 2014), aiming to ensure that all children are well nourished and healthy. At the same time, the policy also promotes school gardening and animal raising. The Decree on Promotion of School Lunch (DPSL, 2017) and the Plan of Action of School Meals Programme (PA-SMP 2016-2020) further elaborate on the NPPSL with respect to targeting and selection of schools to be covered by the school feeding programme. As a further example of country strategic plan alignment to sectoral policy, school feeding is also included as one of the priorities in the National Nutrition Strategy (2015-2025) and Plan of Action (2016-2020), which also emphasizes the first 1,000 days of life and has a main goal of reducing children under 5 years old) chronic malnutrition (stunting) to 25 percent by 2025. Finally, the Agriculture Development Strategy to 2025 and Vision to the year 2030 (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MoAF), 2015) recognizes that to prevent and control impacts from natural disaster it is necessary to integrate management, prevention and control of natural disaster plans into the agriculture development plan at every level.

71. **The country strategic plan aligns with national gender strategies.** The country strategic plan shows further alignment with key government strategies for gender equality. The National Strategy for Gender Equality (2016-2025) vision includes the eradication of discrimination against women and girls with regard to food security and nutrition, particularly during and immediately after pregnancy, and opportunities for women and girls to have access to the same quality of food as men and boys. The country strategic plan, by ensuring that girls and boys equally benefitted from the school feeding programme as well as by supporting pregnant and lactating women (PLWs), was in full alignment with the National Strategy for Gender Equality (2016-2025). The Strategy for Gender Equality in Agriculture and Forestry

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<sup>63</sup> Interview with district- and provincial-level government staff

Sector (2016-2025) comprises a target of 45 percent participation of women farmers from poor households in all activities, including activities focused on technical training and access to new technologies.<sup>65</sup> The country strategic plan, by including women in the preparation of school meals and farmer schools and by building their capacities as well as by partnering with the Lao Women's Union, contributed to this target.

72. **The country strategic plan is well aligned with the government commitments and priorities on SDG 2.** The country strategic plan states “all strategic outcomes will contribute to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2 and be in synergy with the other Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 5 on gender, SDG 4 on education (strategic outcome 1), and SDG 13 on climate action (strategic outcome 3) and sustainable development”.<sup>66</sup> Documents reviewed and interviews with central government ministries confirmed alignment of the country strategic plan with SDG 2. The Voluntary National Review reaffirms the Government's commitment to implement the Sustainable Development Goals through its national development plans, prioritizing (among others) the accelerated implementation of the National Nutrition Strategy (NNS).<sup>67</sup> The National Nutrition Strategy has 22 priority interventions of which the WFP strategic outcomes contribute directly to 19.<sup>68</sup>

73. **The country strategic plan also holds some alignment with SDG 17.** The country strategic plan aligns with SDG 17.9. Although this is not included in localized Sustainable Development Goal indicators, the country strategic plan falls under the overarching framework for development cooperation in Lao PDR, the Vientiane Declaration on Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (2016-2025), which itself is highlighted under the Lao PDR Sustainable Development Goals framework.<sup>69</sup>

74. **Overall, the country strategic plan is aligned with subnational strategies and plans.** Field-level enquiry found that the country strategic plan had aligned with subnational strategies and plans in all surveyed provinces and districts. Interviews with WFP field offices and subnational government staff confirmed that activities are aligned to provincial plans, for example on school attendance, nutrition, and household economics.<sup>70</sup> For example, the Oudomxai five-year provincial plan includes a focus on food security and agriculture production<sup>71</sup> with the education strategy prioritizing quality of education and enrolment. Alignment of the country strategic plan with district-level plans was similarly observed. Within surveyed districts, planned priorities included poverty reduction, reducing hunger,<sup>72</sup> food security,<sup>73</sup> access

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<sup>65</sup> Ministry of Agriculture (2015) *Strategy for Gender Equality in Agriculture and Forestry Sector 2016-2025, Vision Towards 2030 MAF*. Vientiane

<sup>66</sup> World Food Programme. *Lao People's Democratic Republic Country Strategic Plan (2017-2021)*. Rome. World Food Programme. 2017, pg4

<sup>67</sup> Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic. 2018. *Lao People's Democratic Republic Voluntary National Review on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.

<sup>68</sup> World Food Programme. *Lao People's Democratic Republic Country Strategic Plan (2017-2021)*. Rome. World Food Programme. 2017, pg6

<sup>69</sup> Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic. 2018. *Lao People's Democratic Republic Voluntary National Review on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.

<sup>70</sup> Interview WFP field office.

<sup>71</sup> Interview with provincial-level government.

<sup>72</sup> Interview with district-level government.

<sup>73</sup> Two interviews with district-level government.

to education<sup>74</sup> addressing nutrition in the first 1,000 days and access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH).<sup>75</sup>

#### Summary

The country strategic plan is overall relevant to the Lao PDR national priorities. It was developed in consultation with central ministries and is appropriately aligned with national policies and strategies. The country strategic plan is also aligned with subnational strategies and plans in all surveyed provinces and districts. Finally, it is well aligned with government commitments to SDG 2.

#### EQ 1.2 To what extent did the country strategic plan address the needs of the most vulnerable people<sup>76</sup> in the country to ensure that no one is left behind?

75. SO 1 aims to address the root causes of food insecurity and low education indicators. As highlighted in paragraph 11, **people living in remote regions are more vulnerable to food insecurity,<sup>77</sup> with vulnerability linked to poverty, rural residence, and ethnicity.<sup>78</sup> The country strategic plan clearly states that, through SO 1, WFP is targeting school children in remote and ethnically diverse districts.** WFP identified schools to participate in the programme using a combination of variables and the results of existing surveys. Variables and surveys included nutrition indicators from the Ministry of Planning and Investment/UNICEF, poverty indicators from the World Bank, and educational indicators from the Ministry of Education and Sports. WFP additionally used its own geographic information system (GIS)-related assessments, and also considered schools supported from the previous WFP programmes. Based on these variables and factors, WFP produced a long list of suggested schools, which was finalized by the Ministry of Education and Science, using its own set of education indicators.

76. It is not clear how WFP prioritized different variables to select the target schools, nor is it clear on how the Ministry of Education and Science used educational indicators to finalize the list of participating schools. The data in the surveys that WFP used to identify locations were mostly up to date, however, the Government's own definition of the poorest districts changed between the dates of some of the surveys and the commencement of the country strategic plan. Due to these factors and the use of legacy programmes, as county office staff reported,<sup>79</sup> some of the target schools were not always within the most food insecure districts. For example, WFP implemented school feeding in some urban areas, which tend to be more accessible and less food insecure. Therefore, although there has been extensive consideration of data to target SO 1, **there is a lack of clarity on whether the programme targeted the most vulnerable.**

77. SO 2 aims to target "provinces with high levels of malnutrition" Availability of nutrition statistics at the time of developing the country strategic plan has limited the extent to which WFP was able to target the areas with the highest levels of malnutrition. Under SO 2, WFP used nutrition statistics in the Lao Social Indicator Survey (LSIS) 2011 to identify target locations. At this time Luang Namtha province had the worst level of stunting, at 23.2 percent. However, according to the 2017 LSIS (published in 2018), Luang Namtha was the 10th province (out of the 17) with the highest level of stunting. WFP targeted activities based on the 2011 data available at the time of developing the country strategic plan. WFP did not re-target its support in view of the 2017 results. WFP reasoned that stunting levels in Luang Namtha remained higher than the

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<sup>74</sup> Interview with district-level government.

<sup>75</sup> Interview with district-level government.

<sup>76</sup> The evaluation takes note of the WFP policy on policy protection and accountability (EB 2 2020/4/A/1/Rev2) however considering the CSP and evaluation ToRs do refer to this terminology it is kept as such when referring to these documents.

<sup>77</sup> Poverty Profile in Lao PDR: *Poverty Report for the Lao PDR Expenditure and Consumption Survey 2018-2019*.

<sup>78</sup> Lilao Bouapao, L, Insouvanh, C., Pholsena, M, Armstrong, J and Staab, M. 2016. Strategic Review of Food and Nutrition Security in Lao People's Democratic Republic.

<sup>79</sup> Interviews WFP CO staff.

national average (at 34.1 percent versus 33.0 percent), and with less than two years remaining for the project it would not have made sense to retarget.

78. **WFP reached 22 percent of all villages in Lao PDR, working in 17 of the 23 priority districts. This demonstrates the valuable reach of WFP programming.** According to Decree 309/PM (2013) a district with more than 50 percent “poor villages” is identified as a “poor district”.<sup>80</sup> Based on this decree, a total of 23 districts were identified as poor. As can be seen in Table 9, WFP has been implementing at least one of the four strategic outcomes in 17 of the 23 districts. However, as Table 10 shows, WFP reached 38 districts in 2017, rising to 49 districts in 2019. This shows that although WFP has an extensive and valuable reach in Lao PDR and are reaching a greater number of districts than the number of districts that have been identified as poor, it has not targeted, and is not reaching, all the identified poor districts. However, importantly, as previously mentioned, targeting of WFP projects are not solely based on poverty. Additionally, targeting also considers the location of activities from other development partners, aiming to avoid duplication.

**Table 11: WFP operations in the government-priority poor districts (2015–2020)**

District	Province	WFP activity (any activity SOs 1-4) <sup>81</sup>
Xaychamphone	Borikhamxay	
Huameuang	Houa Phane	X
Xamtay	Houa Phane	X
Khouane	Huaphan	X
Xone	Huaphan	X
Long	Louang Numtha	X
Nalae	Louang Numtha	X
Pak Xeng	Luang Phrabang	
Pakbeng	Oudomxay	X
Nga	Oudomxay	X
Phongsali	Phongsaly	X
Bountai	Phongsaly	X
Samphanh	Phongsaly	X
Nhotou	Phongsaly	X
Khua	Phongsaly	X
Mai	Phongsaly	X
Ta oi	Saravanh	X
Samuoi	Saravanh	X
Nong	Savannakhet	
Xaysathan	Sayabuli	
Longcheng	Saysomboun	
Hom	Vientiane	
Kaleum	Xekong	X

Source: WFP Lao PDR country office, 2020

**Table 12: Numbers of provinces, districts and villages reached by WFP (2017-2020)**

	WFP actual number in 2017	WFP actual number in 2018	WFP actual number in 2019	WFP actual number in 2020	Total number in Lao PDR
<b>Provinces</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Districts</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>148</b>

<sup>80</sup> The new decree-348 in 2017 (which replaced decree 309/PM 2013) has 9 criteria to designate a district as poor (e.g. over 70 percent of the total villages in the district have graduated from poverty). Designation of the districts according to this criterion is ongoing.

<sup>81</sup> World Food Programme. 2019. Annual Country Report. 2020.

<b>Villages</b>	<b>2,500</b>	<b>2,040</b>	<b>2,205</b>	<b>1,993</b>	<b>8,464</b>
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Source: Data from 2017 - World Food Programme. annual performance reports 2017, 2018. Rome. World Food Programme; data from 2018 - Interview WFP CO senior management; data from 2019 - World Food Programme in Lao PDR 2019 In Numbers; data from 2020- Interview WFP CO senior management.

79. **The remote locations of some of the most vulnerable communities has challenged WFP reach.** In the 2017 annual country report (ACR), the country office indicated that the country strategic plan has a “last mile” approach, which has led to higher inclusion rates for activities under SO 2.<sup>82</sup> Indeed, as reported in paragraph 78, WFP have extensive reach within the poor districts of Lao PDR. However, both senior and field country office staff, as well as staff from local government, reported that WFP Lao PDR has difficulty reaching the most vulnerable communities because of the remoteness of these communities. Field staff explained that WFP needed more support from the Government to access the remote rural communities, both in terms of improving infrastructure and in mobilizing the communities.

80. **WFP is challenged when it has to navigate the tension between competing positions of reaching the most vulnerable or reaching a greater number of beneficiaries.** It was highlighted by several country office staff that WFP have been challenged when faced with the options of either working at scale and targeting a larger number of “easier-to-reach” communities for which there is a higher degree of success, or trying to reach the most vulnerable, most remote communities. It was stressed that WFP needs to operate at a significant scale, but also that WFP cannot avoid the most challenging places, which are less accessible, and where interventions are more costly and have less chance of success and sustainability. A challenge for WFP is also to develop a model to operate in these most remote locations.

#### Summary

The country strategic plan was designed to target the most vulnerable groups for the aims of each strategic outcome. Appropriate vulnerability indicators were used to identify the most vulnerable. However, there is a lack of a clear strategy on how indicators were prioritized, and the availability of up-to-date data at the time of developing the country strategic plan may have limited the extent to which WFP reached the most vulnerable. WFP also faced logistical challenges to reach the most remote communities. Nevertheless, WFP demonstrated an impressive reach, operating in 22 percent of all villages in Lao PDR and working in 17 of the Government’s 23 priority districts. WFP faces a challenge in balancing costly interventions in remote areas against reaching greater numbers of more accessible beneficiaries.

**EQ 1.3 To what extent has WFP strategic positioning remained relevant throughout the implementation of the country strategic plan in light of changing context, national capacities, and needs?**

81. **WFP successfully adapted its strategic position to respond to emergency situations.** Emergency response was not a feature designed within the country strategic plan, and there was no budget line for response activities. The decision to “downgrade the emergency preparedness and response (EPRP) component of the country strategic plan” came as a result of changes in ministerial responsibilities for EPRP, and no ministry committing to investing for activities.<sup>83</sup> However, when the floods occurred in 2018 and 2019, on a request from the Government, WFP successfully augmented national response efforts to respond to the emergencies. WFP was able to respond using immediate funding from headquarters. Government informants at central, provincial and district levels all reported on the speed, quality, and extensive reach of WFP disaster response. National counterparts at various levels provided positive feedback on WFP emergency responses. Overall, they found that WFP was able to mobilize resources

<sup>82</sup> World Food Programme. 2017. Annual Country Report 2017.

<sup>83</sup> WFP Laos. 2019. MTR CSP Laos PDR.

quickly and effectively utilizing its extensive field presence.<sup>84</sup> It is also recognized that the modality of the WFP cash response provided a valuable example of how a government social support system could work.<sup>85</sup>

82. **The country strategic plan allowed WFP to appropriately respond to changing needs as a result of COVID-19.** The impact of COVID-19 on Lao PDR has largely been socio-economic. This has caused increased pressure for vulnerable households.<sup>86</sup> In response to the closure of all schools in the country between 17 March 2020 and 21 April 2020, the WFP country office in Lao PDR modified the school feeding programme to provide a safety net for the school children and their families. Instead of school feeding, the country office distributed, as take-home rations (THRs), the remaining commodity stocks at the schools, disbursing a total of 981,058 mt of food commodities.<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, to implement COVID-19-related responses, the country office made a second substantive country strategic plan budget revision in September 2020. The revision, which increased the needs-based plan to USD 88,532,208, did not adjust the strategic orientation of the country strategic plan, but changed activities in three of the four strategic outcomes.<sup>88</sup> The changes were appropriate to respond to the pressure on vulnerable households, and the country office continued school feeding under Activity 2 until official hand-over in June 2021, expanded its agriculture for nutrition support under Activity 6, and increased cash-based transfer beneficiaries under Activity 7.

EQ 1.4 To what extent is the country strategic plan coherent and aligned with the wider United Nations and does it include appropriate strategic partnerships based on the comparative advantage of WFP in the country?

83. **The country strategic plan offers a conceptually coherent approach on zero hunger, supporting partnerships with other agencies and organizations.** The partnerships described below illustrate how the country strategic plan offers a framework around tackling zero hunger that provides the opportunity to partner with other organizations with complementary and/or overlapping objectives.

84. **The country strategic plan strongly aligns with overall objectives of the United Nations partnership framework in Lao PDR.** The country strategic plan strategic objectives 1, 2 and 3 clearly align with and have contributed to the results of three of the expected outcomes of the UNPF: Expected Outcome 3 – climate change, disaster management and environmental; Expected Outcome 4 – education; and Expected Outcome 6 – food security and nutrition. The UNPF is a broad-based framework that has yet to provide a platform for more strategic and fundamental consideration and adjustment by United Nations agencies in terms of strategic partnership working, this being considerate of a mutually shared view on where the comparative advantage of an agency in the particular operating context lies. Agencies are still focused on areas of operational collaboration where their respective areas of programming interest – aligned to their respective corporate mandates - overlap. WFP reputation in Lao PDR and its recognized perceived comparative advantage lie in the areas of emergency relief, supporting emergency preparedness and food distribution.<sup>89</sup>

85. **Alignment of the country strategic plan with the Rome-based agencies country programmes has facilitated some strong partnership working with FAO and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).** WFP has mapped out the Lao PDR-based United Nations agencies whose programmes overlap with thematic areas of country strategic plan strategic objectives and this is illustrated in Table 11. Most significantly overlapping with the WFP country strategic plan are the Rome-based agencies, FAO and IFAD, country programmes. WFP signed a local partnership agreement with FAO in March 2017 for “policy development and implementation”.<sup>90</sup> This has resulted in several coordinated

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<sup>84</sup> Interview with central government staff; Interview provincial-level government staff; Interview WFP country office staff.

<sup>85</sup> World Food Programme. Annual Country Report 2018. 2019. Rome. World Food Programme.

<sup>86</sup> UN Country Team in Lao PDR. November 2020. *UN Lao PDR Socio-Economic Response Framework to COVID-19*.

<sup>87</sup> WFP Lao PDR. 2020. *Take-Home Ration Report Lao PDR*. August 2020.

<sup>88</sup> World Food Programme 2020. Country Strategic Plan Revision. Version 16 September 2020.

<sup>89</sup> Interviews with partner UN agencies.

<sup>90</sup> World Food Programme. Lao People's Democratic Republic Annual Country Report 2017; *Country Strategic Plan (2017–2021)*.

activities, including emergency response support to flood-affected populations in 2018,<sup>91</sup> implemented under SO 3, and a crop and food security assessment mission under SO 4.<sup>92</sup> Partnership with IFAD has been through the agriculture for nutrition (AFN) project contributing to strategic outcomes 2, 3 and 4, and funded through the Global Agriculture and Food Security Programme.<sup>93</sup>

**Table 13: United Nations agencies whose programmes overlap with the country strategic plan objectives**

United Nations agency	SO1	SO2	SO3	SO4
Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)	X	X	X	X
International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)	X	X	X	X
International Labour Organization (ILO)			X	
United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF)	X		X	
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)			X	X
The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)	X	X		
United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)	X	X		
World Health Organization (WHO)		X		

Source: World Food Programme. 2018. WFP Laos Partnership and Resource Mobilization Strategy CSP (2017-2021).

86. The alignment of the country strategic plan objectives with the programmes of other United Nations agencies has facilitated some further United Nations coordination and collaborations, each building on their respective comparative advantages. The geographic coverage of the WFP school feeding programme overlapped with some UNICEF stunting prevention activities. Coverage was not strategically planned, but the agencies coordinated on the ground. UNICEF provided water and sanitation initiatives and WFP provided school meals to some of the same schools in two of the eight provinces (Saravane and Oudomxay).<sup>94</sup> Alignment of objectives with UNFPA offer a further example of partnership working. Building on existing WFP outreach through school meals in primary education, and capitalizing on UNFPA knowledge and established awareness campaigns, the two formalized a partnership around the “Noi” 2030 Framework,<sup>95</sup> targeting adolescent girls.

87. To achieve greater coherence and alignment WFP joined and helped establish several working groups and meetings:

- **The school meals technical working group:** This group is co-chaired with Catholic Relief Services (CRS) to share experiences and carry out joint advocacy regarding school feeding, which resulted in the Government allocating funds in the national budget for school feeding.<sup>96</sup>
- **The logistics cluster coordination meeting:** This meeting is held monthly and its key operational achievement was ensuring coordination during the emergency floods.<sup>97</sup>
- **The cash working group:** WFP supported the establishment of a local cash working group, co-chaired by WFP and the United Nations Capital Development Fund.<sup>98</sup> Operationally, this led to a better alignment of cash assistance among the different organizations implementing cash-based

<sup>91</sup> World Food Programme. Lao PDR. Annual Country Report. 2018.

<sup>92</sup> World Food Programme. Lao PDR. Annual Country Report. 2019.

<sup>93</sup> World Food Programme. Lao PDR Annual Country Report. 2017.

<sup>94</sup> Interview WFP field staff.

<sup>95</sup> A programme of activities to help protect girls’ rights: reduce out-schooling, reduce early marriages and early pregnancies, fight gender-based violence, and engage men and boys to participate into the promotion of women and girls’ rights.

<sup>96</sup> Interview with WFP country office staff.

<sup>97</sup> Interview with WFP country office staff.

<sup>98</sup> World Food Programme. 2019. Lao People’s Democratic Republic Annual Country Report 2019. *Country Strategic Plan (2017-2021)*.

transfers. WFP supported the development of cash and voucher assistance guidelines and a minimum expenditure basket for the country.<sup>99</sup>

- **The inclusive education thematic working group:** WFP co-chairs this working group with an international non-governmental organization.<sup>100</sup>
- **The Lao PDR-United Nations Partnership Framework Result Group 6 on Food and Nutrition Security:** WFP chairs this group, which monitors progress on improving food security and nutrition.<sup>101</sup>

### Summary

The country strategic plan is a coherent approach to addressing zero hunger. This has contributed towards working relationships with the Rome-based agencies and UNFPA and, due to its alignment with the UNPF, it has resulted in the complementarity of activities with UNICEF. Furthering greater coherence, WFP has also joined and helped establish several multi-partner working groups.

## 2.2. EVALUATION QUESTION 2: WHAT ARE THE EXTENT AND QUALITY OF THE SPECIFIC CONTRIBUTION OF WFP TO COUNTRY STRATEGIC PLAN STRATEGIC OUTCOMES IN THE COUNTRY?

### EQ 2.1 To what extent did WFP deliver expected outputs and contribute to the expected country strategic plan strategic outcomes?

88. The CSPE focuses on the performance of WFP in contributing to country strategic plan strategic outcomes, with progress on outputs being considered the necessary (but not always sufficient) means through which the intervention logic of the country strategic plan is realized. Progress at the strategic outcome level can be affected by several factors. Whilst most of these will be out of direct WFP control, a theory of change analysis should identify those factors that are most open to WFP influence and where WFP engagement in country can be put to best effect.

