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# **EVALUATION OF WFP'S SUPPORT TO SMALLHOLDER FARMERS AND ITS EXPANDED PORTFOLIO ACROSS THE AGRICULTURE VALUE CHAIN IN BHUTAN**

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# Executive Summary

## *Introduction*

1. This Evaluation Report summarises the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the “Evaluation of WFP’s support to smallholder farmers through an expanded portfolio across agriculture value chains in Bhutan over the period January 2019 to June 2021”. The evaluation period covered a phase when WFP shifted its operational modality from direct implementation to supporting government implementation of the national School and Hospital Feeding Programme (SHFP).
2. The evaluation was commissioned by WFP Bhutan. Its purpose was to support strategic learning and accountability. Priority was given to capturing learning in the form of conclusions to guide WFP’s future agriculture sector support.
3. The evaluation objectives were to: (i) draw lessons from limited WFP agriculture sector assistance under its Country Strategic Plan (CSP, 2019-2023); (ii) establish the extent to which WFP helped build farmer-school supply chain linkages and responded to COVID-19; (iii) build understanding of WFP and Government contributions to gender, climate, and nutrition; (iv) review digital innovation promoted by WFP; and (v) identify scaling-up opportunities by developing a WFP value proposition.
4. The main users of the evaluation included the Royal Government of Bhutan, as represented by the Gross National Happiness Commission (GNHC); the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests and Ministry of Education; UN Resident Coordinator’s Office and Rome Based Agencies; and WFP’s Country Office and Regional Bureau Bangkok.

## *Evaluation context*

5. Bhutan is a landlocked country in the Eastern Himalayas with a population of 727,145. In the decade to 2020, economic growth averaged 7 percent and contributed a significant fall in poverty. The health and nutritional status of children also improved with reductions in stunting and wasting among children. However, Bhutan continued to face a triple burden of malnutrition involving high rates of stunting, micronutrient deficiencies, and overnutrition, and the benefits of economic progress remained uneven. Of the 5 percent of Bhutanese identified as multi-dimensionally poor in 2017, 93 percent resided in rural areas where limited opportunities for local employment had contributed to rural out-migration, particularly among men and youths. By 2020, women made up 58.8 percent of those directly employed in farming compared to 41.7 percent of men. Despite significant government efforts to provide emergency investments into the agriculture sector under its Economic Contingency Plan, the onset of COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 further exacerbated development outcomes by exposing gaps in food supply chains that compounded problems in food distribution, market reliability, and increasingly high food prices especially for fresh produce.

## *Evaluation subject*

6. The evaluation subject built on WFP’s efforts to improve farmer-school linkages as a sub-component of Activity 1 of its CSP (2019-2023). The geographical scope focused on the four Districts of Trongsa, Zhemgang, Lhuntse and Samtse: a fifth of Bhutan’s 20 Districts. Each represented a distinct agro-ecological zone and was identifiable as one of Bhutan’s poorest districts.
7. No sector-specific CSP Strategic Outcome, Activity, or intervention logic for agriculture was developed by WFP. Agriculture budget and beneficiary targets were developed for donors.
8. From 2019 to 2021, WFP received USD 257,000 to support Output 2.1 (“Farmer-Based Organizations organize farmers to produce for the school meals market”) of the project, “Consolidating a fully integrated universal National School Nutrition Programme in Bhutan”. The 5-year project (2019-2023) targeted 9,000 smallholder beneficiaries, 50 percent of them women.
9. In 2020, WFP also received USD 200,000 Multi-Partner Trust Fund support under the UN’s COVID-19 Socio-Economic Response Plan for the project, “Protecting livelihoods and reinforcing the tourism and

agriculture sectors in Bhutan”.<sup>1</sup> No beneficiary target was agreed. In line with Bhutan’s COVID-19 Emergency Contingency Plan, GNHC channelled all WFP MPTF funds through District Agriculture Offices.

### **Methodology**

10. The evaluation’s inception, data collection and analysis phases were conducted from June to December 2021. Five overarching evaluation questions (EQs) were explored, including: EQ1 – How relevant was the agriculture portfolio? EQ2 – What results were achieved? EQ3 – How flexibly did WFP respond to changes in the development context? EQ4 – How well did WFP integrate its portfolio with those of its partners? and, EQ5 – What is the potential for the results to be sustainable?

11. In response to the new WFP portfolio, rapidly shifting context, COVID-19 pandemic and policy adjustments following the 2021 Mid-Term Review of the country’s 12th FYP (2018-2023), a “developmental evaluation” approach was adopted. This integrated a summative review of evaluation findings with formative learning processes involving the evaluation team, WFP staff and external stakeholders. This learning was captured in the conclusions which were structured against the key strategic, programmatic, operational and organisational themes that emerged from the cross-cutting analysis of evaluation findings.

12. A mixed methods approach was used. Sources included: key informant interviews with WFP employees (6 females; 9 males) and external stakeholders (13 females; 26 males); focus group discussions with WFP staff, 6 farmer groups (50 females; 5 males), and 5 Schools (15 males; 8 females); four workshops involving government, WFP, civil society and independent groups; and an extensive document review.

13. Three analytical frameworks supported the triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data across EQs. A retrospective ‘Intervention Logic’ was used to frame WFP planning and results; an ‘emergent modelling’ analysis engaged stakeholders in shaping a WFP value proposition for agriculture; and an ‘organisational readiness’ framework was used to assess WFP’s ability to deliver it.

14. Data limitations were caused by the short time period during which agriculture interventions were undertaken, WFP resource constraints, COVID-19 restrictions to field access during 2020 and 2021, and government limits to the gathering of groups prior to local elections during the data collection phase. These were mitigated by extended inception and data collection processes, remote interviews and flexible, iterative data analysis. With high levels of consistency across summative and developmental analyses the evaluation team did not consider these limitations affected the quality of evaluation findings.

### **Findings**

15. 14 findings were identified against the 5 evaluation questions:

#### *EQ1 – Relevance of the agriculture portfolio*

16. In focusing technical assistance and resources to support government strengthening of farmer-school linkages, WFP operations demonstrated relevance to national agriculture, education, nutrition and health policies, including the *Rural Natural Resources Strategy 2040 (2020) and Marketing Policy (2017; 2021)*.

17. Although WFP field interventions were coherent with government, donor and UN agriculture programmes, and managed through government structures, the portfolio was recent, and the Country Office had yet to establish a sector reputation with government and potential UN partners.

#### *EQ2 – Results achieved*

18. Despite resource and COVID-19 access constraints, WFP interventions supported the School and Hospital Feeding Programme to establish farmer-school linkages and the emergence of a national fresh produce market providing incomes to 7,516 smallholders, two-thirds of them women.