89. In the (reconstructed) theory of change for the WFP country strategic plan represented in Figure 8, the intermediate outcome space is not clearly apparent or articulated. Whilst not a requirement of WFP in the roll out of its corporate results framework, it is this lens of a defined intermediate outcome or result (on the causal pathway to the final outcome) that would allow the country office to monitor, track and reflect on incremental progress and thereby more proactively set a course and steer within the country strategic plan period towards the strategic outcome.

90. As mentioned in the methodology section, the country office's monitoring of the country strategic plan, which is aligned to the WFP corporate results framework, provided a data set with significant limitations to supporting a robust assessment of progress and contribution at the country strategic plan outcome level. These limitations include monitoring related to capacity strengthening, especially at the community level.

91. Given the above context of the reconstructed theory of change and the monitoring framework,<sup>102</sup> the evaluation team has provided an overall assessment of the performance on delivery of outputs and the progress in terms of each of the four country strategic plan strategic outcomes (Table 12).

92. The output assessment is drawn from detailed data on outputs (as of end 2019) in Annex 8. The "progress to date" rating using a scale of "significant progress", "some progress", "limited progress" and "very limited progress" is based on an aggregated assessment of the progress made (2017, 2018, 2019) in relation to the individual output Indicators as monitored by WFP.

<sup>99</sup> WFP. 2020. WFP Lao PDR Country Brief, April 2020.

<sup>100</sup> See paragraph 162 for detail.

<sup>101</sup> SO2 Factsheet WFP. 2019. Nutrition Ending all forms of malnutrition, May 2019.

<sup>102</sup> i.e. The WFP Lao PDR CSP logframe

93. The outcome assessment considers the “read” based on the reflected monitoring data held by WFP alongside a more rounded and nuanced assessment by the evaluation team that draws in the qualitative evidence gathered through the evaluation, which in turn forecasts ahead to the position (likelihood of achieving end-of-country-strategic-plan target) at the end of the country strategic plan period in December 2021. The “progress to date” rating is based on a cumulative assessment of the progress (as reported in monitoring data) made in reference to individual outcome indicators under each strategic outcome towards their respective country strategic plan end targets (see Annex 8 for details). The scaling of “significant progress”, “some progress”, “limited progress” and “very limited progress” in Table 12 relates to an unweighted read (end of 2019) across the set of indicators for a strategic outcome. The assessment in respect to “likelihood of achieving end of country strategic plan (2021) outcomes” takes each strategic outcome statement at face value and considers the projected December 2021 position based on what is known and/or observed around the current trajectory of progress and operating context in which WFP is aiming to make a contribution. The purpose of Table 12 is to provide an outcome oriented (with careful interpretation) account of country strategic plan performance and more importantly to be a basis for further reflection and dialogue on the path being taken by the country strategic plan, movement along this path and future challenges and opportunities in relation to strategic and tactical adjustments.

**Table 14: An overall assessment of the performance on delivery of output indicators<sup>103</sup> and outcomes indicators against each strategic outcome**

Strategic outcome	Progress towards delivery of outputs to date (2017-2019) <sup>104, 105</sup>	Progress towards strategic outcome (as of end 2019) as tracked by CO monitoring data <sup>106</sup>	Likelihood of achieving end-of-CSP (2021) outcome – ET assessment <sup>107</sup>
Strategic outcome 01 - School children in remote rural areas have sustainable access to food by 2021	Significant progress	Significant progress <sup>108</sup>	Will fall somewhat short – given nature of findings below
Strategic outcome 02 – Stunting levels among children under 2 in provinces with high levels of malnutrition meet national targets by 2025	Significant progress	Limited progress	Will fall somewhat short – given nature of findings below
Strategic outcome 03 – Vulnerable households in climate-sensitive districts are more resilient to seasonal and long-term shocks and stresses	Significant progress	Limited progress	Will fall somewhat short – given nature of findings below
Strategic outcome 04 – National and local governance institutions are strengthened to ensure improved service delivery, especially in hard-to-reach areas by 2025	Very limited progress	Very limited progress	Will fall significantly short – given nature of the engagement and progress to date <sup>109</sup>

94. Below, the evaluation team has provided a narrative account of the findings from Table 12. The findings are set out by strategic outcome and are informed by progress against outputs and by signalling the delivery (either fully or partially) of major activity areas in relation to the country strategic plan. The analysis uses the framing of the reconstructed theory of change and the main areas of WFP engagement through which WFP (in its country strategic plan (2017-2021)), working with partners in Lao PDR, is aiming to make a tangible contribution to progress at the strategic outcome level. Each strategic outcome area starts with an overall summary finding on country strategic plan performance in relation to the outcome level, followed by overview paragraphs on the activities undertaken by WFP, the context for the strategic outcome and the nature of the indicators being used by the WFP country office to track and reflect on their progress. This is then followed by more detailed findings presented under each of the main areas of engagement.

### **STRATEGIC OUTCOME 1: School children in remote rural areas have sustainable access to food by 2021.**

<sup>103</sup> Output indicators as defined and reported by WFP in COMET CM-R008 reports. Please note that these “output indicators” do not cover beneficiaries reached, cash distributed, and food distributed, which are reported separately (CM-R007 annual distribution (CSP)) and are reported on and discussed elsewhere in this report (see Section 1.3, figures 2–5).

<sup>104</sup> Output indicators’ analysis corresponds closely to the extent specific activities undertaken and not in relation to what was planned for.

<sup>105</sup> Levels of progress based on an SO-level summation of the progress scores given to individual CSP outcomes and outputs (by the ET), based on their performance (latest follow up) against CSP year-end targets (see Annex 8), based on the following scale: “met target” = actual result = target; “somewhat off-target” = <30% difference between target and actual result; “significantly off-target” ≥30% difference between target and actual result.

<sup>106</sup> Performance data on outcomes are drawn from the 2017, 2018 and 2019 WFP COMET reports (CM-R010b).

<sup>107</sup> Assessment based on markers of progress that the ET expected to find in relation to these outcome statements (and as discussed in the findings) rather than the indicators on outcome level change being used within the CO monitoring framework.

<sup>108</sup> Assessment based on monitored indicators (2017-2019) relate to education outcomes.

<sup>109</sup> This does not reflect the progress of capacity strengthening activities under other SOs.

95. WFP tracks progress of strategic outcome 1, at the outcome level, through the annually measured indicators, including: (i) enrolment rate, attendance rate and retention rate; and (ii) the completion of process milestones within five pathways<sup>110</sup> of the Zero Hunger Capacity Scorecard.

96. **WFP school meal activities are contributing to improvements in children's school attendance.** The 2019 WFP annual country report states, "as a result of WFP activities, pre-primary and primary school enrolment has slightly improved since 2018 and attendance rates in 2019 have remained high and above target values".<sup>111</sup> Indeed, the evaluation found significant evidence of the positive effects of school feeding on children's attendance. In addition, there were reports of further, related benefits of the school meals programme, such as benefits to children's ability to study and benefits to parents. Senior government staff at provincial level, and teachers from several schools confirmed that the school meals programme has supported children's attendance and in some cases the meals have also helped children study better. Focus group discussions (FGD) with a village education development committee (VEDC), with parents and with the Lao Women's Union in a district of northern Laos, also reported improved attendance, and similarly stated additional benefits, suggesting that the programme has additionally helped parents not to worry about returning from the field to cook for their children.

97. **The girl student dropout rate, although slightly reducing since 2017, was still off target in 2019.** WFP outcome-level monitoring data for SO 1 reveals a gender-related challenge of the girl student dropout rate being off target and higher than that of boy students. It is however worth noting that between 2017 and 2019 the girl student dropout rate decreased slightly, though more slowly than the boy student dropout rate, which was on target by 2019.

98. **Challenges in the handover process of the school meals programme put at risk sustainable access to food for children in remote areas.** The process is however exposing some fundamental challenges at national, subnational and community levels. The challenges are a source of valuable learning in terms of what WFP needs to change/improve to support the Government of Lao PDR to realize an affordable national school feeding programme. The evaluation reports on these challenges further below.

99. Three activities were expected to contribute to strategic outcome 1:

- **Activity 1:** Provide policy support, technical assistance and capacity transfer
- **Activity 2:** Accelerate implementation of the Government's plan of action for the school meals programme
- **Activity 3:** Support a national process for hand-over of the school meals programme to communities and to the Government

100. The reconstructed country strategic plan theory of change illustrates how the three activities relate to the five interventions that act as enabling factors and preconditions through which progress to strategic outcome 1 was to be achieved. The five enabling factors are:

- A. Enhanced policy framework of the Government on school feeding**
- B. Enhanced technical capacities of the Government on school feeding**
- C. National process for the handover of school meals to communities in place**
- D. Implementation of the Government's school meal programme accelerated**
- E. Food assistance provided to targeted schools.**

101. Below, the evaluation reports on the progress of each of the component precondition parts to SO 1.

#### **A. Enhanced policy framework of the Government on school feeding**

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<sup>110</sup> The five pathways of the Zero Hunger Capacity Scorecard relate to: (i) policies and legislation, (ii) institutional accountability, (iii) strategic planning and engagement, (iv) national programme design and delivery, and (v) engagement and participation of non-state actors.

<sup>111</sup> World Food Programme. 2019. Lao People's Democratic Republic Annual Country Report 2019. Pg.9

102. **WFP has contributed to movements on the Government's policy and budget front**, reflecting the commitment from the Government towards school feeding as a key contributor to achieving national educational outcomes. Part of Activity 1 of the country strategic plan is to provide policy support and to support development of legislative frameworks. Annual country reports state that over the course of the country strategic plan, WFP has contributed to the drafting of seven pieces of legislation that support the handover process and ensure long-term sustainability of the school meals programme. Three of the directives have been fully approved. The directives include: the revision of the school agriculture guidelines, which strengthen nutrition and gender aspects and ensure each educational institution has a garden;<sup>112</sup> the school meals handover plan, outlining the joint work plan and timeline for both the Government and WFP;<sup>113</sup> and the proposal of funds for the national school meals programme in national budgets. The proposal for funds amounted to 800 LAK<sup>114</sup> (approximately USD 0.10) per student per day for the purchase of supplementary fresh foods to complement local contributions. This current budget is based on Article 61,<sup>115</sup> providing emergency funding for the programme. The draft ninth NSEDP reflects the intention of the Government to introduce a decree about the promotion of school lunch, which (if passed) will not necessarily affect the rate but, rather than based on emergency funding, will make the school feeding approach a feature for Lao PDR for the next five to ten years.

### **B. Enhanced technical capacities of the Government on school feeding**

103. A further part of Activity 1 is to provide technical assistance and capacity transfer. The Government has a clear vision and plan with assigned human resources and with clarity on roles and responsibilities to support and then take over school feeding. This includes the Department of Education and Sports providing training on school gardens, chicken raising and nutrition, the Department of Agriculture and Forestry providing training on fish farming (fish ponds) and the Department of Health providing technical support to identify water sources and design supply solutions in support of school lunch provision. **WFP has been engaging closely with the Government to build institutional frameworks and capacities and to provide equipment to ensure that the communities and the Government are prepared for the phased handover.**<sup>116</sup>

104. **The evaluation found evidence of good examples of district and provincial level structures receiving WFP capacity strengthening and coordination activities.** These include: the study visits that exposed provincial and district officials to successful school meals programmes in other countries (para 110); support to the Ministry of Education and Sports and related provincial and district departments for the monitoring of school meals activities (para 111); and support with developing and coordinating structures for the handover of the school meals programme (para 113).

105. **Community and village-level structures have received capacity strengthening training that supports the school meals programme.** A significant number of reports and most interviews with village-level structures, such as the Lao Women's Union (at the village level), VEDCs and teachers, illustrated that these structures had received, very positively, often several different types of training. Topics included cooking and how to use different ingredients and prepare varied menus, nutrition, management and finances of school meals, and record keeping for storekeepers and cashiers. Interviews included some clear reports of participants feeling confident after training, with additional reports of training being utilized after project closure and after schools had been handed over. The strengthening of village-level structures to manage the school meals programme is similarly reflected in the results of WFP community capacity assessment (CCA) in 2018. WFP used the community capacity assessment tool to analyse capacities at the community level, to assess the "readiness" of each school community to contribute toward the management and the sustainability of the school meals programme and to identify tailored support based on the needs and gaps identified through the community capacity assessment. The community capacity assessment is comprised of four main variables: vulnerability, access to infrastructure, VEDC performance, and community awareness. VEDC performance refers to the abilities and performance of VEDC in: a) fixing

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<sup>112</sup> World Food Programme. Lao People's Democratic Republic Annual Country Report 2019.

<sup>113</sup> World Food Programme. Lao People's Democratic Republic Annual Country Report 2017.

<sup>114</sup> Laotian Kip.

<sup>115</sup> Interview with government staff.

<sup>116</sup> World Food Programme. Lao People's Democratic Republic Annual Country Report 2019.

issues related to the delivery of school lunches, b) problem-solving of school meals, garden or other school issues, and c) having a good sense of planning. The assessment in 2018 reported that, of the 1,417 schools assessed, 66 percent were scored as having high or very high VEDC functionality.<sup>117</sup>

106. **However, field-level inquiries also indicated that in some cases training was not sufficient to build sustainable capacity of village-level structures.** Data collected from field-level interviews suggested capacity strengthening did not reach a sufficiently diverse type of village-level structures. Reported in one district in the south, schoolteachers had received cooking training, but had then left the school, leaving the school with a lack of qualified cooks. In another district, there was a lack of understanding about which village structures had received training. A VEDC reported that they had received training on the management of school meals, but had not received training on cooking, and were unsure who had received this training. Similarly, there were varied reports from village interviews as to whether parent groups had received cooking and nutrition training.

107. **High turnover of government staff can at times be challenging to capacity strengthening efforts.** For example, in one district in Attapeu Province, schoolteachers had received cooking training. However, the teachers had then left the school, leaving the school with a lack of qualified cooks for the meals programme. A similar situation was reported in a village in one district in a northern province: the current teacher has only just been recruited, therefore missing out on trainings, and the District Education and Sport Bureau (DESB) has no budget to train them on the management and recording of the school lunch programme.

108. **Data collected from village-level structures offered mixed reports about receiving training for vegetable raising and fish farming and the success of that training.** Interviews with teachers from a school in Luang Namtha Province, reported that the head teacher had received a successful three-day training on gardening, the use of organic fertilizer and, on the final day, nutrition, which the other teachers also attended. It was reported that the head teacher then provided agricultural trainings to a group of other schools. The VEDC in one village in Sekong Province in southeast Lao PDR reported that they had not received training on cooking, but they had received on-the-job training on gardening, fish raising and recording of school meal activities. A focus group discussion with the VEDC and Loa Women's Union in a village in Phongsaly Province reported the delivery of chicken raising training to mothers.

109. Conversely, the VEDC and Loa Women's Union in the village in Phongsaly Province reported that participants, while acknowledging that they had received training in chicken raising activities, found that they had not gained enough knowledge to manage the chicken raising activities on their own. It was reported that families failed to follow the training advice and (although not part of WFP activities) there was a lack of available vaccination equipment. Interviews with the VEDC and teachers in a village in Luang Namtha Province reported that WFP had provided funds and materials for gardening and fish raising but without any training.

110. **WFP study visits were supportive to key stakeholders involved in the school feeding programme.** In addition to the above activities, WFP capacity strengthening also included study visits to Thailand and Sri Lanka. Visits were targeted at selected national, provincial, and district-level government officials, school headteachers, teachers, and community members. The visits exposed participants to successful national school feeding programmes and included technical training on, for example, school gardens.<sup>118</sup> Interviews with staff within one provincial education and sports service, with teachers in villages within Luang Namtha Province, and with VEDC representatives in Luang Namtha Province reported the benefits of the visit. For example, the VEDC members reported that through the study visit they understood that although there are difficulties with the handover process, particularly at the start, these difficulties can be overcome.

111. WFP supported the **Ministry of Education and Sports and related provincial and districts departments** in implementation and monitoring of the school feeding activity. This included developing and piloting a tablet-based school monitoring and self-reporting system for 306 schools in northern Lao PDR. Monitoring tracks progress through the frame of 15 (education oriented) indicators, including, for

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<sup>117</sup> WFP Laos PDR. 2018. Summary Report. Community Capacity Assessment (CCA) for School Feeding. October 2018.

<sup>118</sup> World Food Programme. Lao People's Democratic Republic Annual Country Report 2019.

example enrolment rate. However, there are no specific indicators relating to the quality of the school feeding activity.

### **C. National process for the handover of school meals to communities in place**

112. In 2019/2020, 515 schools (receiving direct WFP support) had been handed over and integrated into the NSMP, and the remaining 924 targeted for mid-2021.<sup>119</sup>

113. **WFP has supported the development and coordination of the structures that support and contribute to the handover process.** One part of the WFP approach to handing over the school meals programme has been to support the formation and coordination of handover committees at provincial level, at district structures and at the community level.<sup>120</sup> These committees include a range of stakeholders. For example, at the district level, the committee has representation from Department of Planning and Investment (DPI), District Agriculture and Forestry Office (DAFO), District Education and Sports Bureau (DESB), Lao Women's Union, Lao Front for National Development (LFND), the youth union, and the governor's office. Interviews with staff from provincial, district and village-level structures reported that the extent of (post-handover) coordination between and clarity within the structures varies between location. For example, in one district of a southern province, a focus group reported that only a few households had contributed the additional inputs needed for school meals. They therefore anticipated that the village would not be confident implementing the school meal activities, post-handover, without a functioning village structure responsible for school meals.

114. **The limited government funding poses a challenge to post-handover monitoring of the school meals programme.** The Provincial Department of Planning and Investment, part of the Ministry of Planning and Investments, monitor progress against the handover plan two to three times per year in order to identify strengths and weaknesses. The amount of budget allocated for post-handover supervision and monitoring has meant that responsible departments are not monitoring the implementation of school meals to the extent that they were pre-handover.

115. WFP, through the McGovern-Dole Program, provides cooking equipment and the commodities of oil, rice, canned fish and lentils to targeted schools. The community contributes by providing vegetables and meat to the provision of school lunch. The community is also responsible for managing associated school gardens, fishponds, and rice banks in ways that contribute to school feeding. School feeding is managed through a structure of committees at the district and village level. This includes the village education development committee and the school parent association. Villages organize cooking groups differently. Cooking groups range from a team of cooks at larger schools, to just one cook at smaller schools. In some villages cooks or cooking groups are voluntary, whilst in others the cook is paid in rice or cash from households. **The success of the handover model is therefore based on strong ownership at the community level.** However, evidence shows that community ownership and engagement is variable (see paragraph 116–121 below for more details).

116. **Some communities are very engaged in the school meal programme and confident about managing the activities post-handover.** Interviews with village authority participants (who can include: village leaders; deputy Village Chiefs, village security (military), village police, youth union, village Lao Women's Union members, village LFND) in villages in Oudomxay, Phongsaly and Luang Namtha provinces reported that the VEDCs and school teachers had a good understanding of school meal management, and were confident and consistent with organizing and monitoring the meals, and importantly carry out repairs and maintenance of equipment important for the school meals programme. These interviews also highlighted cases of innovative behaviour that supported the school meals programme. There was, for example, a case where the community used spare land to grow cash crops (cardamom), and then used the generated income for the school meals activities. Another case benefitted from a motivated teacher and engaged community members who, when faced with the challenge of unsuitable school land for growing food, had identified land outside of the school grounds more suited to support the gardening activity. This positive finding is reflected in the results of the 2018 community capacity assessment analysis.

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<sup>119</sup> World Food Programme. Lao People's Democratic Republic Annual Country Report 2019

<sup>120</sup> World Food Programme. Lao People's Democratic Republic Annual Country Report 2018

117. The evaluation also found, conversely, that from the communities visited **there were a number of examples where the community expressed a lack of ability to take on school feeding activities and/or a lack of understanding of the importance of the programme.** Focus group discussions with VEDC, Loa Women's Union members, parents and teachers in villages in Phongsaly, Oudomxay, and Sekong highlighted that continuing lunch activities would not be possible due to poverty and rice shortages in the villages. It was reported that villagers do not contribute food because they are too poor to do so, and the government provision of 800 LAK per child (approximately 0.10 USD) is insufficient. This is also reflected in the results of the 2018 WFP community capacity assessment analysis, which showed that nearly a quarter of communities in the analysis had high or very high vulnerability. However, the analysis also showed that nearly half of communities (49 percent) had medium vulnerability.

118. **In some communities, the understanding of the importance of school meals is a barrier to increasing community ownership.** The evaluation field inquiry showed that, in some communities, villagers do not understand the importance of school meals. In some cases, particularly in highland areas, during the harvest time, parents want children to help with the harvest rather than go to school, or/and parents are not available to help with cooking. In Luang Namtha Province, it was suggested that there were challenges in approximately 10 percent of handed-over schools, giving examples in two remote villages in the district, where villagers refused to provide the labour to cook food as they do not see school feeding as their job.<sup>121</sup> The results of the WFP community capacity assessment analysis show a similar picture. One of the indices of the community capacity assessment is community awareness. This variable includes: a) frequency of cooking meals; b) community contributions; and c) having perception of the importance of school lunch. As reported by WFP, 53 percent of the 1,417 communities assessed in 2018 were reported to have very low or low awareness of school lunches, another 39 percent reported medium awareness. No communities were assessed as having very high awareness, and only 8 percent had high awareness.<sup>122</sup>

119. **Concerns about community ownership were also expressed by staff at provincial and district level government offices.** District officials in Phongsaly Province and Luang Namtha Province, stressed concern about the parents' commitment and ownership of the project. A staff member at a provincial department of planning and investment noted that community capacity, knowledge, ownership and willingness were issues for managing the school meal handover process.

120. **The lack of incentives for village-level structures is an issue for continuing the school meal activities post-handover.** The members of the VEDC are mostly volunteers (for example, Loa Women's Union, Lao Front, Youth Union, and school association members). The exception being the village head, village deputy and schoolteachers (all of which are salaried positions). Prior to handover, the storekeeper and cooks associated with school feeding often (but not always) receive a small incentive, most often in the form of rice. Focus group discussions with communities and interviews with district-level staff indicated that after handover the incentive is no longer provided. The need for continued incentives to support the continuation of school meals, post-handover, was raised in focus group discussions by several village-level structures in several villages.