19. However, WFP failed to promote rural women’s economic empowerment or adjust its technical assistance to support gender mainstreaming by government leading to an over-dependency on the local intermediation of government staff who lacked gender training and support.

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<sup>1</sup> The tourism sub-component was managed by the United Nations Development Programme

20. WFP project expenditures through government partners were an effective and efficient use of available resources and operated in accordance with UN inter-agency agreements with government.

#### *EQ3 – Flexibility of WFP response*

21. WFP responded flexibly to government requests for agriculture policy and programme contributions and support to the Economic Contingency Plan. However, limited resources, and the absence of a clear intervention logic meant WFP resources were used by government to support its production ambitions rather than the wider food and market systems needs of smallholders.

22. Although WFP agriculture activities continued as a sub-Activity of the CSP (2019-2023), during 2021 the WFP made significant efforts to develop its sector positioning and establish a modified programme portfolio.

23. WFP home-grown school feeding was coherent with its 2016 evaluation findings. However, COVID-19 restraints on evaluations and assessments led to gaps in evidence-based analysis were apparent in 2020. With their relaxation in 2021, WFP introduced a post-harvest assessment to support its agriculture portfolio.

#### *EQ4 – Integration of the agriculture portfolio*

24. Despite WFP efforts to promote a food systems approach during the COVID-19 response, field access restrictions and the channelling of WFP funds through government led to a dominant focus on production.

25. While WFP reached out to partners and promoted sector coordination, its recent entry into the agriculture sector meant the Country Office only started to gain the trust and support of government and UN counterparts towards the end of the evaluation period when new collaboration efforts emerged promoting smallholder resilience and market access.

26. To address inefficient resource mobilisation efforts, a weak funding position, and support the expansion of the country office, a more structured fundraising approach was introduced in 2021 based on a funding cycle with associated tools and clearer roles and responsibilities that showed early signs of success.

#### *EQ5 – Potential for sustainability*

27. Although the school stipend provided an incentive for producers to sell fresh produce to schools, many smallholders started to explore wider market opportunities due to the limited level of standard payments which may have limited sustainability. In following the Economic Contingency Plan's emphasis on production stimulus WFP failed to attend adequately to post-harvest losses and the marketing needs of farmers.

28. With WFP support still in its infancy, the Bhutan country office nevertheless began to build linkages to nutrition and disaster risk management through investments in digital innovation and de-risking agriculture but left gaps in its support for market systems development and business incubation.

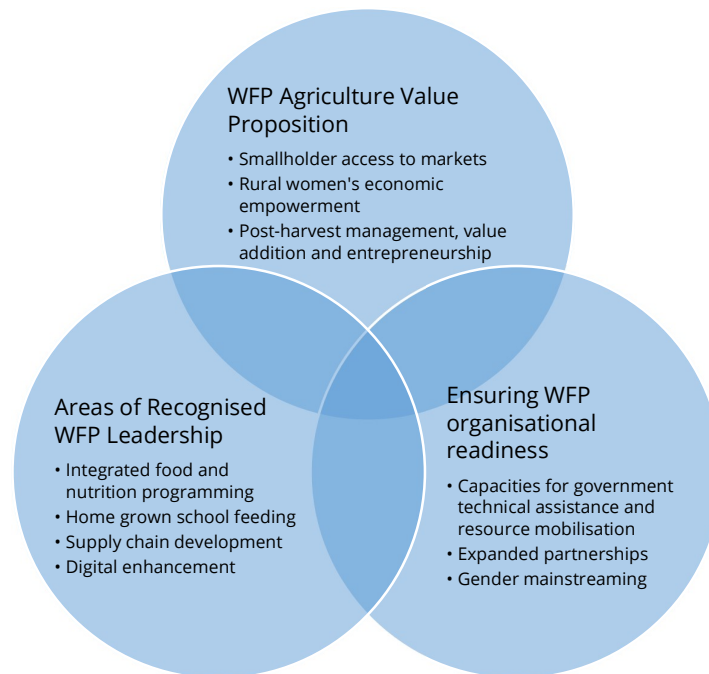
29. In the context of an external environment that was supportive of an amplified role for WFP in agriculture, the country office struggled to consolidate its management arrangements for a balanced portfolio of programmatic, capacity strengthening and resource mobilisation support to government.

### **Conclusions**

30. Seven developmental conclusions were identified. Based on the evaluation findings, and in agreement with the country office, these were presented against the main strategic, programmatic and organisational themes that WFP should address in order to expand its agriculture portfolio in Bhutan. This approach allowed the conclusions to capture key areas of learning, summarised in Figure 1, that indicated that by building on areas of recognised country office leadership, and addressing gaps in organisational readiness, WFP Bhutan had a clear opportunity to build an expanded agricultural portfolio, relevant to the needs of women and men farmers and expectations of government, that should be increasingly focused on smallholder access to agricultural markets (WFP's value proposition).

**Figure 1. Learning from the portfolio: establishing WFP's programme identity for agriculture in Bhutan**





31. Conclusion 1: While the recent introduction of WFP's agriculture portfolio, limited funding position and COVID-19 pandemic meant WFP struggled to develop its value proposition for agriculture, the relationships and learning it established provided a platform for agreeing WFP's future focus with government despite limited resources. In pursuing a balanced portfolio of programme, policy, and capacity strengthening initiatives WFP complemented the transfer of the SHFP to government with an integrated package of support for farmer-school linkages.

32. Conclusion 2: Government interest in WFP sector contributions supported a role in accelerating smallholder market access in Bhutan; a position that was coherent with the summative evaluation findings. However, for WFP to expand its contributions to country capacity strengthening a greater scale of tangible development outcomes and resource contributions were expected by its development partners in order for the country office to gain high-level support. This included clarification in terms of scope (the focus and alignment of WFP planned development contributions with policy) and scale (the balance of national and district support).

33. Conclusion 3: By matching the expectations of internal and external stakeholders with its dual mandate and corporate capabilities, WFP began to build a value proposition focused on the strengthening of smallholder access to markets and a WFP role as a food systems "enabler". Four critical gaps were agreed that would allow the country office to build on the foundations of its integrated approach to home grown school feeding while also addressing broader opportunities. These included: advancing rural women's economic empowerment; strengthening value addition and market opportunities for small enterprises higher up the value chain; improving market efficiency through enhanced supply chain linkages; and ensuring the access to digital information services for agriculture market actors.

34. Conclusion 4: However during the evaluation period, the absence of a clear value proposition for agriculture or logic model meant WFP often struggled to build on areas of good practice and leadership. While indicating a clear willingness to flexibly engage with development partners, WFP efforts to build partnerships, coordination, communications and advocacy beyond its project engagements were at times considered aspirational and unfocused. Nevertheless, despite limited staff, external stakeholders credited WFP efforts to engage on multiple levels. Examples of progress and good practice in integrated food and nutrition programming, homegrown school feeding, and digital enhancement pointed to areas where WFP could build on recognised leadership and expand its contributions and partnerships to improve market systems, supply chains and local infrastructure.