121. The community capacity assessment plays an important role in the handover process. It aims to see whether the handover is feasible and realistic at the community level. Community capacity assessments were carried out from May 2017 to August 2018, informing the schedule for the schools' handover and identifying community-level needs so that programming could be adjusted. However, **reassessment of community strength, just before handover, was not carried out. Therefore, there was little understanding of whether (adjusted) programmes sufficiently prepared communities for handover.** There is significant evidence, as shown in earlier paragraphs, that many communities lack technical capacity and ability to manage the transfer of resources. This signals that, **whilst the pace of handover is on track, this may be at the expense of insufficient attention being paid to the complex conditions for success at a community level. This additionally raises questions about appropriate use of the community capacity assessment results.**

#### **D. Implementation of the Government school meals programme plan of action accelerated**

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<sup>121</sup> Interview with district-level government staff.

<sup>122</sup> WFP Laos PDR. 2018. Summary Report. Community Capacity Assessment (CCA) for School Feeding. October 2018.

122. In terms of the number of transferred resources for the school feeding programme, WFP has largely delivered on its annual plans. For example, with regards to school gardens established, although slightly off target in 2017 (90 percent achieved), WFP met its targets in 2018 and 2019 (with 400 and 578 gardens established in 2018 and 2019 respectively).<sup>123</sup> With regard to distribution of agricultural inputs for the gardens, although there is no data for 2017 and 2018, WFP met its target in 2019. Similarly, with regard to the number of cooking areas that were constructed or rehabilitated, there were no data for 2017 or 2018, but in 2019 WFP largely met its target of 500 schools with rehabilitated or constructed kitchens. With regard to the provision of adequate sanitary facilities, there were no data available for 2017. In 2018 WFP, in partnership with the National Centre for Environmental Health and Water Supply was significantly off target, providing 176 facilities (just over 35 percent of their target). However, in 2019, WFP significantly exceeded its target, providing 206 adequate facilities from a target of 150.<sup>124</sup> Observations from the 11 schools visited during the evaluation showed that five schools (46 percent) had a handwashing station available for the students, and nine schools (82 percent) had water available for cooking. Regarding the number of fishponds established, WFP met its target (190 fishponds) in 2018, but were somewhat off target in 2019, reaching only 75 percent of its target (three out of four fishponds).<sup>125</sup> Observations from the 11 schools visited during the evaluation showed that 2 schools (18 percent) had fish ponds that were prepared. Both these ponds provided fish for the school meals programme.

123. **Communities have had challenges to the successful transfer of resources.** Challenges included poor weather or unsuitable environmental conditions for the types of activities implemented. Focus groups and interviews with teachers and village authorities in Attapeu Province, Oudomxay, Sekong and Luang Namtha reported that WFP had supported the establishment of vegetable gardens, duck and chicken farms, and fishponds. However, water shortages had led to fishponds drying out, unsuccessful vegetable gardens and disease among the chickens. Stakeholders in several villages suggested that the seeds provided by WFP were unsuitable to local conditions and out of date. Other stakeholders reported that although WFP had supported the schools with the establishment of these assets, they had received no training on raising, for example, fish and frogs.

124. **Community ownership at the local level is important for maintenance and sustainability.** As highlighted in the report above from a village in northern Laos, whilst resources have been transferred and are in place, there is an ongoing need for the community to maintain these resources. According to several reports, some communities noted deterioration in kitchen or sanitary facilities but were unsure who had responsibility for their maintenance.

## **E. Food assistance provided to targeted schools**

125. **The school feeding programme has not provided a daily meal to children in as many schools as was intended.** As set out in the country strategic plan, the target for school meals is that “food security of pre- and primary schoolchildren will be ensured by providing a daily snack or meal.”<sup>126</sup> WFP monitoring data on school feeding indicates that on average schools are cooking four meals per week in 2019.<sup>127</sup> There is no data provided for 2017 and 2018. Interviews and field visits indicated varying practices. An interview with WFP staff suggested that on average only three meals were provided a week. Evidence from field interviews showed that, within some schools, children are receiving five meals a week. For example, an interview with teachers at a school, yet to be handed over, in Oudomxay Province, reported that the school is organizing five meals a week and the school garden is fully functioning. However, much of the data collected during the evaluation showed that in many schools, meals are not provided five days a week. Focus groups with village associations, VECDs, and parents in Attapeu and Sekong provinces, repeatedly reported that their schools provided an average of two lunches a week to children. WFP provides lentils as

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<sup>123</sup> Output data is drawn from the 2017, 2018 and 2019 WFP COMET data provided by WFP (CM-R008).

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> World Food Programme. *WFP Strategic Plan (2017-2021)*. Rome. World Food Programme. 2017.

<sup>127</sup> Output data are drawn from the 2017, 2018 and 2019 WFP COMET data provided by WFP (CM-R008).

part of the assistance, while reports from field interviews state that they are a food form not familiar to, or preferred within, Lao PDR.<sup>128</sup>

## **STRATEGIC OUTCOME 2: Stunting levels among children under 2 in provinces with high levels of malnutrition meet national targets by 2025**

126. Under SO 2, WFP is engaged in activities at different levels in the government system that relate to addressing the challenge of stunting in provinces with high levels of malnutrition. WFP have also implemented several activities with the potential to contribute to addressing malnutrition, in particular stunting. This includes: The agriculture for nutrition project with IFAD; the launch of the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) business network; and the instigation of a national action plan for food fortification. Whilst the agriculture for nutrition project has reached 400 villages across 12 districts and has had some immediate positive results (for example, diet diversification), the other activities have had less momentum across the duration of the country strategic plan, and any potential significant impact from the work will only be seen in the future. Whilst the separate activities have laid an important foundation for future work, current results do not show a coherent or sufficiently scaled picture to discern the contribution of WFP to the broader Government-led effort on tackling stunting (and wasting). WFP also provided technical support to the National Nutrition Strategy and Plan of Action (2016–2020) (NNSPA).<sup>129</sup>

127. WFP tracks progress at the strategic outcome level through annually measured indicators that relate to: (i) the proportion of children (6-23 months) who receive a minimum acceptable diet; and (ii) the proportion of eligible population that participates in the programme. WFP monitoring shows that in 2017, the country office met their target for “the proportion of children who receive a minimum acceptable diet”. However, in 2018, WFP was significantly off-target, and in 2019 there were no data for this indicator. With regards to the indicator: “proportion of eligible population that participates in programme” (coverage), the country office shows a high level of achievement, meeting its targets across 2017, 2018 and 2019.

128. The (reconstructed) theory of change sets out five main areas through which progress on the country strategic plan strategic outcome 2 (SO 2) is to be achieved. The five areas correspond to the three activities under SO 2:

- A. Enhanced access to local specialized nutritious food for children (6-23 months) - Activity 5**
- B. Enhanced evidence-based policies in place – Activity 4**
- C. Food assistance to target groups – Activity 5**
- D. Social behaviour changes on nutrition based on enhanced knowledge through behavioural change communication – Activity 6**
- E. Farmer nutrition schools established – Activity 6**

### **A. Enhanced access to local specialized nutritious food for children (6-23 months)**

129. Within Activity 5, WFP aimed to support the Government in exploring private sector-led supply chains for locally available nutritious food for children. The intention was to ensure sustainability and reduce WFP reliance on internationally procured Nutributter. The country office reports that no commodity is available in the country, funding for this work has been limited throughout the country strategic plan, and currently there is no clear strategy for this.

### **B. Enhanced evidence-based policies in place**

130. With Activity 4 under SO 2, WFP aimed to provide technical assistance for evidence-based policy dialogue. **WFP is contributing to the development of rice fortification standards in Lao PDR.** In 2017, WFP partnered with the Department of Hygiene and Health Promotion of the Ministry of Health to carry out the Fill the Nutrient Gap analysis, with the participation of development partners.<sup>130</sup> Also in 2017, WFP

<sup>128</sup> Beneficiaries reported not knowing how to cook or not liking lentils, especially in the south of Lao PDR. Also see 2017.CRS.WFP *Recipe Ideas for Primary School and Home Meals*.

<sup>129</sup> See paragraph 155 for detail.

<sup>130</sup> Development partners include European Union, Save the Children, UNICEF, FAO, Population Services International, Lao American Nutrition Institute, World Bank, Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV) and UNFPA.

partnered with the Ministry of Health to conduct a landscape analysis for rice fortification. Using the resulting analysis, WFP provided technical assistance to the National Nutrition Committee Secretariat and the Ministry of Health to provide evidence for and commence the development of formulating a national food fortification strategic action plan.<sup>131</sup>

131. Also, one of the approaches under Activity 4 of SO 2 was through facilitating the establishment of a SUN business network. WFP was instrumental in the launch of the SUN business network from early 2018. Following a formal launch of the network in mid-2018 a strategy was developed with four priorities, including one on “advocacy and policy perception”. After the launch and in a short timeframe (1-2 years) the strategy was endorsed and signed by the National Nutrition Centre. However **there has been little subsequent activity and with the effects of COVID-19 the remaining activity is now more compressed and there are concerns over the extent to which the network will be able to really “bed in” and start to have an effect in the policy space.**

132. **WFP supported the organization of the first National Nutrition Symposium in Laos.** In collaboration with the Ministries of Health, Education and Sports, Agriculture and Forestry, and Planning and Investment, WFP, UNICEF, FAO, the European Union (EU) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) supported the National Nutrition Committee Secretariat in organizing the First National Nutrition Technical Symposium in November 2017.<sup>132</sup> According to regional WFP staff, WFP was key to encouraging the Government to have the symposium. The symposium brought together more than 400 delegates from the Government, academia, technical partners, the private sector, and donors and it concluded with a joint statement to inform national planning.

133. **The limited success under Activity 4 is reflected in the low level of funding it received** (see Figure 12). Activity 4 has been underfunded throughout the country strategic plan. In 2017, Activity 4 received under 30 percent of the needs-based plan; in 2018, it received just over 50 percent, and in 2019, it received only 25 percent.

### C. Food assistance to target groups

134. Under Activity 5 of SO 2, WFP aimed to accelerate progress in reducing stunting by supplying specialized nutritious food in the form of Nutributter. **In 2017, WFP reported exceeding the target number of pregnant and lactating women and children aged 6-23 months who received ready-to-use supplementary food.** Similarly, the target for pregnant and lactating women was exceeded in the years 2018 and 2019 while more than 95 percent of the planned children were reached.<sup>133</sup> In addition, during and after the floods of 2018, each month 309 pregnant and lactating women and 742 children (372 girls) under 5 years who were affected by the emergency in Attapeu Province received Nutributter.<sup>134</sup>

### D. Social behavioural changes on nutrition based on enhanced knowledge through behavioural change communication

135. **WFP successfully reached remote communities with communication activities.** Between 2017 and 2019, whilst providing specialized nutritious food (SNF) to pregnant and lactating women and children below 2 years of age in 1,100 vulnerable and food-insecure communities in four provinces, WFP also delivered a nutrition awareness-raising campaign. The strategy aimed to enhance nutrition knowledge, awareness and practices and covered infant and young child feeding practices, and maternal nutrition components.

136. **The WFP agriculture for nutrition project has shown movement towards positive results.** WFP is a partner in the agriculture for nutrition project, financed by the Global Agriculture and Food

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<sup>131</sup> Interview with WFP field office staff; interview with partner stakeholder; UNPF. 2017. Progress report Lao PDR - United Nations Partnership Framework (2017-2021). A Partnership for Sustainable Development.

<sup>132</sup> UNPF. 2017. Progress report Lao PDR - United Nations Partnership Framework (2017-2021). A Partnership for Sustainable Development; Comment WFP regional staff.

<sup>133</sup> COMET reports CMR020 for 2018 and 2019.

<sup>134</sup> WFP Lao PDR. May 2019. *Nutrition. Ending all Forms of Malnutrition*. However, note that these beneficiaries are being reached under SO3.

Security Programme (GAFSP) and implemented in partnership with IFAD. Initiated in 2016 before the current country strategic plan and due to end in June 2022, the project aims to address chronic malnutrition and food insecurity in support of the Government's objective to promote local production of nutritious food. The project is implemented in 400 villages within 12 districts in four northern provinces: Oudomxai, Phongsaly, Xieng Khouang and Houaphan. The project is being implemented through three technical components: (1) strengthened public services; (2) community-driven agriculture-based nutrition interventions; and (3) sustainable and inclusive market-driven partnerships. The GAFSP grant to WFP finances component 2 of the project. The results of the GAFSP mid-term evaluation, conducted by IFAD, highlighted impressive implementation progress, although the evaluation also recognizes inadequate sequencing of activities and coordination between components.

137. Relevant to the contribution of WFP to the project, the agriculture for nutrition midline survey report shows that both severe and moderate stunting rates for children under 5 years of age within the agriculture for nutrition project increased slightly between baseline and endline (as did the control group). However, stunting rates for children under 2 years of age decreased between baseline and midline, from 33.1 percent to 39.5 percent, (with only a 0.7 percent decrease in control villages). The midline report concludes that **agriculture for nutrition efforts are benefitting the youngest children whereas impact on older (over 2 years) children is not (yet) visible.**

138. Furthermore, the mid-term evaluation showed that specifically for Component 2, for which WFP is responsible, the average household dietary diversity score (HDDS) significantly increased between baseline and midline, indicating that **households have increased their intake of food groups significantly.** It should be noted however, the score is highly dependent on the season when the survey is conducted, and the baseline was conducted in the lean season whilst the midline was conducted during the harvest season.

139. As one of the subcomponents under component 2, **WFP has facilitated the preparation of village infrastructure plans (VIP) in the 400 target villages,** detailing needs for agricultural infrastructure and with the aim of improving agricultural productivity in the communities. However, **this activity falls short of the project intention to mainstream nutrition into plans.**<sup>135</sup> Nevertheless, the project has now started to include nutrition planning following the 22 priority nutrition interventions from the fourth quarter of 2020 onwards, which will cover at least 300 of the original villages by updating their existing plans.

#### **E. Farmer nutrition schools established**

140. **WFP have established a number of successful farmer nutrition schools, reaching a high proportion of target women participants.** As part of component 2 of the agriculture for nutrition project, WFP helped establish farmer nutrition schools (FNS), which support social behaviour change communication, and where participants learn about healthy eating habits, good infant and young child feeding and hygiene practices, diverse food production, food storage and preservation. The farmer nutrition schools target is mainly pregnant women and mothers of children under 2 years of age. WFP has successfully established farmer nutrition schools in all target villages, reaching a total number of participants of almost 20,133, with a very high proportion of women participants (90 percent).<sup>136</sup> A WFP Knowledge Attitude and Practice (KAP) survey shows that a very positive 76 percent of the women who participated in farmer nutrition school sessions perceived that their nutrition status improved.

141. Women who attended a farmer nutrition school can apply for a garden grant of USD120 to supply and enhance their home gardens or buy small livestock. This is intended to support access to a diversified diet. By February 2020, there were 11,911 women who had submitted garden grant applications. Of those, a total of 6,843 women have received grants, 73 percent of the total number of available garden grants, with the remainder planned for 2021 (this comes under component 3 of the agriculture for nutrition

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<sup>135</sup> IFAD. 2020. Lao People's Democratic Republic. Strategic Support for Food Security and Nutrition Project – GAFSP funds. Mid-term Review.

<sup>136</sup> IFAD. 2020. Lao People's Democratic Republic. Strategic Support for Food Security and Nutrition Project – GAFSP funds. Mid-Term Review.

project). This component of the project is considered a success.<sup>137</sup> However, interviews with WFP field staff report that this activity also needs to be linked more strongly with nutrition planning, and there needs to be follow up monitoring of the implementation of grants to understand the success (monitoring is the role of DAFO). **The Knowledge Attitude and Practice survey shows 96 percent of the women who participated in the farmer nutrition school programme and received a garden grant stated that their nutritional knowledge improved, while 85 percent stated that their farming knowledge has improved.**<sup>138</sup>

### **STRATEGIC OUTCOME 3: Vulnerable households in climate sensitive districts are more resilient to seasonal and long-term shocks and stresses**

142. There have been fewer activities than intended within the country strategic plan in seeking to build the resilience of vulnerable households in climate-sensitive districts to seasonal and long-term shocks and stresses. Driven by a lack of significant and multi-year funds, there has been significantly less engagement in delivering on intended climate resilience activities. Reported beneficiary figures under SO 3 include beneficiaries who were targeted to build their resilience to climate change as well as those who were provided emergency assistance in response to the floods. This explains the significant increase in the number of reached beneficiaries under SO 3.

143. WFP has been tracking progress at the strategic outcome level through annually measured indicators of: (i) number of national food security and nutrition policies, programmes and system components enhanced as a result of WFP capacity strengthening (new); and (ii) proportion of the population in targeted communities reporting benefits from an enhanced livelihoods asset base. Monitoring of the building of productive assets has been ongoing in relation to the initial activity. At the time of the CSPE there was an ongoing food assistance for asset (FFA) review aiming to assess the design and implementation of assets and establish the functionality of the assets. Furthermore, the country office is doing ongoing evaluations of rice banks constructed in 2019 under Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry with Japanese funding. Although monitoring of the conditions or effects of the assets created is taking place, the country office suggests that it could be further increased.

144. The main activity to be undertaken in support of achieving SO 3 was:

- **Activity 7:** Build community resilience through the creation of productive assets and sustainable livelihood opportunities.

145. **Productive asset creation through food assistance for assets has taken place every year of country strategic plan implementation.** In practice, under this broad heading, WFP has: provided food assistance to vulnerable households including households headed by women; provided training at the community level on livelihood technologies; and supported, through food-based and cash-based transfers, community activity such as expanding feeder roads, and rehabilitating irrigation canals (where work delivered has exceeded target).

146. The country strategic plan intervention logic signals three main areas through which progress on the country strategic plan strategic outcome was expected to be achieved:

- A. Enhanced local government staff capacities for building resilience**
- B. Productive assets created**
- C. Enhanced community capacities for resilience.**

#### **A. Enhanced local government staff capacities for building resilience**

147. In partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, WFP implemented the disaster risk reduction and management in agriculture project, which aims to develop capacity of government staff and farmers in planning and integrating disaster reduction and management actions into agricultural sector development plans. This project has delivered three national and four provincial consultation workshops

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<sup>137</sup> IFAD. 2020. Lao People's Democratic Republic. Strategic Support for Food Security and Nutrition Project – GAFSP funds. Mid-Term Review.

<sup>138</sup> WFP Lao PDR. 2020. Farmer Nutrition School Household Impact Survey.

and drafted guidelines for integrating disaster risk management in agriculture for technical review. The project experienced implementation delays, which resulted in the approval of a no-cost extension until June 2020.<sup>139</sup>

148. In partnership with the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MLSW) and supported by the Global Logistics Cluster, WFP has started implementing the logistics preparedness project to support national emergency preparedness and response operations.<sup>140</sup> **In 2019, WFP supported the creation of a logistics preparedness roadmap and action plan jointly developed by the Government and its partners. To support the storage of emergency relief items, a mobile storage unit prepositioning strategy was developed and implemented by the ministry, which included the prepositioning of 11 units across the country, including two donated by WFP in 2019.** This included the delivery of mobile storage unit assembly trainings to the Government, the military and Red Cross staff in all target provinces.<sup>141</sup>

#### **B. Productive assets created**

149. Annual country reports show progress on creating a range of assets, including rice banks, roads, and goat shelters. A food assistance for assets internal review showed that out of 30 assets assessed, 22 were still functional, including two that were built over a decade ago. When assets were not functional, the main cause was natural disasters.

#### **C. Enhanced community capacities for resilience**

150. WFP has demonstrated successful examples of food assistance for asset creation activities, which has good potential for community resilience capacity enhancement. Noted as a successful example of food assistance for assets, WFP established productive community assets supporting community resilience building and installed automated weather stations to support the development of climate information and services. An additional example is the provision of technical knowledge on climate adaptation in agriculture to farmers with good communication in order to increase the reach and success of rice banks in managing the gap in rice supply leading up to harvest.

### **STRATEGIC OUTCOME 4: National and local governance institutions are strengthened to ensure improved service delivery, especially in hard-to-reach areas by 2025**

151. WFP engagement in strengthening national and local governance institutions to ensure improved service delivery, especially in hard-to-reach areas, has been very weak from a system perspective. The country strategic plan set out an ambitious strategic outcome specifically focused on capacity strengthening. However, there has been no real substance to programmatic thinking or the shaping and funding of activities under SO 4, in ways that would have been expected to guide and accelerate developments within the other outcome areas. Whilst there has been capacity strengthening activities within SO 1, SO 2, and SO 3 (as indicated in the respective accounts in the sections above and which has provided a value in its own right), these have not been explicitly articulated as per the SO 4 longer-term vision and its focus on the pressing institutional challenge of improving service delivery for hard-to-reach areas. For SO 1, a clear diagnostic work<sup>142</sup> was carried out, while for the other strategic outcomes there is no evidence of a comprehensive diagnostic of the interdependencies between the individual, organizational and wider institutional environment in terms of realizing sustained gains in capacity of the government system and its evolving relationship with communities. Finally, there has not been a coherent strategy to follow up and monitor capacity strengthening activities (individual, organization and enabling environment), which the strategic intent of the country strategic plan, through SO 4, would suggest needed to be core.

152. In its country strategic plan intervention logic, clearly sighted on the strategic shift towards community-run government financed programmes (2022 onwards), WFP set out three broad areas for

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<sup>139</sup> WFP. Annual Country Report 2019.

<sup>140</sup> Also see paragraph 156 under SO 4.

<sup>141</sup> WFP. Annual Country Report 2019.

<sup>142</sup> The SABER methodology used in SO 1 is a capacity diagnosis that has similarities to the Corporate Country Capacity Strengthening Framework.

capacity strengthening that aligned with the achievement of country strategic plan strategic outcome 4, (SO4). These align directly with the activities of the strategic outcome:

- A. Enhanced national capacity for food and nutrition security governance – Activity 8**
- B. Enhanced community capacities to lead/own their food and nutrition security solutions – Activity 9**
- C. Enhanced government capacities at all levels to prepare for and efficiently respond to natural disasters – Activity 10**

153. Whilst WFP was active in institutional capacity strengthening through its work on school feeding (with both government structures and community institutions) along with its work under SO 2 on nutrition and food security – **there is no articulated overarching approach to strengthening institutional capacity in order to progress the objectives and strategic outcomes of the country strategic plan.**

**A. Enhanced national capacity for food and nutrition security governance**

154. Under Activity 8, WFP planned to deploy an expert to the committee to coordinate among ministries and provide technical support. In delivery, WFP supported the Ministry of Education and Sports in revising the school agriculture guidelines, strengthening nutrition and gender aspects in the guidance, and developing the ministerial directive on promoting school agriculture for all levels from kindergarten to university.