35. Conclusion 5: Organisationally, WFP struggled to establish some key organisational capacities to deliver a balanced portfolio of innovation projects, country capacity strengthening and resource mobilisation

support. Although the integrated nature of project funding allowed WFP to provide cross-sectoral nutrition, agriculture and disaster management support to government, staff and financial limitations meant the country office struggled to build on this platform. Staff were stretched by multiple tasks and demands. While gaps led to a high level of focus on resource mobilisation, WFP failed to establish a clear sector position for its fundraising and government engagement efforts.

36. Conclusion 6: In the absence of any partnership strategy WFP struggled to develop a clear focus and direction for its external engagements beyond its project activities. The country office adopted a loose interpretation of partnership focused on areas of collaboration rather than a common agreed agenda. By operating under a CSP framework that lacked a clear prescription for agriculture, the country office also failed to properly target where country capacity strengthening was most needed or identify its own capacity needs.

37. Conclusion 7: While aware of the high levels of engagement of rural women across its agricultural portfolio, WFP failed to commit to the transformative opportunities of organisational capacity strengthening for rural women, farmers' groups and cooperatives, build its internal capacities, or explore approaches to gender mainstreaming through government. This was a missed opportunity to build on the foundational contributions agriculture can provide towards gender equality and women's empowerment in Bhutan.

### **Recommendations**

38. Building on the conclusions, five recommendations and associated action areas were developed that focused on action areas where WFP had opportunities to make significant progress in advancing its future portfolio and value proposition for agriculture. The recommendations included,

- I. To expand its role and positioning for agriculture in Bhutan, WFP should support tangible development outcomes, enhanced resource contributions and expanded support for country capacity strengthening.
- II. WFP should advance its value proposition for agriculture in Bhutan (developed under Conclusion 3) through a primary focus on supporting smallholder access to agriculture markets as a basis for the development of effective government, partner and donor relations that draw on the Country Office's areas of recognised leadership.
- III. WFP must develop a partnership strategy providing a clear focus and direction for the Country Office's engagements with government, UN and Civil Society counterparts beyond its project activities and that links directly to the future delivery of its value proposition. For example, partnership arrangements with the Department of Agriculture Marketing and Cooperatives and Civil Society groups should include rural women's economic empowerment and youth entrepreneurship.
- IV. WFP should establish key organisational capacities to deliver a balanced portfolio of innovation projects, country capacity strengthening and resource mobilisation support for government. For example, by developing a sector capacity strengthening strategy for agriculture, establishing a consolidated approach to resource mobilisation, and ensuring adequate staffing levels and skills are in place across the agriculture portfolio.
- V. WFP should seek to build on high levels of existing engagement of rural women the agricultural portfolio and commit to the transformative opportunities of organisational capacity strengthening for rural women, farmers' groups and cooperatives. This should include actions outlined at both the programme and organisational levels and involve the sensitization and support of governmental officials at local, regional and national levels.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. EVALUATION FEATURES

1. This Evaluation Report (ER) summarises the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the “Evaluation of WFP’s support to smallholder farmers through an expanded portfolio across agriculture value chains in Bhutan over the period January 2019 to June 2021”. It constitutes part of a decentralised evaluation (DE) 70 percent funded by WFP’s Contingency Evaluation Fund, a mechanism for supporting country offices that face genuine resource constraints for planned and budgeted decentralized evaluations.<sup>2</sup> The evaluation was commissioned by WFP Bhutan that addresses the Terms Reference (TOR) finalised by the country office (CO) in May 2021 (Annex 1). The TOR were followed by an inception phase from June to August 2021. In preparing the ER, the Evaluation Team (ET) drew on an extended period of in-country data collection, analysis and stakeholder engagement from late September to early December 2021.
2. The evaluation purpose, as defined by the TOR, was to support strategic planning, learning, and accountability. A clear priority was given by the CO to developmental considerations to guide WFP’s future planning and support to the agriculture sector in Bhutan. This learning objective was to draw on lessons as to why results were achieved (or not) and highlight good practice examples to show how partnerships and technical support might enhance the precision and effectiveness of WFP contributions in future.
3. The ER was complemented by the Mid-Term Review (MTR; 2021) of WFP Bhutan’s Country Strategic Plan (CSP; 2019-2023).<sup>3</sup> The evaluation findings built on an assessment of WFP assistance to the Ministry of Education (MOE) as it handed over responsibility for the national school health and nutrition programme to the Royal Government of Bhutan (RGOB) in 2019. The evaluation thereby covered a period when WFP shifted its operational modality from providing direct food and in-kind assistance to schools to the introduction of a capacity strengthening approach that aimed to mainstream an integrated package of nutrition and farmer-to-school linkages under Activity 1 of the CSP.<sup>4</sup>
4. The ambition of this integrated strategy was to help schools secure the ingredients for fresh, affordable and nutritious school meals directly from local farmers. This was to consolidate the ambitions of the MOE’s National School Feeding and Nutrition Programme Strategy (2019), and support the combined ambitions of the School and Hospital Feeding Programme White Paper (2019), and national Nutrition Strategy and Action Plan 2020-2025 (2020).<sup>5</sup> Collectively, these policies sat under Bhutan’s 12<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan (12<sup>th</sup> FYP; 2018-2023)<sup>6</sup> which also guided the United Nations’ (UN) interagency contributions under the Sustainable Development Partnership Framework (UNSDPF; 2019-2023).<sup>7</sup> Indirectly, they also sought to establish linkages between government education expenditures and support for Bhutan’s Renewable Natural Resources (RNR) Strategy 2040 (2020) and RNR Marketing Policy (2017; 2021) which acted as the country’s guiding policies for agriculture and Sustainable Development Goal 2 (SDG2; ‘zero hunger’).<sup>8</sup>
5. Direct and indirect beneficiaries targeted by WFP agriculture activities included school children and smallholder farmers, a majority of them women.<sup>9</sup> A key evaluation feature was therefore to explore the CO’s use of gender analysis and WFP Gender Policy (2015-2020) to guide its support for gender equality and women’s empowerment (GEWE) across the agriculture portfolio. This allowed the ET to build a picture of the

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<sup>2</sup> The remaining 30 percent was funded by the Bhutan Country Office

<sup>3</sup> WFP Bhutan, 2018. [Bhutan Country Strategic Plan](#) (2019-2023)

<sup>4</sup> This corresponding to the targeting of Tier 3 (indirect) beneficiaries of the WFP Management Plan. For definitions see: WFP, 2021. [Report of the External Auditor on the management of information on beneficiaries](#). WFP/EB.A/2021/6-G/1

<sup>5</sup> A list of documents reviewed is provided in Annex 2

<sup>6</sup> RGOB, 2018. 12<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan (2018-2023)

<sup>7</sup> UN Bhutan, 2018. [United Nations Sustainable Development Partnership Framework](#) (2019-2023)

<sup>8</sup> UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2015. 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. SDG 2 is one of 17 Goals. Its aim is to: “End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture”.

<sup>9</sup> Source: Ministry of Agriculture and Forests, 2021. Mobile Operational Data Acquisition (MODA) database. Note that Government data on women’s participation estimated over 60 percent of farmer group members providing fresh produce to schools were women. The ET believes this was a significant underestimate of women’s participation based on average DAO data for membership of groups across districts rather than specific farmer-school groups supported by WFP where the ET found women predominated the membership in 3 out of the 4 targeted districts (see also Section 1.2)

extent to which WFP had, and might in future, contribute to ensuring women, men, girls and boys benefit appropriately from a sustainable, productive and nutritious food system in Bhutan. The assessment was guided by a field analysis of pilot activities in the districts of Trongsa and Zhemgang alongside a remote review of WFP contributions in Lhuntse and Samtse districts. Each represented a distinct agro-ecological zone and was identifiable as one of Bhutan's poorest districts by the government's Poverty Assessment Report (2017) and National Economic Census (2018).<sup>10</sup>

6. In the context of significant COVID-19 impacts on Bhutan's economy and declining fiscal and budgetary space for national development, the evaluation TOR were also designed to guide WFP's formative response to requests from the Gross National Happiness Commission (GNHC) and Ministry of Agriculture and Forests (MOAF) that it should expand its role in agriculture to support the national Economic Contingency Plan (ECP; 2020) for economic and social recovery.<sup>11</sup> In accordance with the TOR, the ET adopted a developmental evaluation approach aimed at ensuring the findings, conclusions and recommendations provided strategic orientation for the CO and support its Government and UN development partners.

7. Preparation of the ER followed consultations with WFP CO staff and representatives of RGOB including staff from GNHC and the national and district offices of MOAF and the MOE. UN counterparts included the Resident Coordinator's Office (RCO), alongside representatives of the Rome Based Agencies (RBAs: including the International Fund for Agricultural Development, IFAD; and Food and Agriculture Organisation, FAO) United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and International Trade Centre (ITC).<sup>12</sup>

8. The evaluation findings and recommendations were of interest to the RGOB looking to learn and apply lessons in national agriculture policies and programmes including its emergency response to COVID-19 and updates to the RNR Strategy 2040 (2020) and RNR Marketing Policy (2017). Particular attention was given by the ET to focusing on areas of collaboration and support requested by MOAF's Department of Agriculture (DOA) and Department of Agricultural Marketing and Cooperatives (DAMC).

9. The main users of the evaluation findings included the RGOB, as represented by the GNHC, MOAF, and MOE; UN Resident Coordinator's Office and RBAs; as well as the WFP CO and its Regional Bureau in Bangkok (RBB). The evaluation findings were designed to feed directly into the annual work plans of the remaining CSP period (2019-2023), provide a critical input into the forthcoming CSP evaluation in 2022, and to support the development of the CO's second generation CSP for the period 2023 to 2028.

## 1.2. COUNTRY CONTEXT

10. Bhutan is a landlocked country located in the Eastern Himalayas between China and India. It has a total surface area of 38,394 km<sup>2</sup> of which 70 percent is forested. Due to the hilly terrain, just 2.6 percent of the land area is used for crop production.<sup>13</sup>

11. Bhutan's population of 727,145 has almost doubled since the 1980s and includes a sex ratio of almost 1.1 including 346,692 women and 380,453 men.<sup>14</sup> The population constitutes four ethnolinguistic categories: the Ngalop of western and northern Bhutan; the Sharchop of eastern areas; the Lhotshampa of southern areas; and several Bhutanese sub-categories living in villages across the country.<sup>15</sup>

12. Bhutan's per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) had grown almost ten-fold in the last 40 years from USD 330 in the 1980s to USD 3,130 in 2020.<sup>16</sup> Annual GDP growth since the early 1980s averaged 7.5 percent derived mainly from the management of natural resources including hydroelectric power.<sup>17</sup> By 2018, the country's Gross National Income per capita had reached USD 3,080, three times the threshold for lower

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<sup>10</sup> RGOB, 2018. [National Economic Census](#). National Statistics Bureau; RGOB, 2017. [Bhutan Poverty Analysis Report](#). National Statistics Bureau

<sup>11</sup> RGOB, 2020. [Economic Contingency Plan](#). Prime Minister's Office

<sup>12</sup> A list of the stakeholders interviewed by the ET is provided in Annex 3.

<sup>13</sup> FAO, 2021. [Food Systems Assessment: working towards the sustainable development goals](#). FAO: Rome.

<sup>14</sup> RGOB, 2021. [Bhutan Interactive Data Portal. National Statistics Bureau](#)

<sup>15</sup> RGOB, 2017. [Population and Housing Census: National Report](#). National Statistics Bureau

<sup>16</sup> RGOB, 2021. [Bhutan Interactive Data Portal. National Statistics Bureau](#)

<sup>17</sup> World Bank, 2020. [Bhutan Systematic Country Diagnostic](#). Taking Bhutan's Development Success to the Next Level

middle-income countries, and poverty rates (measured using the USD 3.20 poverty line) had declined rapidly from 36 percent in 2007 to 12 percent in 2017.<sup>18</sup>

13. A key driver of poverty reduction was a government focus on electrification and extending rural roads that reduced the isolation of rural communities and increased access to schools and health care services.<sup>19</sup> This had contributed to a reduction in the maternal mortality rate from an estimated 430 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2000 to 183 in 2017.<sup>20</sup> Life expectancy had increased from 32 years in 1960 to 70 in 2017,<sup>21</sup> and there was a significant decline in the total dependency ratio of elderly people aged over 65 and children aged 14 or under from 73.9 in 2005 to 64.8 in 2017. Education access was high, with less than 2 percent of both girls and boys aged 6–16 out of school, and equal levels of participation for girls up to grade 10.<sup>22</sup>

14. Bhutan has achieved a high level of digital access. Actual mobile broadband subscriptions in 2018 had reached over 87 percent coverage compared to 62 percent globally. Although the Bhutan Information and Communications Technology Policy (2009 update) was dated,<sup>23</sup> a review was initiated in 2020. Priority Forward-thinking policies and strategies, a predictable regulatory environment have facilitated progress which is further supported by a fibre-optic network that has reached most parts of the country.<sup>24</sup>

15. With the country benefiting from a stable political and economic environment, in 2018 the RGOB committed to graduate Bhutan to middle income country status in December 2023. Despite economic setbacks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, at the end of 2021, the country remained committed to completing the proposed five-year transition period in line with the ambition of the 12<sup>th</sup> FYP (2018-2023).