**B. Enhanced community capacities to lead/own their food and nutrition security solutions**

155. **There has been very limited success so far in supporting preparation of multisector nutrition plans at the district level.** To accelerate the implementation of the National Nutrition Strategy and Plan of Action (2016–2020) (NNSPA) at the district level, WFP, working through component 2 of the agriculture for nutrition project, aimed to support preparation of quality district convergence plans - multisector nutrition plans. WFP planned to work with the district nutrition committees (DNC), providing coaching and facilitation support in order to build a collaborative working culture for the district nutrition committees, while implementing its existing convergence plans. However, although some initial activities took place in 2017 and 2018, there has been no visible success in supporting the preparation of plans, mainly because there was no provincial and district structure available for this activity.<sup>143</sup> According to WFP country office, district nutrition committees were not fully formed during the initial years of the agriculture for nutrition project, but now that they are formed, WFP has started to work with them to strengthen their capacities and facilitate their work.

**C. Enhanced government capacities at all levels to prepare for and efficiently respond to natural disasters**

156. Whilst there has been no systematic approach to capacity strengthening in this area, WFP has been active where opportunities linked to the emergency response and preparedness have arisen. **WFP country office was able to mobilize resources to implement some capacity strengthening, focusing on emergency preparedness.**<sup>144</sup> For example, the building of local government capacity on warehousing (an area of clear WFP technical expertise). Another example, through funding from the Global Logistics Cluster (WFP HQ), was the building of the capacity of government logistics disaster response (e.g., mapping, communication, assembly of eight mobile storage units in the north and the south).<sup>145</sup> Supported by the Global Logistics Cluster and in partnership with the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, WFP began implementation of the logistics preparedness project to support national emergency preparedness and response operations. During 2019, WFP supported the preparation of a logistics preparedness roadmap and action plan jointly developed by the Government and its partners.

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<sup>143</sup> IFAD 2020. Lao People's Democratic Republic Strategic Support for Food Security and Nutrition Project - GAFSP funds Mid-Term Review.

<sup>144</sup> Interviews with senior WFP country office staff.

<sup>145</sup> Interviews with senior WFP country office staff.

157. To support the storage of emergency relief items, a mobile storage unit repositioning strategy was developed and implemented by the ministry, which included the repositioning of 11 units across the country, including two donated by WFP in 2019. This included the delivery of mobile storage unit assembly trainings to government, military and Red Cross staff in all target provinces.<sup>146</sup> Furthermore, the country office was resourceful and used the insurance refund for the damaged food to also carry out emergency preparedness activities.<sup>147</sup>

### Summary

Under SO 1, WFP made significant contributions to improving the policy and budget landscape for a national school meals programme. WFP encountered challenges ensuring daily meal provision and increasing community ownership, an essential component to ensure sustainability. Transfer of technical and institutional capacity at provincial, district and community levels showed mixed results, and indicated room for further follow-up.

For SO 2, there was successful delivery of individual activities with resulting positive outputs. The successful establishment of the SUN business network early in the country strategic plan, now has the opportunity to be built upon. The continuation of the pre-country strategic plan agriculture for nutrition project has had positive results at the community level with indications that activities will contribute to addressing malnutrition and food insecurity.

Under SO 3, with lack of significant and multi-year funds, there has been less activity than intended in addressing the challenges of building the resilience of vulnerable households in climate-sensitive districts to seasonal and long-term shocks and stresses. Though there have been some successful examples of food assistance for assets creation activities, which has good potential for community resilience capacity enhancement.

Activities under SO 4 were not designed in a coherent country capacity strengthening approach at the three levels (national, village and community) of engagement. WFP has delivered individual activities under this outcome and has successfully taken opportunities to build capacity when they have arisen. For example, the country office was able to mobilize resources to implement emergency preparedness capacity strengthening.

## EQ 2.2 To what extent did WFP contribute to the achievement of cross-cutting aims (humanitarian principles, protection, accountability to affected populations, gender equality and other equity considerations)?

158. The country strategic plan had a clear set of expectations on cross-cutting issues. Many of these have been progressed as evidenced by the related indicator monitoring data (see Annex 9) and triangulated through interviews.

### Humanitarian principles

159. Targeting was needs-based (see EQ 1.2 above) and based on several vulnerability indicators. For example, the selection and targeting of schools and activities under SO 1 was based on the Ministry of Education and Sport's education indicators, and the targeting of provinces for SO 2 activities was based on poverty and nutrition indicators. However, when it came to implementation, the most vulnerable areas were not systematically reached due to several factors, including remoteness of the village and willingness of communities to be included in the school feeding programme.<sup>148</sup>

### Neutrality and impartiality: considerations of gender, ethnicity, disability and age

<sup>146</sup> World Food Programme. 2020. Lao People's Democratic Republic Annual Country Report 2019.

<sup>147</sup> Interview with WFP country office staff.

<sup>148</sup> Prior to selecting the school, WFP carried out consultations to obtain the village/school's commitment to be included in the school feeding programme.

160. **Gender:** As Table 5 shows on average over 50 percent of WFP beneficiaries were women/girls, with only the year 2018 falling slightly under 50 percent.<sup>149</sup> For example, in 2019, 49 percent of WFP-supported school feeding activities were attended by schoolgirls. Participation of women in SO 2 activities was very high, with women making up 90 percent of farmer nutrition school participants and 84 percent of farmer nutrition school facilitators.<sup>150</sup>

161. **Ethnicity:** In Lao PDR, vulnerability and nutritional status are linked to poverty, rural residence, and ethnicity (see Table 1). Even though WFP used several assessments<sup>151</sup> that analysed the differences among the ethnic groups in Lao PDR, the monitoring and evaluation data did not track beneficiaries by ethnicity.<sup>152</sup> As a result, the evaluation was unable to determine the extent to which the different ethnicities were reached. Nevertheless, in order to reach the ethnically diverse communities, WFP field staff worked closely with the village authorities and/or schoolteachers who acted as interpreters. Furthermore, WFP produced several communication messages in six different local languages, which were transmitted via loudspeakers or local radios.<sup>153</sup>

162. **Disability:** In 2019, WFP country office reported that through activities it reached a total of 6,659 persons with disabilities, 3 percent of total beneficiaries reached.<sup>154</sup> Several activities were implemented to ensure that persons with disability were included in WFP interventions. For instance, in 2018, the Ministry of Education and Sport formed the Inclusive Education Thematic Working Group, which WFP co-chairs with an international non-governmental organization, Humanity & Inclusion (HI). The group works to support access to education for people with disability and inclusion in all areas of society. Furthermore, WFP extended school feeding into two schools for children with disabilities, supporting school gardens at both locations.<sup>155,156</sup> Under SO 2, the evaluation team found that specific provision for infants with disabilities within the first 1,000 days was not provided. Under SO 3, targeting of cash-based transfers is based on poverty, which would include people with disability, and the household can decide who will do the work. Finally, WFP increased staff awareness of disability and equal rights. In 2018, the Lao Disabled People's Association (LDPA) provided training for WFP staff in all WFP offices. Over 50 percent of staff, 29 men and 28 women, attended.<sup>157</sup>

163. **Age:** The country strategic plan offers some references to the targeting of activities to age groups. SO 1 activities target school age girls and boys. Activity 5, under SO 2, targets children aged 6-23 months. And finally, under SO 2, WFP work with IFAD through the GAFSP aims to involve both men and women from different age groups while the agriculture for nutrition project involves mainly women between 15-49 years as village facilitators (VFs) and farmer nutrition school participants.

164. In terms of **inclusive activities**, WFP established a partnership with the Lao National Front for Development to encourage participation of the elderly in the communities to collect data and also to mobilize the communities.<sup>158</sup>

165. As a positive indication of the country office's intention towards age-inclusive activities, the country strategic plan monitored beneficiaries by age group, recording three age-group categories in 2017 and

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<sup>149</sup> The evaluation team analysed COMET data provided by WFP (CM-R020-annual adjusted participants & beneficiaries \_ActTag,BenGrp,Gender,Age\_v1.1) to examine the number of beneficiaries by strategic outcome over the CSP period. This analysis has not been included in this report, as the number of total beneficiaries over the period was inconsistent between the COMET and ACR datasets. As such, this report used data on beneficiary numbers from the ACRs only, which do not provide figures on number of beneficiaries per SO

<sup>150</sup> World Food Programme. Annual Performance Report 2018. 2019. Rome. World Food Programme

<sup>151</sup> For example, Lao Statistics Bureau. 2018. Lao Social Indicator Survey II 2017, Survey Findings Report. Vientiane, Lao PDR: Lao Statistics Bureau and UNICEF

<sup>152</sup> As there is no strong programmatic reasons to collect monitoring data on ethnicity. Reference made to 2016 WFP Guide to Personal Data Protection and Privacy.

<sup>153</sup> Interview with WFP country office staff

<sup>154</sup> World Food Programme in Lao PDR 2019 In Numbers

<sup>155</sup> World Food Programme. Annual Performance Report 2018. 2019. Rome. World Food Programme

<sup>156</sup> Interview

<sup>157</sup> World Food Programme. Annual Performance Report 2018. 2019. Rome. World Food Programme

<sup>158</sup> WFP Lao Country Office Annual Internal Staffing Review 2019, Finalized 26 March 2019.

2018,<sup>159</sup> expanding to six categories in 2019.<sup>160</sup> As can be seen in Table 4, above, for 2017 and 2018, the country office exceeded the target number of beneficiaries for each age group, apart from for children (under 5 years). In 2019, the country office did not meet the target number of children for the age groups of under 5 and 5-18 years. In 2017 and 2018, the country office exceeded the target number of beneficiaries for the age category 18 years+ by over 966 percent and 732 percent, respectively. WFP staff stated that school meal food often accumulated in communities due to its late arrival (see Table 16) and also due to schools not providing a daily meal. Accumulated food was therefore distributed to villagers, a wider beneficiary group than intended, rather than have it stockpiled. As explained above (EQ 2.1. SO 3), a further explanation for the increase of adult beneficiaries in 2018 is the inclusion of beneficiaries from the provision of emergency assistance to the floods.

### **Operational independence**

166. WFP targeted interventions with a fair amount of operational independence. For example, as reported in EQ1.2, in order to target SO 1 activities, WFP prepared a list of suggested schools for school feeding, which was presented to and finalized by the Ministry of Education and Sport. For strategic outcomes 2, 3 and 4, WFP was closely involved in the selection of targeted provinces and districts, thus ensuring operational independence.

### **Protection**

167. The evaluation found that WFP was able to successfully adapt activities to secure access for beneficiaries. For example, under SO 2, there were instances where mothers could not access the specialized nutritious food because they were not able to locate the village health volunteers. To overcome this issue, nutrition awareness training urged health volunteers to make regular visits to pregnant and lactating women in their villages.<sup>161</sup> Under SO 3, protection considerations led to a modification of the assistance distribution process in order to ensure the safety of beneficiaries. Rice was distributed in smaller bags, which were easier to carry, and cash distribution was arranged in locations where beneficiaries did not travel long distances or have to be alone with cash in hand.<sup>162</sup>

168. Several country office and field staff expressed concern about the protection of WFP men and women staff members in rural areas when handling cash operations. The use of cash-based transfers in remote locations, with limited or no access to banking facilities, means that staff must travel and carry large amounts of cash. This exposes WFP staff to the risk of robbery. Though fortunately there has not been any cases, the country office is addressing the issue through two actions: (i) signing long-term agreements with financial service providers that have already successfully conducted two cash distributions in 2020; and (ii) the revision of cash advance mechanisms.

### **Accountability to affected populations**

169. In 2016, WFP launched a beneficiary feedback mechanism in every village of operation. This included a dedicated hotline, focus group discussions and interviews, and allowed assisted communities to provide feedback about WFP support and activities.<sup>163</sup> The evaluation found no clear evidence from interviews and document reviews that target communities were meaningfully consulted in the design of these activities. The hotline was still functioning in 2020.<sup>164</sup> Table 13 shows that men have significantly used the hotline more than women, and that the number of calls has decreased substantially. According to two focus group discussions with beneficiaries and one interview with WFP field staff, the decrease in the use of

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<sup>159</sup> Children under 5 years old; children between 5 and 18 years old; and adults older than 18 years.

<sup>160</sup> Children 0-23 months; children 24-59 months; children 5-11 years; children 12-17 years; adults 18-59 years; and adults 60+.

<sup>161</sup> World Food Programme. 2018. Lao People's Democratic Republic Annual Country Report 2017.

<sup>162</sup> World Food Programme. 2018. Lao People's Democratic Republic Annual Country Report 2017; World Food Programme. 2019. Lao People's Democratic Republic Annual Country Report 2018.

<sup>163</sup> World Food Programme. Annual Performance Report 2017. 2018. Rome. World Food Programme.

<sup>164</sup> The evaluation team tested the hotline several times.

the hotline can be attributed to two reasons: 1) not all issues discussed are reported to the hotline;<sup>165</sup> and 2) there is a need to continuously remind people that the hotline exists.<sup>166</sup> Finally, waybills accompanying food deliveries were previously only provided in English. This challenged communities to validate the receipt of goods. As a result of beneficiary feedback, WFP introduced a simplified waybill in the Lao language, therefore increasing transparency and accountability.<sup>167</sup>

**Table 15: Total number of calls received through the hotline by year and by gender (%)**

Year	% women	% men	Total number of calls
2016	24	76	201
2017	14	86	132
2018	20	80	161
2019	32	68	19

Source: World Food Programme. Annual Performance Report 2017. 2018. Rome. World Food Programme; World Food Programme. Annual Performance Report 2018. 2019. Rome. World Food Programme; World Food Programme. Annual Performance Report 2019. 2020. Rome. World Food Programme.

### Contributing to gender equality and women’s empowerment

170. **The WFP country office employed several steps to mainstream gender into the country strategic plan’s implementation.** In 2017, Lao PDR was the first country to complete the global WFP effort to strengthen all aspects of gender for the implementation of the country strategic plan. As a result, it developed the gender action plan to guide the implementation of the country strategic plan (2017-2021). It also benchmarked its performance of integrating gender equality and women’s empowerment into all WFP work by applying the Gender Transformation Programme (GTP) markers across seven workstreams: programming, creating an enabling environment, human resources, partnerships, capacity strengthening, communication, oversight and delivering results.

171. **WFP implemented several actions to ensure gender equality and women’s empowerment.** As mentioned above, in the school feeding programme, WFP equally targeted girls and boys. The programme also provided an opportunity for women to prepare school meals and gave them cooking classes. Through its nutrition activities, WFP targeted pregnant and lactating women and through SO 3, WFP provided assistance to households headed by women. Finally, in 2017, WFP provided “super-clean cookstoves” in 48 villages in Nalae district, Luang Namtha Province, where the local and regional procurement (LRP) project was implemented.<sup>168</sup>

172. **For the majority of the country strategic plan timeframe there has not been an active gender focal point to drive the implementation of the gender action plan within WFP.** A dedicated gender focal point was reactivated in April 2020 following the departure of the gender and protection adviser in September 2017. In the meantime, follow up on the implementation of the gender action plan was more limited. A gender results network involving various WFP staff was established and held regular meetings in 2017. However, frequency of meetings decreased until they stopped because they were not included in staff terms of references. The prolonged absence of a dedicated gender focal point and results network resulted in reduced follow up on the country office’s gender action plan.

173. **WFP has taken positive steps to encourage gender parity.** To improve gender parity in staffing, the country office has introduced procedures to follow when carrying out a recruitment process. This includes the vacancy announcement containing gender information, the interview panel being gender balanced wherever possible, the shortlist for final interview containing at least one qualified women candidate where possible and in the case of equal competencies, preference being given to the woman

<sup>165</sup> One FDG said that they discussed the issue of spoiled rice amongst themselves rather than phoning the WFP staff – although they have the number.

<sup>166</sup> Interview with WFP country office staff; Participants in FGD in one village in Xamamxai District were unaware of hotline.

<sup>167</sup> World Food Programme. Annual Performance Report 2017. 2018. Rome. World Food Programme.

<sup>168</sup> ACR 2017

applicant. Furthermore, the country office has introduced the “I know gender” course in WeLearn as mandatory training for country office staff.<sup>169</sup>

174. **Despite challenges, WFP has successfully increased the number of women staff members during the country strategic plan.** According to WFP staff, the remoteness of project sites and norms around gender roles have discouraged women from applying for field positions.<sup>170</sup> However, the country now has women in managerial positions at the two field offices (Oudomxay and Pakse), and has increased the percentage of women staff members, from 29 percent in 2017, to 37 percent in 2020.<sup>171</sup>

175. **WFP has an opportunity to improve gender equality and women’s empowerment (GEWE) coordination with other United Nations agencies.** There is no specific gender technical group within the UNCT. WFP has participated in the inter-agency protection against sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) network and is in the process of joining the local gender network. There is an opportunity for WFP – with other interested United Nations agencies – to enhance GEWE within the UNCT and advocate for the establishment of a gender working group.

176. **Although the gender and age marker shows clear integration of gender in activities during the country strategic plan, there is room for further improvement.** In 2019, WFP started to report the gender and age marker (GAM) that assesses the extent to which gender and age were integrated into the implementation of each activity and rated each activity. Table 14, below, shows the gender and age marker monitoring code for each activity. It is worth noting however that sex-disaggregated data for capacity strengthening activities are only partially available, for instance in the McGovern-Dole Program reports and for SO 3 capacity strengthening transfer activities. Finally, although tracking of programme expenditure attributable to gender was carried out in 2016 (recorded at 25 percent), this was discontinued in 2017 due to a lack of adequate corporate tools and guidance.<sup>172</sup>

**Table 16: WFP gender and age marker**

SO	Activity #	Country strategic plan activity	GAM monitoring code <sup>173</sup>
1	1	Provide policy support, technical assistance and transfer of capacities	3
	2	Accelerate the implementation of the Government’s plan of action of the school meals programme	4
	3	Support a national process for community and Government handover of school meals	4
2	4	Provide technical assistance for evidence-based policy dialogue	4
	5	Stimulate access to local specialized nutritious food for children aged 6 to 23 months	3
	6	Develop a social behaviour change communication and establish farmer nutrition schools	3
3	7	Build community resilience through the creation of productive assets and sustainable livelihood opportunities	4
4	8	Invest in national governance capacity for food and nutrition security	n/a
	9	Enable communities to lead and own their food and nutrition security solutions	3
	10	Enhance government capacity at all levels to prepare for and efficiently respond to natural disasters	3

<sup>169</sup> CO response to gender questionnaire

<sup>170</sup> Interview WFP country office staff

<sup>171</sup> World Food Programme. Annual Performance Report 2017. 2018. Rome. World Food Programme.

<sup>172</sup> Country office response to gender questionnaire; WFP. 2020. *Evaluation of the Gender Policy (2015-2020)*.

<sup>173</sup> Monitoring codes reading: 4” [Fully integrates gender and age] or “3” [Fully integrates gender].

Source: World Food Programme. Annual Country Report 2019. 2020. Rome. World Food Programme.

177. **Gender equality decision making has improved:** Monitoring of decision making related to the nutrition activities under SO 2 showed a positive trend in increased joint decision making. A total of 63 percent of nutrition-related decisions were made jointly by women and men, 17 percent were made by women and 20 percent were made by men. Monitoring of decision making related to the flood relief response under SO 3 showed that the level of women's decision making over cash increased, both jointly and individually: 33 percent of decisions were made jointly by women and men, 49 percent were made by women, and 18 percent were made by men.<sup>174</sup>

## Environment

178. WFP operations have taken into consideration environmental concerns in programme planning and implementation.

179. **Environmental risk screening was conducted for asset creation.** In 2019, all 176 assets established in communities under strategic outcomes 1 and 3 were categorized as having low environmental impact. This was assessed through risk screening jointly undertaken by WFP, implementing partners and communities at the project planning and construction phase, during which risk mitigation measures were identified. For example, several fishponds were initially considered as possessing medium levels of environmental and social risks due to their physical dimensions. Therefore, WFP took some initiatives to reduce the risk levels, such as selecting locally sourced fish, installing fences to reduce physical harm to children and others, technical supervision during construction, etc.<sup>175</sup>

180. **Environmental screening was included within village development plans.** During 2019, WFP supported the completion of 186 nutrition-sensitive village development plans, all of which were identified as having low environmental impact.<sup>176</sup> WFP does not monitor the implementation of plans, as it is not part of its activities. Therefore, the actual environmental impact once (or if) implemented is not known.

181. **Through farmer nutrition schools, WFP raised awareness regarding environmental issues.** Through the farmer nutrition schools, WFP delivers messages that the use of chemical pesticides is detrimental to health and the environment. It also promotes the use of natural pesticides in communities and includes updated formulas and guidance in farmer nutrition school curriculums and training packages.<sup>177</sup>

182. **As part of resilience building activities, WFP supported the piloting of climate-smart villages.** Under SO3, and in partnership with the International Institute of Rural Reconstruction, an international non-governmental organization (INGO), WFP is currently piloting five climate-smart villages in Phongsaly. In addition to the benefit to the targeted communities, the partnership is also building WFP capacity with climate smart technologies.<sup>178</sup>

183. **WFP country office staff have received environmental and social safeguarding training.** Since the fourth quarter of 2020, training on environmental and social safeguards (ESS) is a requirement at the country office level. WFP staff received trainings on topics including pesticide use, climate change impacts, adaptation, and mitigation options.<sup>179</sup> Training of staff is valued and several field office staff expressed the need for further training.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> World Food Programme. Annual Performance Report 2018. 2019. Rome. World Food Programme.

<sup>175</sup> World Food Programme. Annual Performance Report 2019. 2020. Rome. World Food Programme.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>178</sup> Inception interview with WFP country office senior management.

<sup>179</sup> World Food Programme. Annual Performance Report 2019. 2020. Rome. World Food Programme and Interview with WFP country office staff.

<sup>180</sup> Interviews with two WFP field staff.

## Summary

Targeting was largely needs-based. Activities reached a positive balance within genders and ages, and delivery of the country strategic plan took active measures to reach ethnically diverse communities. However, this may have been limited by challenges to reach communities in the most remote areas. The country strategic plan took a similar active approach to adapting delivery to safely reaching beneficiaries, and when risk to staff was identified, the country office took measures to address this. To support accountability to communities, the country office launched a beneficiary feedback mechanism in every village of operation. The mechanism remains operational, although its use has significantly decreased throughout the duration of the country strategic plan. A gender focal point was only nominated in 2020, following the departure of a gender advisor in 2017. Despite the challenge, gender was mainstream into the country strategic plan's implementation, and similarly the country office has taken active steps to improve gender parity in staffing. Positively, the country strategic plan has taken several measures to consider environmental concerns, such as activity environmental screening and staff environmental safeguard training.