16. However, of the 5 percent of Bhutanese that were identified as multi-dimensionally poor in 2017, more than 93 percent resided in rural areas,<sup>25</sup> and despite policy support for gender equality,<sup>26</sup> the country ranked just 131 out of 153 countries in the 2020 Global Gender Gap Report. Structural and cultural norms presented barriers to gender equality,<sup>27</sup> and Bhutan ranked just 130<sup>th</sup> for women's equal economic participation.<sup>28</sup> This particularly affected women in rural areas where 90 percent of Bhutan's poor relied on subsistence agriculture, and a majority of farmers were women.<sup>29</sup> A slow-down in economic growth to 3.8 percent in 2019 and 10 percent contraction in the national economy in 2020 led to an increase in unemployment from 2.7 percent in 2019 to 5 percent in 2020. This particularly affected youths for whom unemployment rates had climbed rapidly from 11.9 percent in 2019 to an estimated 22.6 percent in 2020.<sup>30</sup> Strategies to support rural women's economic empowerment and youth employment were therefore considered pivotal to reducing inequality in Bhutan.<sup>31</sup>

### **Policies**

17. Policy in Bhutan was guided by its development philosophy of Gross National Happiness (GNH). Written into the Constitution of Bhutan in 2008 ('Principles of State Policy'), this focused all Bhutan's national policy arrangements around the four pillars of sustainable and equitable socio-economic development, the preservation and promotion of culture, environmental conservation, and good governance.

18. Implementation of the GNH framework during the evaluation period was driven by the 12<sup>th</sup> FYP (2018-2023) which highlighted a convergence between poverty eradication and RNR sector development.

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<sup>18</sup> RGOB, 2017. [Bhutan Poverty Analysis Report](#). National Statistics Bureau

<sup>19</sup> World Bank, 2020. [Bhutan Systematic Country Diagnostic](#). Taking Bhutan's Development Success to the Next Level

<sup>20</sup> WHO, 2018. [RMNCAH Factsheet](#). Maternal Mortality Estimation Inter-Agency Group

<sup>21</sup> RGOB, 2017. [Population and Housing Census: National Report](#). National Statistics Bureau

<sup>22</sup> RGOB, 2021. [Statistical Yearbook of Bhutan 2021](#). National Statistics Bureau

<sup>23</sup> RGOB, 2009. [Bhutan information and communications technology policy and strategies \(update 1\)](#). Ministry of Information & Communications: Thimphu

<sup>24</sup> International Telecommunications Union, 2017. [Measuring the Information Society Report, Volume 2. Bhutan Country Profile](#). ITU: Geneva

<sup>25</sup> RGOB, 2017. [Bhutan: Multidimensional Poverty Index](#). National Statistical Bureau, and Oxford Poverty Human Development Initiative. University of Oxford

<sup>26</sup> RGOB, 2019. [National Gender Equality Policy \(draft\)](#). National Commission for Women and Children

<sup>27</sup> World Economic Forum, 2020. [Global Gender Gap Report](#).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid

<sup>29</sup> In 2020, 83 percent of women were employed in agriculture compared to 66 percent of men (many of them seasonally employed). See for example, RGOB, 2020. [Labour Force Survey](#). National Statistics Bureau: Thimphu

<sup>30</sup> RGOB, 2021. [Bhutan Interactive Data Portal](#). National Statistics Bureau

<sup>31</sup> Section 1 of Annex 17 "leave no-one behind" includes a more comprehensive analysis of gender and social inclusion

Agricultural development was guided by the RNR Strategy 2040 (2020) and RNR Marketing Strategy (2017; 2021) that targeted a transition from a subsistence- to commercially- based rural economy that supported diversified export growth, job creation and poverty reduction.<sup>32</sup> A focus on private and state-owned enterprise development was mirrored in the Economic Development Policy (2016) that stressed the need to increase agricultural productivity and exports.<sup>33</sup> Each of these policy frameworks sought to substitute imports (that constituted over 50 percent of the food consumed in Bhutan) through an enhanced production and consumption of domestically produced nutritious foods and growing focus on agricultural markets.<sup>34</sup>

19. Additional policies specifically relevant to the school feeding component of the evaluation included the National School Feeding and Nutrition Programme Strategy (NSFNP, 2019-2030),<sup>35</sup> the White Paper on Bhutan's School and Hospital Feeding Programme (2019),<sup>36</sup> National Education Policy (2018),<sup>37</sup> and National Nutrition Strategy and Action Plan (2020-2025).<sup>38</sup> Collectively these are hereafter referred to as the NSFNP (2019).

20. Collectively, this combination of education, health, nutrition, and RNR policies provided a policy environment that guided RGOB's ambition to ensure a high proportion of school meals would be based on the consumption of locally produced nutritious food products with the support of government investments into a decentralised procurement model whereby schools received a School Stipend for the direct purchase of fresh produce from local farmer groups and cooperatives (Box 1).<sup>39</sup>

#### **Box 1. Raising of Bhutan's School Stipend**

Under the Ministry of Finance's Notification for the revision of the stipend for schools (January 2020) the recommended school stipend was increased by 50 percent over 2019 levels to Nu. 1500 (USD20.25) per student per month for three meals a day, Nu. 1005 (USD13.60) for two, and Nu. 503 (USD6.80), for one. Schools were required to allocate two-thirds of the stipend to the procurement of fresh produce (vegetables, fruit, milk, eggs, and meat) from local farmers. The remaining third was for the purchase of non-perishable food items through the Food Corporation of Bhutan. No inflation link was included with the stipend increase.

#### **Nutrition**

21. Prior to the evaluation, Bhutan had made significant progress in addressing child nutrition with wasting and underweight prevalence reduced to 4 and 9 percent respectively. The prevalence of wasting, a measure of acute undernutrition, had also fallen from 5.9 percent in 2010 to 4.3 percent in 2016. However, the country still faced a triple burden of malnutrition involving a combination of micronutrient deficiencies, high rates of stunting, and increasing levels of overnutrition.<sup>40</sup>

22. Anaemia, a proxy indicator for micronutrient deficiencies, affected over 35 percent of non-pregnant women, 31 percent of adolescent girls, and 44 percent for children aged from 6 to 59 months.<sup>41</sup> More than 1 in 5 pre-school aged children and 17 percent of pregnant women were deficient in Vitamin A while peripheral neuropathy due to vitamin B1 deficiency constituted a risk factor affecting all school age children. Non-communicable diseases were responsible for 69 percent of Bhutan's overall disease burden with 71 percent of deaths in 2019 caused by hypertension, cardiovascular disease, cancer, and diabetes.<sup>42</sup>

23. At 21 percent, high rates of stunting in 2019 contrasted with obesity rates that had increased to 11.4 percent while 33.5 percent of the population were overweight.<sup>43</sup> While in part due to the Bhutanese diet

<sup>32</sup> RGOB, 2020. RNR Strategy 2040. Policy and Planning Division. MOAF; See also: RGOB, 2017. [RNR Marketing Strategy](#). MOAF. Note, the RNR Strategy 2040 was withdrawn in 2021 and is being updated with the RNR Marketing Strategy

<sup>33</sup> RGOB, 2016. [Economic Development Policy](#). Ministry of Economic Affairs

<sup>34</sup> RGOB, 2020. RNR Strategy 2040. MOAF: Thimphu.