### EQ 2.3 To what extent are the achievements of the country strategic plan likely to be sustainable?

184. Sustainability of achievements is built into the intent of the country strategic plan. This is most clearly illustrated in Strategic Objective 1: "Schoolchildren in remote rural areas have sustainable access to food by 2021". The aim is that sustainability and national ownership are achieved through the "school lunch model, which is coupled with capacity strengthening and knowledge transfer".<sup>181</sup> The evaluation, therefore, explored sustainability through the success and challenges of national ownership and the handover process of the school meals programme. Given the outcome focus of the country strategic plan evaluation and the more disparate and relatively limited scale of activities within strategic objectives 2, 3 and 4, assessing outcome level achievements from a sustainability lens was not feasible.

185. **WFP made significant strides in the handover of the school meals programme.** WFP school meals programme handover plan was officially approved by the Government of Lao PDR in June 2018 (see Box 1 below). The Government has committed to taking over complete implementation of the WFP school meals programme by 2021. A remaining 924 schools (64 percent) require to be handed over to the Ministry of Education and Sport and this is planned for June 2021. The handover of the school meals programme is a significant landmark in the shift in WFP implementation, from a model of food aid to one of food assistance and technical support<sup>182</sup> and sustainability.

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<sup>181</sup> World Food Programme. *Laos Country Strategic Plan (2017–2021) Revision 02*. Rome. World Food Programme. 2017.

<sup>182</sup> World Food Programme. *Annual Performance Report 2019*. 2020. Rome. World Food Programme.

### Box 1: The school feeding handover plan<sup>183</sup>

The school feeding handover plan was designed to transition the full responsibility for implementing the national policy on promoting lunch to the national Government. Central to the transition was the handover plan that includes approaches and tools to strengthen communities and the Lao PDR Government's institutional capacity to design, finance and manage programmes over time. Approved in 2018 and started in 2019, the handover plan was jointly developed by the Ministry of Education and Sports and WFP to guide the efforts of the Government and partners to take over and lead the nationalization of the school feeding efforts.

Over the handover period the plan stated that WFP would continue to provide financial and technical support to around 1,450 schools. WFP would support the Ministry of Education and Sports to advocate for the integration of school feeding into government budgets and to formulate guidelines needed for the handover. The Ministry of Education and Sports was to establish an internal committee for school meal handover at the national, provincial and district levels, and a budget line for school meals over an 18-month period.

Under the plan, WFP was to support and invest in core tasks and activities, particularly around capacity strengthening to school meal handover committees, including at the community/school level to ensure they were able to continue programme implementation after the handover had been completed.

At the time of its publication, the handover plan expected the handover of 500 schools to the Ministry of Education and Sports in 2019, followed by the remaining 940 in 2021. After this point the Ministry of Education and Sports would take full lead of the school feeding implementation. The most recent available data shows that in 2019/2020, 515 schools (receiving direct WFP support) had been handed over and integrated into the NSMP, and the remaining 924 are targeted for mid-2021.<sup>184</sup>

186. As discussed above (Section 2.2, EQ 2.1), WFP contributed to seven pieces of legislation that will support the sustainability of the school feeding programme.

187. Once handed over to the Ministry of Education and Sports, the sustainability of the school feeding activities relies partly on timely availability of the budget in the schools. However, **reports show that many schools were confronted with up to three months delay before receiving their budget.**<sup>185</sup>

188. Coordination between and among government institutions at various levels is a key component of sustainability post WFP handover. The Ministry of Education and Sports, along with the Provincial Education and Sports Service (PESS) and District Education and Sports Bureau (DESB), are the main government institutions responsible for school feeding once it has been handed over. However, interviews with government staff highlighted the ongoing need for support from other government departments.<sup>186</sup> For example, the Lao Women's Union, who support cooking of meals, and the District Agriculture and Forestry Office (DAFO) and its provincial counterpart (PAFO), who support school gardening activities. To facilitate coordination and the exchange of information, the ministerial decree outlining the agreement of the handover from WFP to the Ministry of Education and Sports has resulted in the formation of handover committees at provincial, district and village levels.<sup>187</sup> However, budget limitations may restrict the support that government departments can offer. For example, when WFP hand over to DESB, DAFO do not have the budget to provide further support and monitoring of school garden and fishpond activities.<sup>188</sup> This poses a risk to the sustainability of key components of the school meals programme.

189. WFP and the Ministry of Education and Sports have developed a process for school meal handover and there are examples where this process has been successfully implemented. In addition to the handover

<sup>183</sup> WFP. 2018. School Feeding Handover Plan of The Ministry of Education and Sports and the World Food Programme.

<sup>184</sup> WFP. 2019. Annual Country Report 2019.

<sup>185</sup> Interview WFP country office senior staff.

<sup>186</sup> Interview with two district-level government staff.

<sup>187</sup> World Food Programme. Annual Performance Report 2018. 2019. Rome. World Food Programme.

<sup>188</sup> Interview with district-level government staff.

plan developed with the Ministry of Education and Sports (see Box 1), WFP have developed and are utilizing the community capacity assessment to measure communities' capacity to take over school meal programme, and to obtain information to design "packages" of support to assist schools with transition<sup>189</sup> (see also Section 2.2, EQ2.1). The plan and the assessment tool provide WFP with essential direction for the transition, which has resulted in some examples of good practice of the process of handing over the school meals programme, (see Box 2, Luang Namtha).

### Box 2: Good practice actions: Handover process in Luang Namtha Province

- ✓ There is a handover committee with managers from different departments within PESS<sup>190</sup>
- ✓ WFP informed the committee about the handover process
- ✓ A field trip was organized for teachers to visit Thailand school feeding programme
- ✓ WFP provided PESS officers training on management (especially on finance management of the budget for school feeding). PESS then trained DESB who train in communities/schools
- ✓ Training on gardening and nutrition by the Ministry of Education and Sports
- ✓ Handover meeting for first group of districts in Luang Namtha
- ✓ Staff from PESS and PAFO attended training on fish-raising training, organized, and trained by WFP and ADC Fishery Development Company in Vientiane

Source: Interview with provincial level government staff.

190. The challenges to the implementation and success of the school meals programme (see EQ 2.1) strongly suggest the need for further practical action plans on the transition process for handover. Indeed, staff at country and regional level stated that the handover plan process could have benefitted from a more detailed action plan articulating the handover as a package of capacity strengthening activities against the five pathways identified in the country capacity strengthening corporate guidance (policy and budget, institutional capacity, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, community engagement), with clear success criteria for each of the milestones.<sup>191</sup>

191. **To support sustainability, WFP are now providing some post-handover technical support for school feeding programmes.** Having learned from the first batch of schools handed over, WFP will now offer post-handover support for 6-12 months as part of the handover process in both the northern and southern provinces.<sup>192</sup> In the north, district community facilitators (DCF) (field staff) are continuing some monitoring post-handover.<sup>193</sup> In districts where WFP will not provide ongoing support, it is reported that WFP has signed memorandums of understanding with Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and Comité de Coopération avec le Laos (CCL) to continue the provision of technical support.

**Table 17: Arrangements for ongoing support to school to be handed over**

Province	District	# schools	Organization that will provide on-going support
Phongsaly	Boon neua	56	Comité de Coopération avec le Laos
Luangnamtha	Namtha	55	WFP District Community Facilitator
	Sing	78	WFP District Community Facilitator
	Viengphoukha	40	Lutheran World Federation
	Nalae	47	Lutheran World Federation
Odoumxay	Xay	68	WFP District Community Facilitator
	Namor	59	WFP District Community Facilitator

<sup>189</sup> WFP. 2018. Summary Report. Community Capacity Assessment (CCA) for School Feeding. October 2018.

<sup>190</sup> Head of PESS; Vice of PESS; Head of statistic and international relation; Head of finance; Head of HR; Head of formal education; Head of Pre-primary education.

<sup>191</sup> Feedback from WFP RBB.

<sup>192</sup> Interview with one WFP country office staff member and one provincial WFP staff member; feedback from WFP CO staff.

<sup>193</sup> Interview with WFP field office staff.

Province	District	# schools	Organization that will provide on-going support
	Nga	59	WFP District Community Facilitator
	Beng	53	WFP District Community Facilitator

Source: WFP country office.

192. **Continuous follow up to strengthen community ownership is needed for the sustainability of school feeding after the handover.** As reported above, the capacity of communities to take ownership remains a significant challenge to sustainability. While the results of the community capacity assessment feed into providing tailored packages of assistance for the school meals programme, further follow-up needs to be considered.

193. **The availability of water in villages limits the sustainability of the school feeding programme.** It was reported and observed, particularly in the northern provinces/districts, that many villages lack water. This impacts the school feeding activities and reduces the likelihood of sustainability. For example, in Oudomxay, it was reported that in 10 schools the fishpond had dried up,<sup>194</sup> and in Luang Namtha schools struggle to provide water for handwashing and latrines, let alone for fishponds.<sup>195</sup> Difficulties, in some locations, of accessing water for handwashing and fishponds, indicates that WFP needs to ensure the design of activities is adapted to context.

#### Summary

WFP has made good progress in the handover of the school meals programme and has identified the development of accountability and ownership within the local community as vital to a successful and sustainable handover. WFP contributed to seven pieces of legislation that will support the sustainability of the school feeding programme. There are ongoing challenges to the handover process, including a lack of clarity over the process, governmental budget limitations and capacity shortages at the local level.

### EQ 2.4 In humanitarian contexts, to what extent did the country strategic plan facilitate more strategic linkages among humanitarian, development and, where appropriate, peace work?

194. **The country strategic plan was designed, within SO 3, with a clear outcome that links humanitarian and development work.** SO 3 aimed to assist vulnerable communities in adapting to climate change and building long-term resilience against climate risks. Strategic partnerships with FAO, IFAD, and the Government, as well as with other development partners, provided both technical and capacity strengthening assistance, as well as food- and cash-based transfers for asset creation activities. The country strategic plan showed strong potential to link humanitarian and development work. However, in 2017 contributions to SO 3 were only 32 percent of the needs-based plan, with funding only received towards the end of the year. Achievements under SO 3 for 2017 were therefore lower than planned.<sup>196</sup> In 2018, there was also an underspend (USD 870,093) against both the needs-based plan (USD 1,041,834) and available resources (USD 2,873,673).<sup>197</sup>

195. **The country strategic plan did not have an “emergency”-related outcome or an emergency component. Although this limited the ability of WFP to create strategic links between emergency response and development work, WFP was able to develop some innovative links.** Even without a crisis response focus area, WFP was able to rapidly respond to shocks (floods in 2018, drought in 2019, and COVID-19 in 2020) through immediate funding from the Strategic Resource Allocation Committee and

<sup>194</sup> Interview district-level government staff.

<sup>195</sup> Interview district-level government staff.

<sup>196</sup> World Food Programme. Annual Country Report 2017. 2018. Rome. World Food Programme.

<sup>197</sup> WFP. CSP Results and Resources: Overview Laos, Reporting period: 2019. Downloaded 11.11.20.

the Global Logistics Cluster (in headquarters).<sup>198</sup> This funding was channelled into SO 3, the strategic outcome intended to build resilience, not to respond to emergencies.<sup>199</sup> Despite, the lack of a specific budget line for emergency response, WFP created innovative links between humanitarian and development work. For example, to support the 131 flood-affected communities in three districts in Khammouane Province, WFP designed a campaign to promote the use of cash to support dietary diversity and nutrition,<sup>200</sup> therefore linking emergency cash transfers to development work of preventing malnutrition and stunting.

196. Resilience activities are limited to Strategic Outcome 3. There is a need to integrate resilience capacity strengthening activities throughout other strategic outcomes. Given the limited disaster risk management capacity of the Government at the national and provincial level, there is an opportunity for WFP to explore building the resilience capacities of communities (see Box 3). This can be incorporated into activities under existing strategic outcomes, for example integrating climate change resilience into farmer nutrition schools.<sup>201</sup> This will help bridge the humanitarian and development work.

### Box 3: Village disaster prevention unit (VDPU): Also known as village disaster prevention and control committees (VDPCC)

Village disaster prevention units (VDPUs) are part of the national disaster prevention and control committee (NDPCC) structure and are responsible for preparing for and taking rapid action in the event of an emergency and ensuring that support is provided to affected households. VDPCCs also mobilize resources for disaster management at the village level and establish volunteer groups for relief operations. They provide the initial information on the effects of the disaster. In practice, the composition of VDPUs or VDPCCs is often the same as village education development committees (VEDCs).

VEDCs are composed of at least seven individuals, including the village head (serving as chairperson), representatives from the Women's and Youth Union, and the School Director. Their role is to promote enrolment and completion, as well as supporting school management and learning achievement, through liaison with the wider community, providing cash and in-kind support and participating in school activities.

Source: WFP. 2019. Strengthening the capacity of ASEAN Member States to design and implement risk-informed and shock-responsive social protection systems for resilience – Lao PDR Case Study, May 2019.

197. **The country office has a capacity gap of resilience expertise.** Country office staff identified that the office has a current lack of the skills necessary to build communities' capacity for agricultural resilience, and equip farmers to absorb and recover from shocks and stresses.<sup>202</sup> Similarly, it was identified that there was a gap in the skills needed to build nutrition resilience so that communities can withstand dietary diversity shocks. Key informants responded that relevant trainings on topics such as resilience were planned with the regional office. However, these were postponed due to COVID-19.

<sup>198</sup> interview WFP country office staff.

<sup>199</sup> interview WFP country office staff.

<sup>200</sup> WFP. 2019. *Social Behaviour Change Communication: Sharing knowledge to empower communities*, May 2019.

<sup>201</sup> WFP country office staff.

<sup>202</sup> Interview with WFP regional office staff; Interview with two WFP country office staff.

198. **The country strategic plan log frame and indicators are more adapted to humanitarian interventions than to development activities.** Indicators show, for example quantities of food distributed, number of training activities provided, numbers of people reached etc. There is a lack of indicators showing any resulting changes following capacity strengthening activities at the individual level. The log frame and indicators are based on the Corporate Results Framework (CRF) and Corporate Indicator Compendium. The Corporate Results Framework offers what needs to be monitored at the minimum but the country offices can (and often do) go beyond the Corporate Results Framework to meet their country office-specific, donor-specific evidence needs.<sup>203</sup> However, this adds to the overall monitoring workload and of course requires specific staff capabilities. It is important to note that developing indicators that measure these types of changes would improve the understanding of the country strategic plan performance in linking humanitarian and development work. This also suggests that WFP should revise its minimum monitoring requirements (MMRs) to provide further flexibility and not require the use of corporate indicators that are not suitable.

#### Summary

The country strategic plan clearly articulates the link between humanitarian and development work, but funding shortfalls and delays have hindered activities to address the nexus between the two. Although the country strategic plan did not have an “emergency”-related outcome and focus area, which limited the ability of WFP to create strategic links between emergency response and development work, WFP was able to develop some innovative links.

### **2.3. EVALUATION QUESTION 3: TO WHAT EXTENT HAS WFP USED ITS RESOURCES EFFICIENTLY IN CONTRIBUTING TO COUNTRY STRATEGIC PLAN OUTPUTS AND STRATEGIC OUTCOMES?**

#### EQ 3.1 To what extent were outputs delivered within the intended timeframe?

199. Overall, the evaluation found no significant delays in the delivery of planned activities behind intended outputs where funding conditions have been supportive (see Annex 8 for details). While emergency response was not originally planned in the country strategic plan, the support that was requested and then provided by the country office was reported by government officials as being delivered quickly to the required areas.

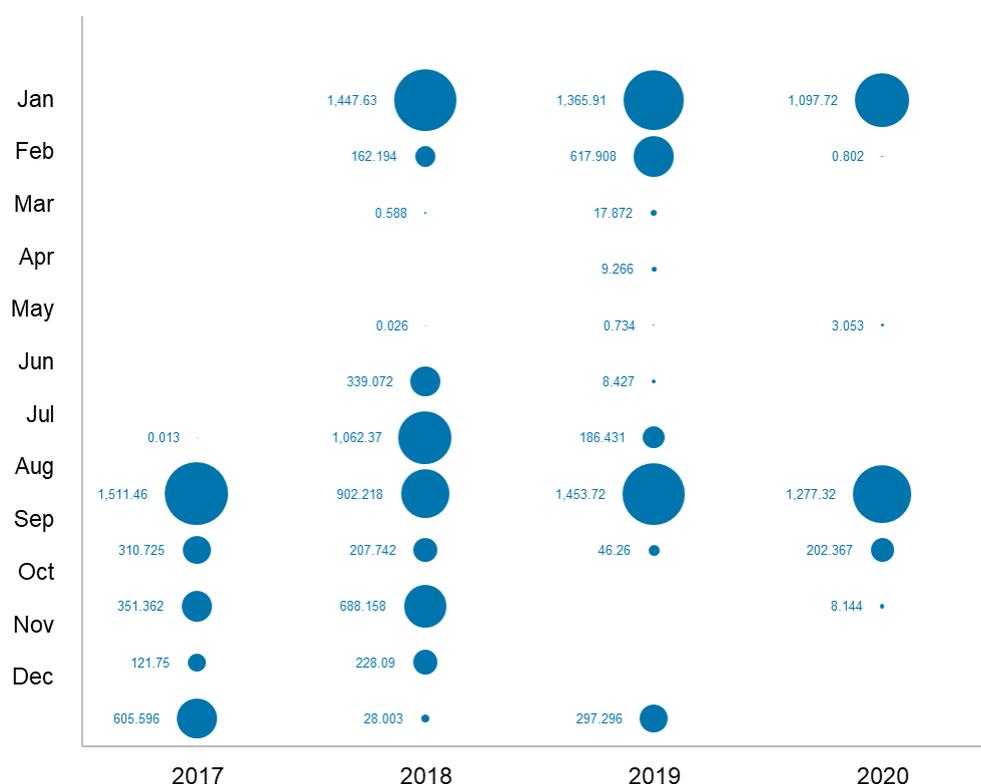
200. Road conditions challenge food delivery, and therefore distribution. Timeliness of distribution has improved over the country strategic plan period. Food arrives through Bangkok, Thailand, and is unloaded in Vientiane for storage before onward delivery to sub-office warehouses. Food for multiple activities is dispatched at the same time, allowing for savings on transport costs. For the school feeding programme, WFP aims to do two deliveries to target schools per year. Delivery needs to be completed before the start of school semesters, which commence in September and January. Food delivery for the first semester starts from mid-July to be completed by the end of August. Delivery for second semester starts in mid-December to be completed by mid or end of January. However, food delivery to schools (particularly from mid-July when still in the rainy season) is challenged by remoteness of target schools, landslides, and poor road conditions.<sup>204</sup> Distribution is also delayed when WFP does not receive logistics details (quantities and locations for delivery) in a timely manner. As Table 16, below, shows, food delivery to schools over the period 2017 to 2020 have become less spread out within each year. This indicates that distribution is becoming more efficient, and more schools are receiving food within the timeframes needed for the start of school semesters.

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<sup>203</sup> WFP RRB staff.

<sup>204</sup> Interview with one WFP country office staff member.

**Table 18: Food delivery (mt) to schools by month for school feeding activity**



Source: WFP country office 2020.

### Summary

The evaluation found that the delivery of commodities have generally been timely and that efficiency of food delivery has improved over the course of the country strategic plan.

### EQ 3.2 To what extent was coverage and targeting of interventions appropriate?

201. Issues of strategic targeting under the country strategic plan are covered in Section 2.1 EQ 1.2 of this report. This evaluation question focuses on operational coverage and targeting. Evidence, from stakeholder interviews, suggests that if the key challenge of targeting remote communities is to be a consistent focus, WFP is not yet as informed as it needs to be, in terms of whether its support is being well targeted. Table 17 below provides data on the percentage of schools being covered within a province (aggregated data from each district). This shows that whilst an average of around 74 percent of all schools in the targeted provinces are being reached - which is significant - WFP currently has no clear sighting on the extent to which the 26 percent of schools not being reached aligns with local contextualized issues of poverty/ remoteness and vulnerability. Activities in SO 2 and SO 3 were appropriately targeted in geographic areas where conditions pertinent to the outcome aims are found.

**Table 19: Coverage and targeting of interventions**

Province	Total number of Schools in province/ districts	Total number of schools in WFP school feeding programme	Percentage of schools covered by school feeding programme
Attapeu	163	115	70.6
Khammouan	59	15	25.4
Louangnamtha	351	278	79.2

Province	Total number of Schools in province/ districts	Total number of schools in WFP school feeding programme	Percentage of schools covered by school feeding programme
Louangphabang	117	99	84.6
Oudomxai	448	394	87.9
Phongsavaly	399	280	70.2
Salavan	245	147	60.0
Sekong	164	103	62.8
Grand Total	1,946	1,433*	73.5

\*Including two schools for children with hearing and visual impairments.

Source: WFP CO, October 2020.

### Summary

WFP is reaching a significant amount of schools within the targeted provinces. WFP is not well sighted within its operational targeting at the local level on the extent to which remote and/or poor areas with specific issues of vulnerability within the community are being covered.

### EQ 3.3 To what extent were WFP activities cost-efficient in delivery of its assistance?

202. The available data do not suffice for a comprehensive analysis of the cost-efficiency of WFP assistance in Lao PDR. The evaluation, using the information that could be obtained, explored food loss, the cost efficiency of food distribution, and staffing capacity with main country and field offices.

#### Food losses

203. **There is limited loss of food within WFP warehouse facilities and within schools, indicating efficient storage.** Food is stored and handled through a network of three warehouse facilities. One facility has been offered as in-kind support from the Government since 2007, a second facility is a WFP building located on government land. This has led to cost saving for WFP. WFP logistics record two kinds of food loss: pre-delivery loss, before food reaches Lao PDR; and post-delivery loss, within WFP warehouse facilities. As Table 18 below shows, loss within WFP warehouses has remained at a stable and minimal amount throughout the country strategic plan period and pre-delivery loss reduced substantially over time.

**Table 20: Reported food loss by year**

Year	Loss before reaching Lao PDR (Ocean loss) (mt)	Loss at WFP warehouses (mt)	Total (mt)
2017	117.022	0.004	117.026
2018	30.326	0	30.326
2019	2.994	0.05	3.044
2020	0.568	0.044	0.612
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>150.910</b>	<b>0.098</b>	<b>151.008</b>

Source: WFP country office data.

204. Prior to the commencement of school feeding activities, WFP assessed school facilities used for food storage. Training to manage the storage space (how to maintain the facility, how to clean and how to prevent infestation) was provided to school store managers and school cooks. As Table 19 below shows, the amount of food lost within school storage facilities is low and decreased over the course of the country strategic plan.

**Table 21: Food distribution and losses for school feeding activities by year**

Year	Total distributed to schools (mt)	Total recorded loss in school storage facilities (mt)	% recorded food loss in school storage facilities
2017	2,900.908	3.3282	0.11
2018	5,066.088	31.349	0.62
2019	4,003.827	1.25	0.03
2020	2,589.399	0.781	0.03
<b>Total</b>	<b>14,560.222</b>	<b>36.7082</b>	<b>0.25</b>

Source: WFP country office data.

## Distribution costs

205. **Although the cost of transport has increased with the country strategic plan reaching remote areas, inclusion rates have also increased.** In the first year of the country strategic plan, the delivery of WFP food assistance to remote areas, and moving distribution points closer to the beneficiaries, increased transport costs.<sup>205</sup> However, at the same time, it was also highlighted that changing distribution points led to a higher inclusion rate for SO 2 beneficiaries, children and pregnant and lactating women, and therefore enhanced WFP support to achieve the strategic outcome of reducing stunting rates.<sup>206</sup>

206. **The cost of distribution for the school feeding activity has decreased over the duration of the country strategic plan.** As Table 20, shows the cost of food distribution for the school feeding programme has decreased over the course of the country strategic plan. The cost of distribution is slightly higher in 2020 when compared with the previous year, even though food distribution had not been completed at the time of data analysis. According to two WFP informants, the local transport market is regularly assessed, with a significant number of transport providers being on the shortlist for 15-20 years.

**Table 22: The cost of food distribution for school feeding**

Year	Total transport cost Bangkok-Schools (school feeding activity) (USD)	Total food distributed for school feeding activity (mt)	Cost of distribution per mt (USD)
<b>2017</b>	833,931.09	2,900.908	287.47
<b>2018</b>	1,102,105.84	5,066.088	217.55
<b>2019</b>	819,440.33	4,003.827	204.66
<b>2020</b>	572,923.50	2,589.399*	221.26
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,328,400.76</b>	<b>14,560.22</b>	<b>228.60</b>

\*At the time of analysis, food distribution for 2020 has not been completed.

Source: WFP country office data.

207. **There is some, though limited, evidence to suggest that WFP assessed more cost-efficient modalities to implement the country strategic plan.** For example, in 2017, instead of engaging a third-party institution as a service provider to prepare village development plans under Activity 9, WFP worked directly with the district agriculture and forestry office to support communities to develop their own plans; this resulted in a cost-saving that was redirected.<sup>207</sup> Additionally, distribution of food for different activities was dispatched at the same time, allowing for savings on transport costs.<sup>208</sup> Through the partnership with Big Brother Mouse,<sup>209</sup> WFP was able to offer more cost-efficient literacy materials for schools in five districts. Through the saving more beneficiaries were reached.<sup>210</sup>

<sup>205</sup> World Food Programme. 2017. Lao People's Democratic Republic. Annual Country Report 2017. Pg3.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid. pg.26.

<sup>207</sup> World Food Programme. 2017. Lao People's Democratic Republic. Annual Country Report 2017.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> Big Brother Mouse is a local not-for-profit organization. Also see paragraph 226.

<sup>210</sup> World Food Programme. 2019. Lao People's Democratic Republic. Annual Country Report 2019.

208. The cost of food distribution for SO 2 has been relatively high as tonnage is small (for example, approximately 2-3 metric tons to more than 60 villages in one district). WFP has tried to reduce costs by combining SO 2 with SO 1 distribution. However, it is not always possible either because operations for SO 2 are not collocated with those for SO 1 or because the delivery timelines are different. Therefore, deliveries could not systematically be combined and transport costs for SO 2 remained high.

## Staffing

209. **Throughout the country strategic plan, there has been difficulty recruiting specialist national staff.** With the country strategic plan and the shift away from direct food assistance towards national capacity strengthening, WFP underwent a workforce review in mid-2017. The review identified

### Summary

Data did not suffice for a comprehensive analysis of the cost-efficiency of WFP assistance in Lao PDR. However, analysis of available data indicate that the cost-efficiency of activities has improved over the country strategic plan. For instance, distribution cost for school feeding decreased between 2017 and 2020. Although faced with challenges, the country office has assessed more cost-efficient modalities, such as by combining SO1 and SO2 deliveries.

changes to organizational staffing at country office and field office levels. There was a gradual abolishment or transformation of some positions such as monitoring assistants<sup>211</sup> and logistics positions,<sup>212</sup> as well as the identification of gaps in specialist positions. At the same time, there has been a shift towards the employment of national staff in the office. This has resulted in development for national staff members and the upgrading of staff positions. However, due to competitive salaries elsewhere and the lack of availability of such specialist knowledge/capacity within the country, WFP has experienced difficulties recruiting some national specialist positions (for example, agronomists, community mobilizers). For example, the country office requested that WFP headquarters arrange the deployment of a nutritionist to support the Laos country office on temporary duty basis.<sup>213</sup> As a result, many national positions have remained vacant over the duration of the current country strategic plan.<sup>214</sup>

### EQ 3.4 To what extent were alternative, more cost-effective measures considered?

210. In 2018, the country office carried out a cost-benefit analysis (CBA) study of school meals programmes jointly with the Ministry of Education and Sports and MasterCard. **The study indicates the possible cost-effectiveness of the school feeding programme in Lao PDR to inform evidence-based policymaking** and advocacy for further investments in a nationally-owned school meals programme. According to the study, **for every USD 1 invested in school meals, an economic value return of USD 6.1 (for the food-based programme) or USD 5 (for cash-based programmes) is generated over the lifetime of a beneficiary** in the country's economy, predominantly attributed to improved education leading to increased productivity and additional income, and better health outcomes as a result of school meals programmes. The study noted that it is important to interpret the differences in the cost-benefit ratios for food- and cash-based programmes by looking at the total costs and net benefits created by each programme.<sup>215</sup>

211. Macro financial assessment was also conducted in July 2019, to provide a baseline overview of the financial sector and its inherent opportunities and risks for WFP cash-based transfers operations.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> Monitoring assistant posts were renamed as district community facilitator with expanded roles of community mobilization communities in addition to monitoring.

<sup>212</sup> Lao PDR Workforce planning presentation.

<sup>213</sup> WFP CO comment.

<sup>214</sup> Interview WFP country office staff; World Food Programme. Annual Performance Report 2017. 2018. Rome. World Food Programme.

<sup>215</sup> WFP.2019. Cost benefit analysis of the school meals programme - Lao PDR.

<sup>216</sup> WFP.2019. Macro Financial Assessment Laos.

212. Between April 2017 and June 2019, the country office implemented a local and regional procurement programme, funded by USDA, across 47 villages and 47 schools within the Nalae district. One of the three strategic outcomes of the programme was improved cost-effectiveness of food assistance through local and regional procurement. The end line evaluation concluded that while the WFP local and regional procurement programme has been able to achieve its intended outcomes overall, there were areas for further learning, such as improving coordination, increasing women's participation in leadership

#### Summary

The country office has carried out several assessments and activities aimed at demonstrating its awareness of the need for cost effectiveness in programming design. This included a cost-benefit analysis of the school meals programme and the implementation of a procurement programme with an aim of improving cost effectiveness of food assistance through local and regional procurement. At the same time, the evaluation did not find the trails that such awareness was translated into deliberate actions to explore alternative more cost-effective measures systematically.

and improving the limited monitoring of data collection.<sup>217</sup>

## 2.4. EVALUATION QUESTION 4: WHAT ARE THE FACTORS THAT EXPLAIN WFP PERFORMANCE AND THE EXTENT TO WHICH IT HAS MADE THE STRATEGIC SHIFT EXPECTED BY THE COUNTRY STRATEGIC PLAN?

EQ 4.1 To what extent did WFP analyse or use existing evidence on the hunger challenges, and the food security and nutrition issues in the country to develop the country strategic plan?

213. **WFP extensively used a variety of existing analyses to develop the country strategic plan.** WFP predominately drew on Lao PDR official statistics and census data, and World Bank and UNICEF analyses on poverty and nutrition: (i) poverty data were taken from Ministry of Planning and Investment, a Lao Statistics Bureau report entitled 'Where are the Poor?'; (ii) hunger data were taken from Lao Statistics Bureau and World Bank 2014 Poverty Profile in Lao PDR; (iii) stunting data were taken from Ministry of Health and UNICEF 2015 Lao Child Anthropometry Assessment Survey, an add-on to the 2015 National Immunization Survey; (iv) Information on breastfeeding was taken from Lao Social Indicator Survey. 2011 - 2012; (v) Agriculture data were taken from Lao Census of Agriculture, 2010-2011, Lao Statistics Bureau 2014 Statistical Yearbook 2014, and World Bank 2014 Drivers of Poverty Reduction; and (vi) Sustainable food systems data were taken from Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry 2016, Comprehensive Food Security Assessment. Data were also taken from WFP commissioned surveys, such as the Strategic Review of Food and Nutrition Security in Lao People's Democratic Republic, and WFP data, such as Consolidated Livelihood Exercise for Analyzing Resilience (2016).

#### Summary

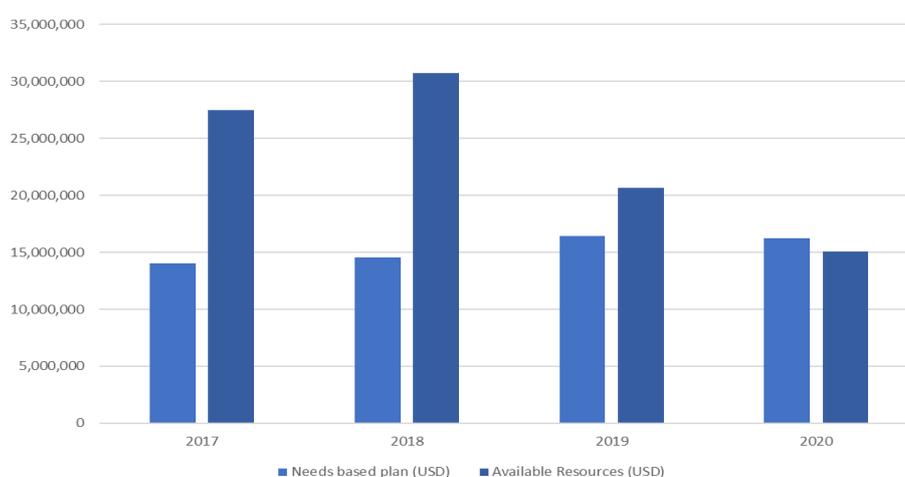
WFP extensively used a variety of existing analyses to develop the country strategic plan, predominantly drawing on Lao PDR official statistics and census data, and World Bank and UNICEF analyses on poverty and nutrition, as well as the WFP commissioned Strategic Review of Food and Nutrition Security in Lao PDR.

<sup>217</sup> WFP.2020. *Decentralized Evaluation - End line Evaluation of USDA Local Regional Procurement project in Nalae District, Luang Namtha Province in Lao PDR* [FY 16-19].

EQ 4.2 To what extent has WFP been able to mobilize adequate, predictable and flexible resources to finance the country strategic plan?

214. **Throughout the country strategic plan, WFP has mobilized a very high percentage of funds called for in the needs-based plan.** The country strategic plan had an original needs-based plan of USD 85,344,104. There were four budget revisions, two of which were substantive. The first major revision (budget revision 2), in October 2018, did not change the overall strategic orientation of the Lao PDR country strategic plan but decreased the overall country strategic plan budget to USD 78,717,956. The second major budget revision in September 2020, adjusted the country strategic plan for COVID-19 related responses, increasing the needs-based plan to USD 88,532,208.<sup>218</sup> As Figure 9, shows, the country strategic plan appears to have been significantly overfunded.<sup>219</sup> However, this perspective needs to be balanced with an understanding that funding has included multiyear funding that extends beyond the duration of the country strategic plan.<sup>220</sup>

**Figure 10: Available resources against needs-based plan**



Source: WFP. CSP Results and Resources Overview, Laos.<sup>221</sup>

215. **Much of the funding through the country strategic plan has been reasonably predictable, however it has not been flexible.** As of September 2020, WFP was able to mobilize 90 percent (USD 79,894,346) of funds against the total needs-based plan. The funding strategy has continually focused on contributions from key official development assistance partners.<sup>222</sup> Figure 10, indicates USA through McGovern-Dole programme funding, has played a central role in this, with a contribution in September 2020 of 56 percent of the needs-based plan.<sup>223</sup> However, much of the resources to the country strategic plan, between 2017-2020, were multi-year allocations earmarked to specific strategic outcomes and activities.<sup>224</sup> For example, in 2019, of the contributions received, 98 percent were earmarked for specific country strategic plan activities while 2 percent were flexible contributions at top country portfolio budget

<sup>218</sup> World Food Programme 2020. Country Strategic Plan Revision. Version 16 September 2020.

<sup>219</sup> As of September 2020

<sup>220</sup> WFP CO comment.

<sup>221</sup> WFP. CSP Results and Resources Overview, Laos, Reporting Period: 2020. Downloaded 11.11.20; WFP. CSP Results and Resources Overview, Laos, Reporting Period: 2019. Downloaded 11.11.20; WFP. CSP Results and Resources Overview, Laos, Reporting Period: 2018. Downloaded 11.11.20; WFP. CSP Results and Resources Overview, Laos, Reporting Period: 2017. Downloaded 11.11.20

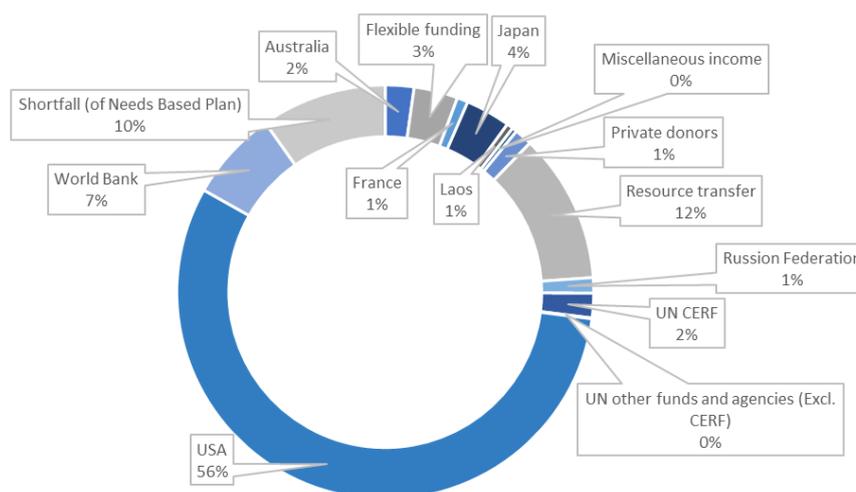
<sup>222</sup> World Food Programme. 2019. Lao People's Democratic Republic Annual Country Report 2019. Country Strategic Plan 2017 - 2021

<sup>223</sup> World Food Programme. 2020. Lao Resource Situation. 09/11/2020

<sup>224</sup> Interview with WFP Country Office senior staff; World Food Programme. Annual Performance Report 2017. 2018. Rome. World Food Programme

(CPB) level.<sup>225</sup> The flexible contributions were allocated to specific activities based on resource shortfalls as well as evolving emergency situations.<sup>226</sup>

**Figure 11: Funding composition for the country strategic plan**



Source: World Food Programme. 2020. Lao Resource Situation. 09/11/2020.

216. **The total available resources at the end of each year of the country strategic plan masks under-funding of some strategic outcomes.** As noted above, the country strategic plan has received a very low proportion of flexible funding, with most funding earmarked against strategic outcomes and specific activities. As a result, although, at the end of the year, some strategic outcomes have been overfunded, others have been underfunded. For example, as seen in Figure 11 below, SO 3 was underfunded in 2017 and in 2020. Flexible contributions were allocated to specific activities based on resource shortfalls as well as evolving emergency situations.<sup>227</sup>

217. However, more significantly, **the total available resources at the end of the year, masks significant delays to receiving funds within the year.** Delays in receiving financial contributions have caused delays or postponement of some activities. For example, in 2017 WFP received USD 470,000 against Strategic Outcome 3, only 31 percent of requirements for the strategic outcome against the needs-based plan. In addition, receipt of these limited resources was delayed, resulting in further lower than planned achievements. In 2018, Strategic Outcome 3 was underfunded through the first half of the year, until funding was received late in the year, allowing activities to begin.<sup>228</sup> Also in 2017, WFP received USD 1.3 million against requirements for Strategic Outcome 4, a total of 103 percent of requirements for the strategic outcome against the needs-based plan. However, late confirmation of funding, as well as the postponement of some activities to 2018, resulted in lower achievement of planned activities.<sup>229</sup>

<sup>225</sup> 2019 ACR.

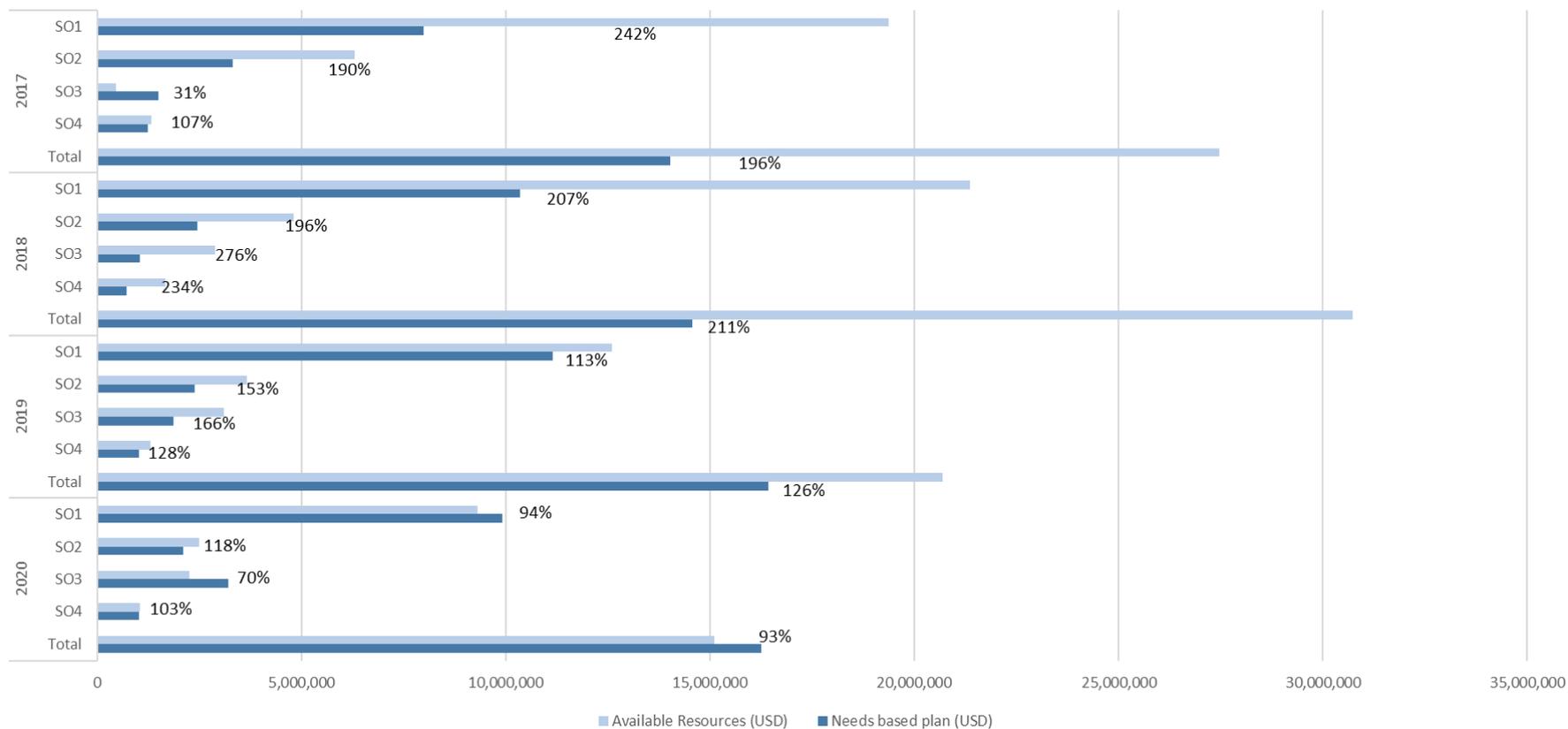
<sup>226</sup> The evaluation team highlight that within WFP documents, the term 'flexible funding' is used with different meanings. This can be misleading to readers, as 'flexible funding' in, for example Lao Resource Situation documents, does not mean the country office can not allocated funding as needed, for resource shortfalls. This is not a issue of the Lao country office but at HQ level.

<sup>227</sup> World Food Programme. 2019. Lao People's Democratic Republic Annual Country Report 2019. Country Strategic Plan (2017-2021).

<sup>228</sup> Interview with WFP country office staff; World Food Programme. 2018. Lao People's Democratic Republic Annual Country Report 2018. Country Strategic Plan (2017-2021).

<sup>229</sup> World Food Programme. 2017. Lao People's Democratic Republic Annual Country Report 2017. Country Strategic Plan (2017-2021).