<sup>35</sup> RGOB, 2019. National School Feeding and Nutrition Programme. Ministry of Education: Thimphu

<sup>36</sup> RGOB, 2020. [White Paper on Bhutan's School and Hospital feeding Programme](#). MOAF

<sup>37</sup> RGOB, 2018. [National Education Policy \(draft\)](#). Ministry of Education

<sup>38</sup> RGOB, 2019. National Nutrition Strategy and Action Plan (2020-2025). Ministry of Health. (not yet online)

<sup>39</sup> See, RGOB, 2020. [Annual Education Report 2019 – 2020](#). MOE: Thimphu, and; RGOB, 2020. [Notification on Revision of Stipend for Schools](#). Cabinet Office: Thimphu. Note that despite representing a 50 percent increase, the 2020 stipend was 25 percent below 2019 recommendation in the White Paper on Bhutan's School and Hospital feeding Programme (2019)

<sup>40</sup> RGOB, 2016. [National Nutrition Survey](#). Department of Public Health, Ministry of Health

<sup>41</sup> This in part relates to the 26 percent of girls that are married by the age of 18, 6 percent of them by the age of 15.

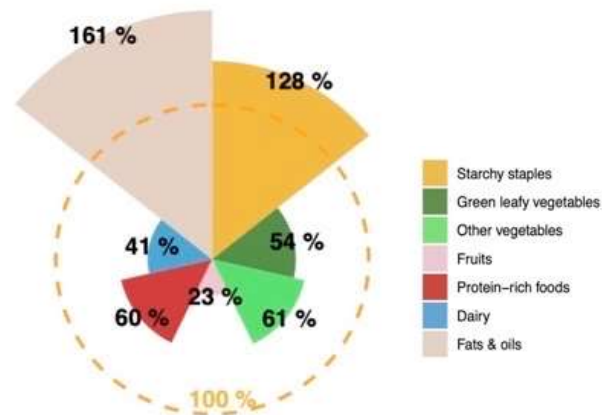
<sup>42</sup> RGOB, 2019. [Annual Health Bulletin](#). Ministry of Health

<sup>43</sup> RGOB, 2019. [Noncommunicable risk factors: Bhutan STEPS survey 2019](#). Ministry of Health

being high in carbohydrates, fat and salt but low in protein and micronutrients, the juxtaposition of under- and over- nutrition in Bhutan appeared to reflect an association between dietary and economic inequalities that were on the increase.<sup>44</sup> This was also reflected in differences in the prevalence of stunting between the poorest and wealthiest quintiles that had risen from a factor of two in 2010 to six 2015.<sup>45</sup>

24. The implication was that progress in securing an adequate diet and nutrition had bypassed poorer groups. By 2020, 45 percent of the population were still unable to access healthy diets, particularly in rural areas.<sup>46</sup> This was reflected in a Cost of a Nutritious Diet analysis that showed limited household spending on diets had led to high levels of consumption of fats, oils and starchy staples relative to fruit, vegetables and protein rich foods (Figure 1),<sup>47</sup> and a government survey in 2019 that identified insufficient fruit and vegetable intake (under 5 servings per day) among 86.1 percent of women and 86.7 percent of men.<sup>48</sup>

**Figure 1. Food consumption by commodity type relative to national guidelines (percent)**



Source: Dizon, F., et al. 2021. *The Cost of a Nutritious Diet in Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal*.

### Disaster risks

25. The primary focus of Bhutan’s disaster risk profile related to the high prevalence of natural disasters. Bhutan lies in zones IV and V of the Indian Seismic Code making it one of the most seismically active zones of the world. Although earthquakes in 2009 and 2011 affected many sectors including education and health facilities, and several tremors were registered in 2021, data for modelling seismic impacts in the country remained weak.<sup>49</sup> These indeterminate events have made Bhutan particularly vulnerable to landslides and glacial lake outburst floods. With 2674 glacial lakes in the northern mountains, 562 of them associated with glaciers, 24 glacial lakes were identified by UNDP as in “potentially dangerous” risk of outburst events triggered by ice melt or seismic activity.<sup>50</sup>

26. Climate risk models showed that the mean annual temperatures were projected to increase by 0.80C to 1.00C between 2010 and 2039, and by 2.00C – 2.40C between 2040 and 2069.<sup>51</sup> This would increase the risks of GLOF events, storms, flash floods, landslides, drought and forest fires and was expected to impact seriously on Bhutan’s economic dependency on its RNR sector and road connectivity: potentially creating serious disruption to the country’s emerging rural economy.

<sup>44</sup> Dizon, F., et al. 2021. [The Cost of a Nutritious Diet in Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal](#). World Bank: Policy Research Working Paper, 9578.

<sup>45</sup> RGOB, 2015. [National Nutrition Survey](#). Ministry of Health

<sup>46</sup> UNDESA, 2020. [State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World](#)

<sup>47</sup> Dizon, F., et al. 2021. [The Cost of a Nutritious Diet in Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal](#). World Bank

<sup>48</sup> RGOB, 2019. [Noncommunicable risk factors: Bhutan STEPS survey 2019](#). Ministry of Health

<sup>49</sup> Robinson, T. R., 2020. [Scenario ensemble modelling of possible future earthquake impacts in Bhutan](#). Natural Hazards 103: 3457–3478

<sup>50</sup> See for example, UNDP, 2011. [Improving Adaptive Capacity and Resilience in Bhutan](#). Springer. Other relevant UNDP country project summaries addressing risk available at, <https://www.adaptation-undp.org/projects/ldcf-glof-bhutan>

<sup>51</sup> Asia Development Bank, 2021. [Bhutan Climate Risk Profile](#)