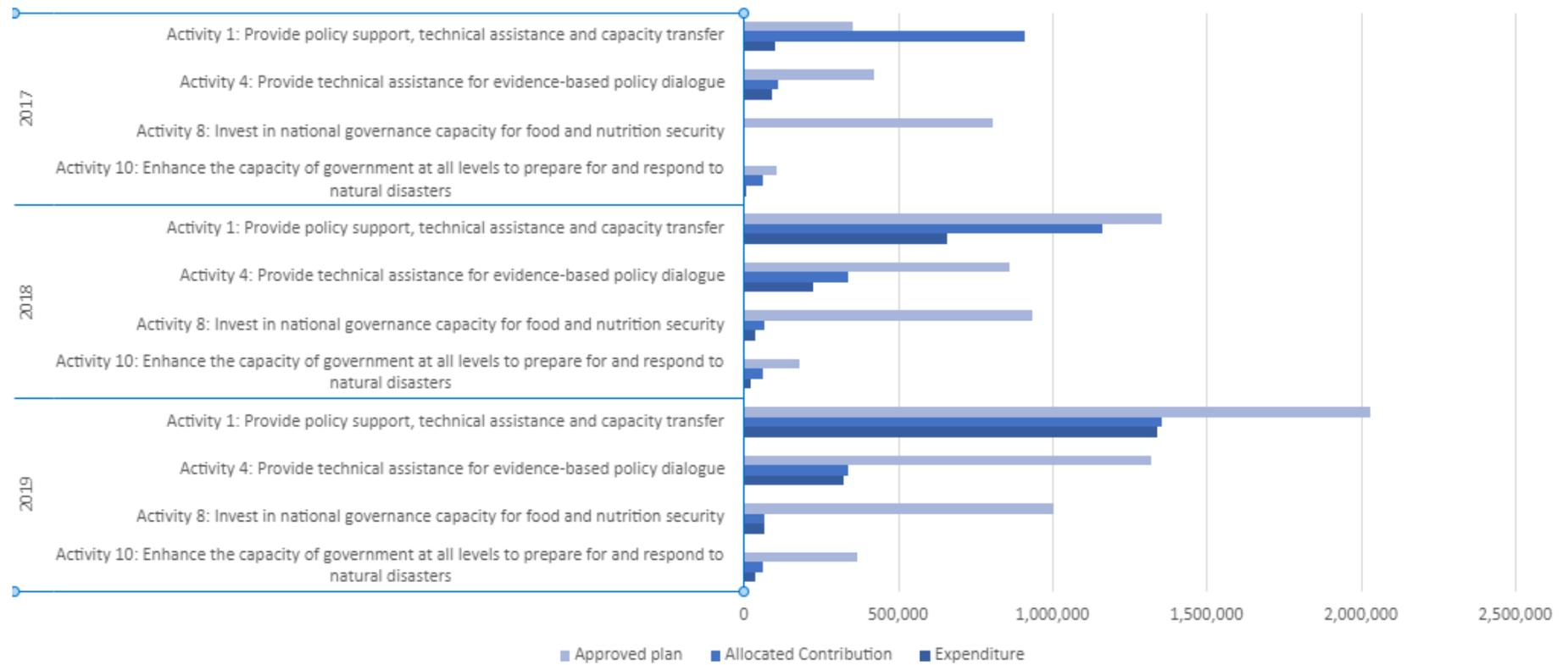
**Figure 12: Available resources for needs-based plan**



Source: WFP. CSP Results and Resources Overview, Laos<sup>230</sup> (Available resources consist of the yearly allocation of "contributions", plus unspent balance of allocated contributions carried forward from previous years and the advance and other resources for the current year).

<sup>230</sup> WFP. CSP Results and Resources Overview, Laos, Reporting Period: 2020. Downloaded 11.11.20; WFP. CSP Results and Resources Overview, Laos, Reporting Period: 2019. Downloaded 11.11.20; WFP. CSP Results and Resources Overview, Laos, Reporting Period: 2018. Downloaded 11.11.20; WFP. CSP Results and Resources Overview, Laos, Reporting Period: 2017. Downloaded 11.11.20.

**Figure 13: Needs-based plan, financial allocation and expenditure for government level capacity strengthening/technical assistance activities**



Source: Downloaded from WFP IRM report platform.

218. The country strategic plan's shift from direct implementation to policy support and technical assistance to Government is implemented through activities in strategic outcomes 1, 2 and 4. The successes and limitations of these activities is discussed in Section 2.2 EQ2.1. As Figure 12 (above) shows the allocated contributions for Activity 1 have been over the amount approved in the needs-based plan. However, apart from Activity 1, where there has been significant success, **the capacity strengthening activities under SO 2 and SO 4 have been consistently underfunded for the duration of the country strategic plan.**

219. WFP developed a partnership and resource mobilization strategy in 2018,<sup>231</sup> however activities to develop new donor partnerships are still taking shape. The strategy maps key donors against strategic objectives and provides recommendations for maintaining donor relations as well as attracting new donors. Activity managers were responsible for fundraising for their activities/strategic outcomes, until a full-time staff member to work on resource mobilization and donor partnerships was recruited in March 2020. Interviews with WFP staff,<sup>232</sup> and recommendations in the strategy, suggest that plans to develop new donor partnerships are being considered, and engagements in 2020 with emerging donors are translating into new sources of funding.<sup>233</sup> COVID-19 restrictions were reported to have delayed progress on new partnerships.

220. As seen in Figure 10, the largest financial contribution for the country strategic plan came from the USA, through McGovern-Dole school feeding programme. This funding stream was a continuation from previous years, pre-country strategic plan.<sup>234</sup> Similarly, the World Bank contribution, which was allocated to SO 2 and the agriculture for nutrition project, was a programme started in 2016, pre-country strategic plan. These large pre-country strategic plan funding streams and the associated legacy programmes have dominated both the shaping of the country strategic plan, and its direction throughout its duration.

#### Summary

Over the course of the country strategic plan WFP has deployed a high percentage of funds against the needs-based plan. However, the amount of resources available at the end of each year masks the underfunding of some strategic outcomes and significant delays to receiving funds. Additionally, although much of the funding has been predictable, it has not been flexible, as resources have been multiyear allocations earmarked to specific strategic outcomes and activities. A significant proportion of the funding has been a continuation from streams developed pre-country strategic plan. Although a Partnership and Resource Mobilization Strategy was created in 2018, activities under the plan have not yet been fully developed.

#### EQ 4.3 To what extent did the country strategic plan lead to partnerships and collaborations with other actors that positively influenced performance and results?

221. The introduction of the country strategic plan has strengthened partnerships and collaborations with the central, provincial, and district government. Throughout the country strategic plan, WFP engaged with a wide range of government partners. The Ministry of Planning and Investment is the main coordinating ministry for WFP and the counterpart of the memorandum of understanding for the country strategic plan. However, for implementation of the country strategic plan, WFP built on long-term partnerships with the Ministry of Education and Sports for an handing over of school feeding activities; the Ministry of Health for improved technical assistance in prevention of stunting and with the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry in areas focused on promoting climate and nutrition-sensitive agricultural practices; the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare for technical support to natural disaster preparedness and to the process of drafting a social protection strategy; and the Lao Front for National Development. Most interviews with government staff at the central and provincial level reported that coordination and

<sup>231</sup> WFP Laos Partnership and Resource Mobilization Strategy CSP (2017-2021).

<sup>232</sup> Interview WFP country office staff.

<sup>233</sup> WFP Laos CSP (2017-2021) Partnership Strategy 20180203.

<sup>234</sup> WFP Lao PDR. Laos Funding Country Historical Overview. 30.8.2019.

communication mechanisms between WFP and central ministries and provincial departments are good, particularly the relationship between WFP and the Provincial Departments of Planning and Investment.<sup>235</sup> At the district level, there were some reports of miscommunication and a need for more regular support from WFP.<sup>236</sup> For WFP, partnering with the Government has strengthened its capacities and enhanced relationships.

222. **The country strategic plan's shift into increased technical assistance has repositioned WFP partnerships with government stakeholders.** Provincial and district level departments have been directly involved in the implementation of WFP interventions. WFP has also undertaken capacity strengthening activities for government staff, particularly at the national and provincial levels. This is evident through activities that have engaged national legislation and policy in school feeding and for nutrition, as well as activities that have supported the handover of the school feeding programme, such as the study visits to Thailand and Sri Lanka, technical training on activities related to school feeding, and building the capacity of national and provincial government to plan, monitor and report food security and nutrition activities.

#### Box 4: Examples of the positive influence of government partnerships on results

- Highlighted as a government partnership positively influencing performance was the relationship between WFP and the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare. Recognized to have a good coordination between parties, this partnership provided immediate food assistance in the form of unconditional cash-based transfers to a total of 6,388 flood-affected households with 32,889 beneficiaries in Khammouan Province and, together with the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and the Lao Red Cross, WFP continued to distribute food assistance to households in Sanamxai District affected but not displaced by the floods in 2018.
- Towards the end of 2019, to improve evidence-based understanding of nutrition, WFP commissioned a technical study on “nutrient-dense food crops” for promotion in farmer nutrition schools. The study was undertaken in close collaboration with, and guidance from, the National Nutrition Institute (NNI). The results of the partnership have been of use and benefit more widely than for WFP. For example, it was reported that the results of the study have been presented to, and used by, members of the scaling-up nutrition civil society network, and integrated into the training tools of national and international civil society organizations in Lao PDR.

#### Box 5: Example of good practice - partnership with Lao Women's Union has positively impacted results

At the community level, WFP has partnered with the Lao Women's Union. Partnership has strengthened the Lao Women's Union's own capacities, whilst also strengthening gender equality messaging at the community level. The Lao Women's Union plays an important role to drive SO 1 and SO 2 through the village education development committees and village associations (VA).

In the future, WFP partnerships could extend to further increasing the partnership with Lao Women's Union to create greater gender-related advocacy at the national level, and to engage with the Committee for Advancement of Women, Mother and Child linking this committee and the village Lao Women's Unions in order to strengthen the overall impact on nutrition.<sup>237</sup>

Source: World Food Programme. 2017. Lao People's Democratic Republic Annual Country Report 2017. Country Strategic Plan 2017 – 2021.

223. WFP has working partnerships with a few United Nations agencies. The country strategic plan appears to have had some, but limited, influence over the direction of these relationships. As discussed in EQ 1.4, partnerships with United Nations organizations are predominately with the Rome-based agencies, FAO, and IFAD, but also include UNFPA. FAO and WFP are reported to have been working and meeting

<sup>235</sup> Interview provincial-level government staff; Interview WFP field staff.

<sup>236</sup> Interview ministry-level government staff.

<sup>237</sup> Interview with central government staff.

together for over 15 years in Lao PDR.<sup>238</sup> As stated above, FAO and WFP are working through a local-level memorandum of understanding and have collaborated on several activities specific to the country strategic plan. Rather than a new partnership influenced by the country strategic plan, collaborations with IFAD have continued from prior to the country strategic plan period. WFP work with IFAD is largely through the agriculture for nutrition project, implemented under the GAFSP fund. This project was signed prior to the commencement of the country strategic plan in April 2016.<sup>239</sup> The relationship between the two organizations is reported to be working well.<sup>240</sup>

**224. WFP has also engaged in platforms and partnerships with mixed results.** For example, WFP co-chairs a school feeding technical group with Catholic Relief Services. According to the country office, the close engagement with Catholic Relief Services regarding the national school meals programme resulted in a successful joint proposal to USDA. Under SO 2, WFP took a leading role in preparations for the establishment of the SUN business network. This was in partnership with the European Union (as the SUN donor focal point) and Plan International, (as SUN civil society focal point). The SUN business network was established in 2018, however, a lack of funding for these activities under SO 2 appears to have limited activities.<sup>241</sup> Some progress has been made on food fortification, with plans to support rice fortification standards.

**225. The strategic approach to partnerships with other organizations has been limited.** WFP has worked with over 15 international and local civil society organizations over the course of the country strategic plan.<sup>242</sup> The history and the formats of these partnerships are not recorded in a partnership document, and there is no current partnerships mapping.<sup>243</sup> Developing and managing partnerships is the responsibility of staff throughout the country office who combine this function with other roles. This appears to have limited a strategic approach to partnerships, limiting benefits to results. For example, the final evaluation of the BEQUAL<sup>244</sup> NGO Consortium (BNC) programme, a group of four international non-governmental organizations (ChildFund, Plan International, Save The Children and World Vision) aiming to improve access to, and education in, schools (2016-2018), noted that the school meals programme supported by WFP and the BNC school hygiene activity appear to have been implemented in silos.<sup>245</sup> Further, although WFP reported coordination with UNICEF, (see EQ 1.4), where UNICEF provided school materials and main water connections, it was reported by one interviewee that this was more a matter of chance than strategy, as occasionally the target villages were in the same area.<sup>246</sup>

**226. WFP has some strong strategic partnerships with civil society.** For example, partnerships with the international non-governmental organization Room to Read and the local not-for-profit organization Big Brother Mouse. Both partnerships support and complement WFP school feeding activities under SO 1. Similarly, under SO 3, WFP has signed a partnership agreement with the International Institute for Rural Reconstruction to provide technical assistance on climate-smart villages, which will serve as learning sites for climate-smart and resilience practices, while also serving community-driven school feeding.<sup>247</sup> The partnership supports the implementation of WFP activities and benefits WFP in an area where they are not experts and struggle to recruit local specialists.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> World Food Programme. WFP Lao PDR Country Brief. January 2020.

<sup>239</sup> IFAD. WFP. 2020. *Lao People's Democratic Republic. Mid-Term Impact Survey Results Agriculture for Nutrition Project (AFN)*.

<sup>240</sup> Interview with UN partner agency.

<sup>241</sup> Interview WFP country office staff.

<sup>242</sup> World Food Programme. Annual Performance Report 2019. 2020. Rome. World Food Programme; World Food Programme. Annual Performance Report 2018. 2019. Rome. World Food Programme; World Food Programme. Annual Performance Report 2017. 2018. Rome. World Food Programme; Interview WFP country office staff.

<sup>243</sup> The 2018 partnership strategy has not been updated and does not present current partnerships.

<sup>244</sup> Basic Education Quality and Access in Lao PDR.

<sup>245</sup> Interview WFP field staff.

<sup>246</sup> Interview WFP field staff.

<sup>247</sup> World Food Programme. WFP Lao PDR Country Brief. January 2020.

<sup>248</sup> Interview with WFP field office staff.

227. **WFP has experienced some difficulty with establishing partnerships with non-governmental organizations.** According to several INGOs, establishing a partnership with WFP is a long and slow process with delays to renewal of agreements.<sup>249</sup> For example, one INGO reported an interruption between partnership while agreements were being renewed.<sup>250</sup> A further INGO wanted to establish a partnership but was not successful because the process was too slow and complicated.<sup>251</sup> As a result, the number of I/NGOs partners is limited and the continuity of the partnerships is not assured from one year to another.

228. Other development partners in Lao PDR recognize and appreciate the traditional strengths

#### Summary

The country strategic plan has enabled stronger partnerships with the Government of Lao PDR at all levels. The country strategic plan's shift into increased technical assistance has repositioned WFP partnerships with government stakeholders. WFP has engaged in platforms and partnerships, though with mixed results. Its strategic approach to partnerships has been limited. WFP has had some difficulty in developing partnerships with non-governmental organizations, but has some strong and beneficial partnerships with a small number of local and international civil society organizations (CSO). Some development partners have suggested WFP might lack the capacity to work in an effective programmatic development mode.

of WFP whilst not being confident with their current capacity to work in an effective programmatic development mode. However, WFP are valued and respected as a reliable, trusted partner on humanitarian assistance within the development partner community, delivering related outputs in a timely and effective way, utilizing good connections with the Government at central and subnational level and providing warehousing/logistics support and related capacity strengthening. WFP in Lao PDR is perceived as an agency still in transition in terms of aligning its thinking and ways of working with the demands of development programming. There is some concern that WFP is reaching beyond its current capacity and spreading itself too thinly without fully appreciating, structuring and resourcing itself for the complexity of the development space that it is engaging with. This suggests that in order to reach full potential of the outcome-level results in Lao PDR, WFP should partner with other development partners. However, the perceived stance of WFP on a national school feeding programme and its engagement with nutrition is believed to be at odds with (or peripheral to) the work of some other key development partners that are active and more experienced in this development space.

#### EQ 4.4 To what extent did the country strategic plan provide greater flexibility in dynamic operational contexts and how did it affect results?

229. **The shift to the country strategic plan has provided WFP with an increased ability and increased flexibility to work in Lao PDR.** WFP operations in Lao PDR work through an agreement with the Government, with the signing of one memorandum of understanding. Previously, different projects have all required different agreements. One agreement allowed WFP to implement different projects with different funding sources. The country strategic plan and memorandum of understanding has, therefore, provided WFP – in principle – with greater operational freedom and flexibility but this has not been fully deployed in terms of delivering on the strategy, largely due to funding modalities and unchallenged working practices.

230. **WFP was able to respond to flooding in Attapeu province by expanding the reach of ongoing activities under SO 1 and SO 3.** In July 2018, Tropical Storm Son-Tinh caused heavy rains and flooding in 55 districts of 13 provinces across Lao PDR. In addition to seasonal flooding, an unprecedented flash flood occurred on 23 July in Attapeu Province due to water discharge from the Xepien-Xe Nam Noy Dam. This led the Prime Minister of Lao PDR to declare the affected areas as a national emergency disaster zone.<sup>252</sup>

<sup>249</sup> Administrative authorizations of working in certain areas are at times lengthy and can limit partnership options.

<sup>250</sup> Interview with development partner.

<sup>251</sup> Interview with development partner.

<sup>252</sup> LAO PDR: Disaster Response Plan (August 2018-December 2018).

Though WFP had already prepositioned food near the affected area, the donor would only permit the use of the food items for school feeding. In order to respond to the emergency, WFP “followed” the students whose villages were displaced to provide emergency assistance.<sup>253</sup> Similarly, WFP expanded its immediate assistance and recovery activities under SO 3 to cover the flood-affected households through its cash-based transfers in 2019.

**231. In response to changes in weather conditions, WFP adjusted planned SO 1 activities.** The 2019 wet season (May-October) was characterized by drought conditions in the north of the country. In some districts, this affected the ability of parents to contribute the necessary ingredients to cook school meals. WFP provided school gardens with greenhouses, which WFP staff and DAFO noted would better support year-round vegetable cultivation.<sup>254</sup> Similarly, WFP supported communities to adapt to the drought conditions, which led to a change in the type of vegetables grown, shifting to planting beans and growing corn, pumpkin, cassava and potato,<sup>255</sup> all of which require less water, and moving from building fish ponds to raising chickens.<sup>256</sup>

**232. In 2020, WFP adapted to the COVID-19 pandemic by putting in place internal procedures for its own staff.** Internally, WFP country office management took pro-active early decisions to address the COVID-19 pandemic. Specific and concrete measures were put in place including: (i) allowing staff to work from home; (ii) permitting field staff to travel back home; (iii) providing staff with a printer/scanner to work from home; (iv) organizing all staff meetings twice a week and later once a month through Microsoft Teams; (v) providing staff with internet SIM cards; (vi) sharing daily updates on the COVID-19 pandemic; (vii) providing guidance on how to cope with COVID-19 for staff and how to work from home; (viii) offering support from the Vientiane office with back-up from headquarters; (x) stating that travel outside the country required approval by the Country Director; and (xi) requiring staff returning from overseas to undergo quarantine for 14 days.<sup>257</sup>

**233. WFP drew on its existing partnerships and extensive field presence to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.** Drawing on its existing partnership with FAO, the two organizations carried out a joint rapid impact assessment and food security assessment.<sup>258</sup> WFP also provided food assistance to seven quarantine centres, feeding about 1,000 people a day, mostly Lao migrant workers returning from Thailand.<sup>259</sup> Thanks to staff from ethnic minority backgrounds and its extensive field presence, WFP helped create and disseminate COVID-19 prevention messages in local languages.<sup>260</sup>

**234. WFP showed some ability to adapt ongoing programming. It is unclear whether this was consistently applied.** As discussed in Section 2.1 EQ 1.3, during the lockdown response to COVID-19, the

#### Summary

The shift to the country strategic plan has provided WFP with an increased ability and increased flexibility to adapt within its set of activities in Lao PDR. This has been demonstrated under specific conditions. For example, WFP responded to flooding by expanding the reach of activities under strategic outcomes 1 and 3, and demonstrated similar flexibility in adjusting activities under SO 1 to account for the impact of weather conditions. WFP utilized its existing partnerships and significant field presence to bolster its response to COVID-19, and demonstrated some adaptability in ongoing programming to account for COVID-19 restrictions. It is unclear whether this adaptability was consistently applied. The country strategic plan as a vehicle for more flexibility in shaping the configuration of the set of activities, including relative scaling behind strategic outcomes, has not been evident. This is largely attributed to the continued dominant practice of donor earmarking of funding to specific activities.

<sup>253</sup> WFP CO comment.

<sup>254</sup> Interview with district-level government staff.

<sup>255</sup> Interview with two district-level government staff (different districts.)

<sup>256</sup> Interview with district-level government staff.

<sup>257</sup> Interview WFP country office staff.

<sup>258</sup> Interview WFP country office staff.

<sup>259</sup> Interview WFP country office staff.

<sup>260</sup> Interview WFP country office staff.

country office successfully modified the school feeding programme, distributing take-home rations and therefore providing a safety net for the school children and their families. There were some accounts from field visits that indicated that take-home rations were not received by all beneficiaries.

# 3 Conclusions and recommendations

## 3.1 THE STRATEGIC POSITIONING AND ROLE OF WFP IN LAO PDR

235. The country strategic plan and constituent strategic outcomes are appropriate for the operating context and are aligned with the direction of the Government of Lao PDR. The design of the country strategic plan was appropriately informed by the WFP zero hunger review and analysis and consideration of ministerial strategy. The country strategic plan represented a significant and relevant shift in WFP operations. It built on and extended existing WFP approaches by shifting operations from direct delivery to policy engagement, capacity strengthening and hand over. With this move, **the country strategic plan was designed as, and has remained, a relevant approach to supporting the Government meet the food and nutrition needs of the country.**

236. **The country strategic plan provided the space for WFP to adapt its operations and to respond to requests to support the Government's response to flooding and COVID-19** through the provision and use of immediate funding despite the absence of an emergency preparedness and response component. However, including support for emergency response in the country strategic plan and the portfolio budget would have provided more opportunities for WFP to develop stronger links between humanitarian and development work.

237. WFP has actively used the country strategic plan to strengthen its partnership with the Government at all levels. The country office has involved central, provincial and district departments in implementation activities, as well as providing capacity strengthening and technical assistance for policy development. **The shift into increased technical assistance has strengthened government partnerships and positioned WFP for greater engagement in strategic national legislation and policy development.**

238. The objectives and approaches of the country strategic plan aligned with those of sister United Nations organizations, as well as other development actors in Lao PDR. Wide geographical coverage, experience with delivery of school meal programmes, and strong logistical capabilities make WFP a desirable partner for many development actors working in Lao PDR. Indeed, through the country strategic plan, WFP has successfully developed new work with FAO and continued existing work with IFAD. While shared features and the WFP comparative advantage of extensive field presence have led to some partnerships, these have been of limited strategic nature, limiting the benefit that might be had from converging different types of activities to address specific needs. Underutilizing strategic partnerships has limited the country strategic plan's progress, and risks the sustainability of some of the results achieved.