27. While there were no recent examples of man-made disasters in Bhutan, the combination of a rising population, rapid urbanization, unsafe construction practices and weaknesses in the enforcement of land-use planning by-laws had cumulatively led to increasing environmental risks that affect vulnerable populations living in hazard-prone areas such as on steep slopes or river-banks. This led the RGOB to establish and implement a national “72 Hour Rapid Assessment Approach” to estimate the likely impact of disasters and provide an adequate response within the national timeframe.<sup>52</sup>

### **Agriculture**

28. Despite the country's economic successes, Bhutan's food systems had not kept pace with a growing population demand for high quality food products, especially in urban areas. While food imports had risen significantly, food exports had failed to grow.<sup>53</sup> Inherent structural and systemic weaknesses in food systems related in part to small and scattered land holdings. Less than 2 percent of the land area was irrigated. The resulting high costs of production and low yields had failed to stimulate farm investments or market-led agricultural strategies.<sup>54</sup>

29. Although 58 percent of the population in 2019 were identified as reliant on agriculture for their livelihoods (28.1 percent of them females and 23.1 percent male) the agriculture sector contributed just 13.4 percent to GDP.<sup>55</sup> With 69 percent of poor households dependent on agriculture for their primary income, working in agriculture was highly correlated with being poor. This had led to growing out-migration from rural to urban areas, particularly among young adults and males, creating labour scarcities and a feminisation of agriculture.<sup>56</sup> By 2020, 30 percent of arable land was fallow.<sup>57</sup>

30. Despite these constraints, opportunities to transform the agri-food system and improve rural incomes remained a high policy priority for RGOB. Facing a lack of employment opportunities in most sectors, a rejuvenated agri-food sector was thought to provide opportunities for poverty reduction and youth employment and Bhutan's varied agro-ecology was seen as an opportunity to develop niche export products. Nevertheless, some key challenges were recognised. Examples included,<sup>58</sup>

- Weaknesses in post-harvest market systems development including post-harvest handling, aggregation, storage, packaging and quality control.
- A weak rural farm-road network and vulnerable transport infrastructure that hindered the ability of farmers to connect to markets;
- Climate change impacts on rainfall variability and extreme weather events;
- The limited development, promotion and use of digital technologies to support agriculture sector transformation with relevant production, marketing and agrometeorological information; and,
- Deteriorating food consumption patterns across a range food groups critical to a nutritious diet.

31. Features of international development assistance in the agriculture sector provided by other agencies during the evaluation period included,

- IFAD's Commercial Agriculture and Resilient Livelihoods Enhancement Programme (CARLEP) operated across six eastern districts and included support to farmer-school linkages with WFP; FAO's Food Security and Agriculture Productivity Programme (FSAPP) that aimed to raise agricultural production across 6 western and southern districts;
- UNDP's implementation of a Green Climate Fund project 'Supporting Climate Resilience and Transformational Changes in the Agriculture Sector', and;
- ITC support for export diversification linked to small and medium enterprises including support to Bhutan's organic agriculture sector.

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<sup>52</sup> WFP, 2020. [Disaster Risk Management in Bhutan](#) (2019-2023)

<sup>53</sup> RGOB, 2017. [Bhutan Trade Classification & Tariff Schedule](#). Department of Revenue & Customs, Ministry of Finance

<sup>54</sup> FAO, 2021. [Food Systems Assessment: working towards the sustainable development goals](#). FAO: Rome.

<sup>55</sup> RGOB, 2019. [RNR Census of Bhutan](#). National Statistics Bureau, Ministry of Agriculture and Forests

<sup>56</sup> These themes are explored further in the Findings and Annex 17: Leave No-One Behind

<sup>57</sup> RGOB, 2020. RNR Strategy 2040. Policy and Planning Division. Ministry of Agriculture and Forests

<sup>58</sup> Dizon, F., *et al.*, 2019. Bhutan Policy Note. [Harnessing Spatial Opportunities in Agriculture for Economic Transformation](#). World Bank: Washington, DC



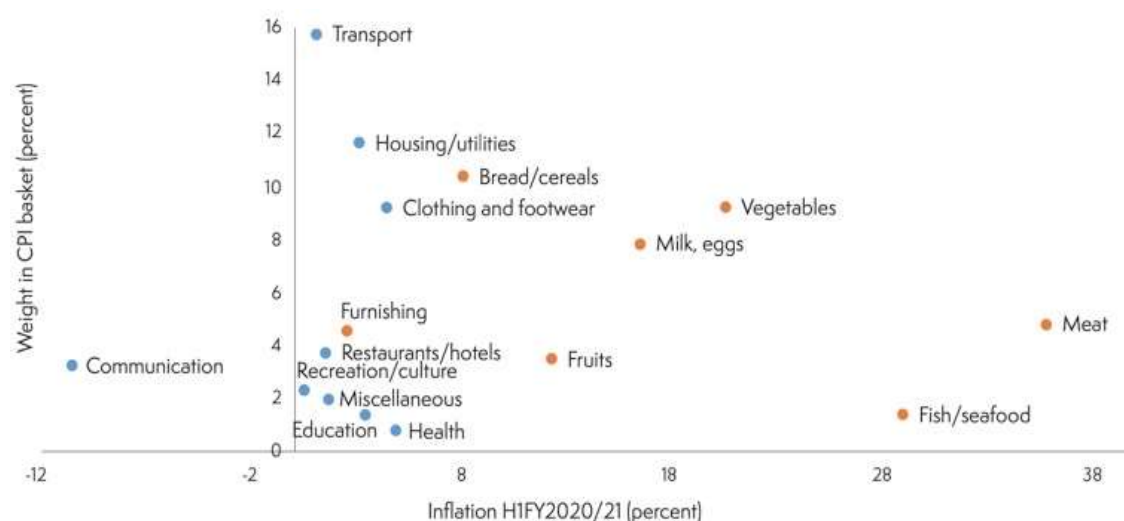
## COVID-19

32. RGOB's COVID-19 response was a dominant factor affecting the results of WFP's agriculture portfolio. In many respects, Bhutan's strategy and response to the pandemic was highly successful. Only limited case numbers and just three deaths were reported in 2021.<sup>59</sup> However, this came on the back of stringent containment measures including mandatory quarantine, mass testing, and contact tracing and national lockdowns and lockdowns in red zones. Internationally, Bhutan's borders were closed in March 2020 before being reopened later in the year. Trading was then subject to movement restrictions between nationally categorized low and high-risk zones that mostly affected southern districts and border towns with India.