239. **Development partners in Lao PDR appreciate WFP for its traditional strengths and extensive reach.** The country office is valued as a trusted partner on humanitarian assistance, utilizing good connections with the Government and expertise in warehousing/logistics support and related capacity strengthening. Partners see WFP as an agency still trying to align with the demands of development programming and have hesitancy in the country office's capacity to effectively deliver development work. WFP is encouraged to step up and demonstrate further its ability to engage with partners.

240. The country strategic plan clearly defined the most vulnerable groups that were targeted for each strategic outcome. However, several factors, including logistical challenges, have limited the extent to which the country strategic plan was able to reach some of the most vulnerable people. The potential trade-off between focusing WFP efforts on reaching the most vulnerable in the hardest-to-reach areas versus maximizing the number of beneficiaries in country will be an important discussion in the development of the new country strategic plan.

### 3.2 EXTENT AND QUALITY OF THE SPECIFIC CONTRIBUTIONS OF WFP TO COUNTRY STRATEGIC PLAN STRATEGIC OUTCOMES

241. **There has been successful and significant progress to address the root causes of food insecurity for school children in remote areas. Greater success and sustainability are constrained by barriers that WFP has yet to overcome.** The school meals programme has been extensively delivered throughout Lao PDR. The programme brought, to some extent, food security closer to a large population of pre- and primary schoolchildren, though it has had only partial success in ensuring the provision of a daily meal. Successful delivery has been constrained by shocks and stressors, such as difficult weather conditions and lack of sufficient water. This has limited communities' abilities to produce sufficient food for the programme. Additional constraints include the ability of WFP to engage communities to participate in the programme, and mixed success with developing strategic partnerships to support delivery. The work that WFP has done to support an allocation of a temporary government budget line for the programme has offered a very significant degree of success to the handover process. However, schools have had difficulties in receiving the budget. These constraints challenge the sustainability of the programme.

242. A community capacity assessment (CCA) informed WFP and the Ministry of Education and Sport of communities' capacities to manage school meal handover. However, **the measures designed to support increased community awareness and capacity based on the assessments have not always produced the expected results**, and evidence showed poor community ownership and a lack of technical capacity to manage the transfer of resources. These limitations impeded the sustainability of SO 1 and the ability of WFP to realize the ambitious objectives.

243. **Through the agriculture for nutrition project, WFP have been successful in enhancing** improved and diversified agricultural production and household nutrition in **communities with high levels of malnutrition**. Through establishing farmer nutrition schools, WFP has reached a high number of women participants in 400 villages in 20 districts. The schools have proved to be a successful pathway to improve farming and nutritional knowledge. This success shows early signs of improving the nutritional status of children under two.

244. **Current results from institutional- and policy-related work in the nutrition area do not show a coherent, or sufficiently scaled, picture to discern the WFP contribution to the broader government-led effort on tackling stunting (and wasting).** This is a complex and challenging task. WFP needs to articulate and bring together the areas in which it is making progress and having a positive influence and build on these areas through engaging strategic partnerships with other international actors. This is something that the country office is aware of, and starting to work more purposefully on.

245. **WFP has not yet realized the comprehensive approach to developing resilience that is needed for successful delivery of the country strategic plan as a coherent strategy and of its constituent strategic outcomes.** Strategic outcome 3 aimed to have an integrated approach in order to assist communities in climate-sensitive districts build their own resilience to climate change. The strategic outcome has experienced funding delays and underfunding has challenged successful delivery of these activities. However, looking beyond this objective, weather-related disasters, the COVID-19 pandemic, and climate-related challenges have all impeded successful delivery of strategic outcomes 1 and 2 and thus illustrate the importance of a comprehensive approach to developing resilience. WFP has had limited technical capacity and vision to mainstream agricultural and nutritional resilience throughout SO 1 and SO 2. The importance and challenges of seeking and securing adequate funding for the development and full implementation of this area is also highlighted.

246. **The country strategic plan design, with a specific strategic outcome for engagement on the generic challenge of strengthening national and local governance institutions to ensure improved**

**service delivery especially in hard-to-reach areas, was appropriate, although results are limited so far.** In the absence of a substantive effort on SO 4, the country office has largely defaulted to taking capacity strengthening as a cross-cutting concern without dealing with the internal challenge of the need to have a more rigorous consideration of how the three interdependent levels – national, community and village - of the country capacity strengthening approach relate to improving service delivery in hard-to-reach areas. The consequence is that the country strategic plan is missing a critical primary lens, source of knowledge uptake and fulcrum for shared learning on capacity strengthening consistent with the envisaged strategic shift of the country strategic plan and in step with the longer-term trajectory for WFP in Lao PDR (see Figure 7).

247. **Limitations in the country office's monitoring framework restricted understanding of effectiveness, sustainability and targeting.** Limitations to the monitoring framework do not support an understanding of the results of capacity strengthening and technical assistance interventions at both the community and government level. Furthermore, limitations to the duration of monitoring activities do not support an understanding of the sustainability of interventions. Also, gaps in the monitoring framework do not provide the country office with an understanding of whether interventions are reaching vulnerable ethnic groups.

248. **Gender has been widely mainstreamed and incorporated during implementation of the country strategic plan.** WFP in Lao PDR had one of first country offices to take the initiative to develop a gender action plan. For most of the country strategic plan, there was not an active gender focal person responsible for gender reporting and coordination and the action plan was not fully implemented. Nevertheless, over the duration of the country strategic plan, the country office increased gender parity, increased the number of women staff members, engaged with the limited gender groups available locally, progressed in the tracking of gender outcomes, and improved gender equality in decision making.

### 3.3 FACTORS THAT EXPLAIN WFP PERFORMANCE AND STRATEGIC SHIFT

249. **The Lao PDR country strategic plan was one of the first group of country strategic plans developed by WFP. The country strategic plan intent of a more strategic engagement and its high-level intervention logic remain a challenge to be addressed.** The evaluation team's analysis suggests that three key converging factors have constrained the country strategic plan being the vehicle for a strategic shift in WFP practice in Lao PDR: (i) the limited "grip" of the strategy on shaping programming, both at the outset and during implementation given the dominant funding stream on school feeding that ran into the country strategic plan period; (ii) the absence of an explicit readiness assessment and allied change process within the country office, drawing on resources at regional and headquarters level, to equip the country team with the skills to fully internalize and engage with the intended strategic shift; and (iii) the continued focus on monitoring at an activity and output level with little definition for outcome-level monitoring in a form that would ensure continual reflection on what activity and output-level tracking mean in terms of an outcome-focused path.

250. **The execution of the country strategic plan as a strategy would have benefitted from a stronger analysis of both internal and external capacities in order to implement and engage in the shift.** A capacity strengthening analysis could have better informed WFP of needed technical assistance, guiding more impactful policy development at the government level. Furthermore, such an analysis would have better informed WFP of its own technical ability and the expertise required to implement the strategy.

251. **Significant donor earmarking has limited WFP flexibility in allocating funds across strategic outcomes within the country strategic plan.** Implementation of the country strategic plan has relied heavily on one donor, with most contributions earmarked to specific outcomes or even earmarked at the level of specific activities. As the new country strategic plan takes into account the progress and reframes its approach, WFP will have to develop a new funding and partnership strategy that supports how the plan is effectively shaped and implemented.

### 3.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

	Recommendation	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Level of priority	Deadline for completion
1	<p><b>WFP needs to deepen its utilization of up-to-date evidence that supports the shaping and implementation of a realistic scope and focus for the CSP for 2021–2025.</b></p> <p>1.1 Develop a theory of change that articulates and maps out clear pathways from activities and outputs through to intermediate outcomes and strategic outcomes. This necessitates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) development of a situational analysis that articulates the factors facilitating or impeding achievement of the current strategic outcomes;</li> <li>ii) for clarity in the design of the next CSP and to ensure that activities under the next CSP are appropriately adjusted, updating of WFP’s targeting guidelines, clarifying the prioritization of indicators used to identify the most vulnerable people and utilizing the results of recent primary and secondary information;</li> <li>iii) development of a prioritization plan for reaching the most vulnerable people or maximizing the number of beneficiaries reached;</li> <li>iv) analysis of policy gaps to better understand the mechanisms that support or impede the financing of the school meals programme and the financing that the Government is able to provide for the programme;</li> <li>v) analysis of the institutional capacity of the Government at the national, community and village levels to manage and monitor the school meals programme independently; and</li> <li>vi) identification of the internal and external synergies between WFP programming and development partners.</li> </ul> <p>1.2 Tailor and integrate adapted interventions to target the most vulnerable population groups, including women, men, girls and boys of ethnic groups and people living in remote rural areas.</p>	Strategic	Country office with support from the regional bureau	High	2021

	Recommendation	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Level of priority	Deadline for completion
	1.3 During implementation of the new CSP, periodically review staffing (the number of staff and their skills) and funding against the needs identified under recommendation 1.1 and unfolding challenges.				
	1.4 At the corporate level refine the corporate results framework and at the country level strengthen the CSP monitoring and evaluation frameworks to develop systems that generate and use information and evidence beyond the output level, monitor the results of capacity strengthening activities and provide disaggregated data, including by ethnicity.		Corporate Planning and Performance Division		
<b>2</b>	<p><b>Engage strategically with partners in order to better integrate partnerships into programming and to enhance resource mobilization.</b></p> <p>Actions to achieve this include:</p> <p>2.1 Identification and mapping of existing and potential partnerships and their positions with regard to the strategic objectives of the United Nations development system and WFP outcomes.</p> <p>2.2 Efforts to strategically expand joint programming with other United Nations agencies, particularly FAO, IFAD and UNICEF.</p> <p>2.3 Streamlining of the partnership process and/or development of long-term agreements with selected organizations that facilitate strategic working.</p> <p>2.4 An annual meeting with partner international non-governmental organizations and non-profit associations for the exchange of information and experiences.</p> <p>2.5 Finalization of the fundraising strategy in line with the next CSP, focusing on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) diversifying funding sources;</li> <li>ii) continuing advocacy with donors for flexible and multi-year funding; and</li> <li>iii) mobilizing resources for under-resourced activities in resilience strengthening and the provision of technical assistance and national capacity strengthening.</li> </ul>	Strategic	Country office with support from the regional bureau	High	2021-2022
<b>3</b>	<p><b>Develop and integrate a country office approach to resilience strengthening and emergency preparedness and response.</b></p>	Strategic	Country office with support from the regional bureau	Medium	2021

	Recommendation	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Level of priority	Deadline for completion
	<p>3.1 Incorporate emergency preparedness and response into the new CSP, developing links between humanitarian and development work.</p> <p>3.2 Build on good relationships with partners to support the mainstreaming of resilience strengthening activities for climate-proofed activities under strategic outcomes 1 and 2.</p>				
<b>4</b>	<p><b>Strengthen the capacity of WFP staff to design and implement country capacity strengthening.</b></p> <p>4.1 Continue to increase the proportion of national staff in the country office by temporarily increasing the use of short-term consultants to work with national staff to build internal capacity in the key area of country capacity strengthening.</p> <p>4.2 As an agent of change with regard to government institution systems, increase efforts to recruit staff with blended technical expertise and influencing skills in the priority areas identified through the gap analysis referred to in recommendation 1.3. At the corporate level review the efficiency of existing WFP tools for assessing capacity gaps. Based on the review, refine a suite of tools for assessing country capacity strengthening.</p> <p>4.3 At the corporate level establish a skills development programme for building the capacity of country office staff involved in capacity strengthening activities.</p>	Operational	<p>Country office with support from the regional bureau and headquarters</p> <p>Country office with support from the regional bureau and headquarters</p> <p>Technical Assistance and Country Capacity Strengthening Service</p>	Medium	2021–2025
<b>5</b>	<p><b>Reappraise and reinforce WFP's approach to supporting the Government's strategy for taking over the school meals programme.</b></p> <p>5.1 Conduct an in-depth survey of the school meals programme in the schools where the programme has already been handed over to the Government.</p> <p>5.2 Conduct a structured and systematic series of participatory lessons-learned workshops with the central Government and local authorities to facilitate the identification of solutions to the challenges that face the successful transition of the school meals programme to the Government.</p>	Operational	Country office with support from the regional bureau and headquarters	High	2021

	Recommendation	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Level of priority	Deadline for completion
	<p>5.3 With the Government, develop a long-term transition plan that ensures the sustainability of the school meals programme. Drawing from the WFP country capacity strengthening framework and working through a SABER (Systems Approach for Better Education Results) exercise, the plan should systemically address existing gaps in five policy pathways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Policy pathway 1 – Policy framework: Building on the policy analysis for school health and nutrition conducted by the country office in 2020, support the engagement of national stakeholders in devising an action plan for the policy framework improvements required for the sustainability of the school meals programme.</li> <li>– Policy pathway 2 – Budget and financing: Carry out an analysis of the budgetary support required for the sustainability of the school meals programme after handover.</li> <li>– Policy pathway 3 – Institutional capacity and coordination: Based on an institutional capacity assessment (recommendation 1) develop an approach to strengthening institutional capacity at the central and school levels (including by developing guidance, processes and human resources for continued support for schools after handover when necessary).</li> </ul>				

	Recommendation	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Level of priority	Deadline for completion
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="309 331 1223 651">– Policy pathway 4 – Programme delivery (design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation): To support handover of the school meals programme at the school level, design a gradual handover process that uses the grading of schools as an indicator of their readiness for handover; develop links between food security and nutrition activities and poverty alleviation activities for communities that lack the resources to contribute food for the programme; and develop (and institutionalize into national systems and frameworks) structured guidance for the handover process, communicating the guidance to local authorities and communities early in the process.</li> <li data-bbox="309 667 1223 794">– Policy pathway 5 – Role and participation of non-governmental stakeholders (including communities): Develop (and institutionalize into national systems and frameworks) an approach to building capacity relevant to community ownership of the school meals programme.</li> </ul>				

# Acronyms

<b>AAP</b>	Accountability to Affected Populations
<b>ACR</b>	Annual Country Report
<b>ADPC</b>	Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre
<b>AFN</b>	Agriculture for Nutrition
<b>ALNAP</b>	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance
<b>APR</b>	Annual Performance Report
<b>ASEAN</b>	The Association of Southeast Asian Nations
<b>BCC</b>	Behaviour Change Communication
<b>BNC</b>	BEQUAL NGO Consortium
<b>CBT</b>	Cash-Based Transfers
<b>CCA</b>	Community Capacity Assessment
<b>CCS</b>	Country Capacity Strengthening
<b>CEDAW</b>	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
<b>CEQAS</b>	Centralized Evaluation Quality Assurance System
<b>CFA</b>	Cash for Asset
<b>CLL</b>	Comité de Coopération avec le Laos
<b>CO</b>	Country Office
<b>COMET</b>	Country Office Tool for Managing (programme operations) Effectively
<b>COMP</b>	Country Operations Management Plan
<b>COVID-19</b>	Coronavirus Disease
<b>CP</b>	Country Programme
<b>CPB</b>	Country Portfolio Budget
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organization
<b>CRF</b>	Corporate Results Framework
<b>CRS</b>	Catholic Relief Services
<b>CSI</b>	Institutional Capacity Strengthening
<b>CSP</b>	Country Strategic Plan
<b>CSPE</b>	Country Strategic Plan Evaluation
<b>CWSEH</b>	Centre of Water Supply and Environmental Health
<b>DAFO</b>	District Agriculture and Forestry Office
<b>DCF</b>	District Community Facilitator
<b>DESB</b>	District Education and Sports Bureau
<b>DFAT</b>	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
<b>DFID</b>	Department for International Development

<b>DIC/MPI</b>	Department of International Cooperation, Ministry of Planning and Investment
<b>DPI</b>	Department of Planning and Investment
<b>DPSL</b>	Decree on Promotion of School Lunch
<b>DNC</b>	District Nutrition Committees
<b>EB</b>	Executive Board
<b>EM</b>	Evaluation Manager
<b>EMIS</b>	Education Management Information System
<b>EMG</b>	Evaluation Management Group
<b>EQ</b>	Evaluation Question
<b>ER</b>	Evaluation Report
<b>ERG</b>	Evaluation Reference Group
<b>EPRP</b>	Emergency Preparedness and Response Programme
<b>ESRC</b>	Economic and Social Research Council
<b>ESS</b>	Environmental and Social Safeguards
<b>ET</b>	Evaluation Team
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>EVI</b>	Extremely Vulnerable Individuals/Households
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organization
<b>FFA</b>	Food Assistance for Assets
<b>FGD</b>	Focus Group Discussion
<b>FLA</b>	Field Level Agreement
<b>FNS</b>	Farmer Nutrition School
<b>FSN</b>	Food Security and Nutrition
<b>GAM</b>	Gender and Age Marker
<b>GAFFSP</b>	Global Agriculture and Food Security Programme
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>GEWE</b>	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
<b>GIS</b>	Geographic Information System
<b>GiZ</b>	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
<b>GNI</b>	Gross National Income
<b>GOL</b>	Government of Lao
<b>GTP</b>	Gender Transformation Programme
<b>HDDS</b>	Household Dietary Diversity Score
<b>HI</b>	Humanity and Inclusion
<b>HQ</b>	Headquarters
<b>HR</b>	Human Resources
<b>IAWGCP</b>	Inter-Agency Working Group on Children's Participation

<b>IDRC</b>	International Development Research Centre
<b>IFAD</b>	The International Fund for Agricultural Development
<b>INGO</b>	International Non-Governmental Organization
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration
<b>IR</b>	Inception Report
<b>IRG</b>	Internal Reference Group
<b>IRM</b>	Integrated Road Map
<b>KAP</b>	Knowledge Attitude and Practice
<b>KM</b>	Knowledge Management
<b>LDPA</b>	Lao Disabled People's Association
<b>LESS</b>	Logistics Execution Support System
<b>LFND</b>	Lao Front for National Development
<b>LNGO</b>	Local Non-Governmental Organization
<b>LRP</b>	Local and Regional Procurement
<b>LSIS</b>	Lao Social Indicator Survey
<b>LWF</b>	Lutheran World Federation
<b>LWU</b>	Lao Women's Union
<b>MAF</b>	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
<b>MCH</b>	Maternal and Child Health
<b>MGD</b>	McGovern Dole
<b>MDG</b>	Millennium Development Goals
<b>M&amp;E</b>	Monitoring and Evaluation
<b>MIC</b>	Middle-Income Country
<b>MLSW</b>	Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare
<b>MMRs</b>	Minimum Monitoring Requirements
<b>MoAF</b>	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
<b>MoES</b>	Ministry of Education and Sports
<b>MoH</b>	Ministry of Health
<b>MoU</b>	Memorandum of Understanding
<b>MPI</b>	Ministry of Planning and Investment
<b>MT</b>	Metric Tons
<b>MTR</b>	Mid-Term Review
<b>NCAW</b>	National Commission for the Advancement of Women
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organization
<b>NNC</b>	National Nutrition Committee
<b>NNI</b>	National Nutrition Institute
<b>NNS</b>	National Nutrition Strategy
<b>NNSPA</b>	National Nutrition Strategy and Plan of Action

<b>NPA</b>	Malnutrition Prevention Activities
<b>NSMP</b>	National School Meals Programme
<b>NPPSL</b>	National Policy on Promoting School Lunch
<b>NSEDP</b>	National Socio-Economic Development Plan
<b>NSGES</b>	National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy
<b>OCHA</b>	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
<b>OECD/DAC</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development/Development Assistance Committee
<b>OEV</b>	Office of Evaluation
<b>OUD</b>	Oudomxay
<b>PAFO</b>	Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office
<b>PA-SMP</b>	Plan of Action of School Meals Programme
<b>PDR</b>	People's Democratic Republic
<b>PESS</b>	Provincial Education and Sports Service
<b>PHC</b>	Population and Housing Census
<b>PLSW</b>	Provincial Department of Labour and Social Welfare
<b>PLW</b>	Pregnant and Lactating Women
<b>PPI</b>	Provincial Departments of Planning and Investment
<b>PPT</b>	Powerpoint
<b>PROT</b>	Technical Assistance and Country Capacity Strengthening Service
<b>PSEA</b>	Protection against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
<b>PSL</b>	Phongsali
<b>P4P</b>	Purchase for Progress
<b>QA</b>	Quality Assurance
<b>RB</b>	Regional Bureau
<b>RBB</b>	Regional Bureau in Bangkok
<b>RCO</b>	Resident Coordinator's Office
<b>RMP</b>	Performance Management and Monitoring Division
<b>ROC</b>	Resident Coordinator Office (UN Country Team)
<b>SABER</b>	Systems Approach for Better Education Results
<b>SD</b>	Standard Deviation
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>SER</b>	Summary Evaluation Report
<b>SR</b>	Strategic Results
<b>SO</b>	Strategic Outcome
<b>SMP</b>	School Meals Programme
<b>SNF</b>	Specialized Nutritious Food
<b>SNV</b>	Stichting Nederlandse Vrijwilligers

<b>SBCC</b>	Social Behaviour Change Communication
<b>SUN</b>	Scaling Up Nutrition
<b>SUN NIPN</b>	Scaling Up Nutrition National Information Platforms for Nutrition
<b>SUNCSA</b>	Scaling Up Nutrition Civil Society Alliance
<b>SABER</b>	Systems Approach for Better Education Results
<b>TOC</b>	Theory of Change
<b>THR</b>	Take-Home Ration
<b>TL</b>	Team Leader
<b>ToR</b>	Terms of Reference
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNCT</b>	United Nations Country Team
<b>UNDAF</b>	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNDRR</b>	United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction
<b>UNEG</b>	United Nations Evaluation Group
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children’s Fund
<b>UNICEF EAPRO</b>	UNICEF East Asia and the Pacific
<b>UNODC</b>	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
<b>UNPF</b>	United Nations Partnership Framework
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development
<b>USDA</b>	United States Department of Agriculture
<b>USD/\$</b>	United States Dollar
<b>UXO</b>	Unexploded Ordnances
<b>VA</b>	Village Association
<b>VF</b>	Village Facilitators
<b>VAM</b>	Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping
<b>VEDC</b>	Village Education Development Committee
<b>VDPCC</b>	Village Disaster Prevention and Control Committees and Control Committees
<b>VDPU</b>	Village Disaster Prevention Unit
<b>VEDC</b>	Village Education Development Committees
<b>VIP</b>	Village Infrastructure Plans
<b>WASH</b>	Water Sanitation and Hygiene
<b>WB</b>	World Bank
<b>WFP</b>	World Food Programme
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization

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