33. The result was a fall in output across the tourism, construction, and manufacturing sectors. Real GDP growth fell to 2.7 percent in the 2019-2020 financial year, down from 5.5 percent in 2018-2019, and the 2019 pre-COVID-19 forecast of 7.2 percent.<sup>60</sup> Low tourist arrivals in 2020 and 2021 reduced growth in the services sector leading to the loss of an estimated 50,000 jobs among youths and young adults.<sup>61</sup>

34. Limited market access for domestic farmers due to a historical focus on subsistence and poor market connectivity in most districts,<sup>62</sup> alongside import restrictions also contributed to food price inflation with the consumer price index for food in December 2021 having increased by 18 percentage points relative to April 2018 prices. The main contributors included food commodities that rose by an average of 9.5 percent during 2020 to 2021. A factor behind this was the 40 percent rise in transport costs that resulted from increased fuel prices and border transshipment costs, that impacted on the prices of bread, vegetables, meat and dairy (Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Inflation across Consumer Price Indicator categories (2020-2021 Financial Year)**



Source: RGOB, 2021. National Statistics Bureau

35. National lockdowns caused by COVID-19 also had a significant affected on school feeding. With the majority of schools closed from March to December 2020, just 29 percent of the 100,000 school children entitled to receive school meals were able to access them or acquire the nutrition supplements normally provided to support their growth, health, and cognitive development.<sup>63</sup> Schools reopened in January 2021.

36. A response of government was to promote efforts toward food self-sufficiency through an Economic Contingency Plan (ECP), an emergency fund of USD 60 million introduced in April 2020 to protect the economy and livelihoods. With the collapse of food imports from Indian markets, priority was given to securing national food self-sufficiency and nutrition security through investments in agriculture and livestock production and

<sup>59</sup> WHO, 2021. [Bhutan Situation](#). World Health Organisation

<sup>60</sup> RGOB, 2021. [National Budgets for Financial Years 2018-2019 and 2019-2020](#). Ministry of Finance

<sup>61</sup> UNDP, 2020. [Ethnographic Research on Youth Unemployment in Bhutan](#). Regional Innovation Centre UNDP Asia-Pacific

<sup>62</sup> Dizon, F., *et al.*, 2019. [Harnessing Spatial Opportunities in Agriculture for Economic Transformation: Bhutan Policy Note](#). World Bank: Thimphu

<sup>63</sup> KIIs and FGDs indicated only boarding schools able to isolate pupils remained open during 2020

the accumulation of food reserves.<sup>64</sup> This included ECP investments in the agriculture sector of USD 8.23 million above 12<sup>th</sup> FYP budget allocation.<sup>65</sup> The ECP also provided targeted support for tourism employees, many of them unemployed youths who had been displaced back to their family homes in rural areas.

37. A further national emergency response to the pandemic was provided by the Druk Gyalpo's Relief *Kidu*, introduced in April 2020.<sup>66</sup> Over the year to March 2021 this social protection instrument supported 45,766 individuals, most of them unemployed, with a basic monthly income. An associated child support top-up *kidu* was granted to 18 percent of beneficiaries. Relief *kidu* was also used to help Bhutanese businesses manage interest repayments through critical support to 139,096 loan account holders. In April 2021 the *kidu* programme was extended for an additional 15 months.

38. The RGOB's COVID-19 response was also complemented by the UN Bhutan COVID-19 Socio-Economic Response Plan (SERP), that centred on five strategic pillars in which WFP took a more prominent position in agriculture than the other RBAs due to the relative size of its Country Office. The pillars included:<sup>67</sup>

- Pillar 1. Health First: Protecting Health Services and Systems during the Crisis, led by WHO and UNICEF;
- Pillar 2. Protecting People: Social Protection and Basic Services, led by UNICEF and WFP;
- Pillar 3. Economic Response and Recovery: Protecting Jobs, Small and Medium Enterprises, and Informal Sector Workers, led by UNDP and WFP;
- Pillar 4. Macroeconomic Response and Multilateral Collaboration, led by UNDP and RCO; and,
- Pillar 5. Social Cohesion and Community Resilience, led by UNDP and RCO.

### 1.3. SUBJECT OF THE EVALUATION

39. This Activity evaluation explored changes in “WFP's support to smallholder farmers and expanded portfolio across the agriculture value chain in Bhutan” between January 2019 and June 2021. The evaluation subject instead built on the foundational aspects of WFP's work to improve farmer-school linkages as a sub-component of Activity 1 of CSP (2019-2023).<sup>68</sup>

40. WFP implementation of its agriculture portfolio from 2019 to 2021 was guided by Output 2.1 (“Farmer-Based Organizations organize farmers to produce for the school meals market”) of the project, “Consolidating a fully integrated universal National School Nutrition Programme in Bhutan”. The overall objectives of the project were to support the RGOB to transition and scale-up of its school feeding programme, provide safe and healthy infrastructure, address the proliferation of non-communicable diseases and increase the income of farmers through increasing local agriculture production. USD 4 million funding was provided by the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) for delivery of the overall project over the 5-year period, 2019 to 2023. USD 400,000 was dedicated to the agriculture output for activities that included strengthening farmer capacities, building farmer-school linkages, and facilitating government market facilitation.<sup>69</sup>

41. WFP also benefited from a USD 200,000 Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) donation in 2020 to support its COVID-19 response under the UN's SERP.<sup>70</sup> The funding of WFP SERP activities and those of UNDP were coordinated under the project, “Protecting livelihoods and reinforcing the tourism and agriculture sectors in Bhutan” (hereafter the “ECP project”).<sup>71</sup> During the COVID-19 pandemic all KOICA and MPTF funds were

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<sup>64</sup> RGOB, 2020. [State of the Nation Report](#). Fourth Session, The Third Parliament of Bhutan

<sup>65</sup> RGOB, 2020. [Economic Contingency Plan: Redesigning Development, Attaining Greater Heights](#). Cabinet Office: Thimphu. See table 5, page 37.

<sup>66</sup> The *Druk Gyalpo's Relief Kidu* was royal prerogative to support Bhutanese facing disasters and hardship. See, [https://royalkidu.bt/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/DGRK\\_One-Year-Summary\\_22.4.2021.pdf](https://royalkidu.bt/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/DGRK_One-Year-Summary_22.4.2021.pdf)

<sup>67</sup> UN Bhutan, 2020. [UN Bhutan COVID-19 Socio-Economic Response Plan](#).

<sup>68</sup> Activity 1 of WFP Bhutan's CSP seeks to: “Assist the Government in its transition to a national school nutrition programme based on an integrated approach that connects school feeding to nutrition education, school health and school agriculture and embeds gender, environmental and social safeguards in all activities, with strengthened supply chains and the optimization of school nutrition infrastructure”.

<sup>69</sup> Detailed analysis of project funding is explored in response to EQ2.2: Finding 5 (efficiency and effectiveness of WFP's use of resources)

<sup>70</sup> See, UN Bhutan, 2020. [UN Bhutan COVID-19 Socio-Economic Response Plan](#). UNRC, Thimphu. The MPTF was a UN inter-agency finance mechanism launched by the UN Secretary-General to support low- and middle- income countries to overcome the health and development crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

<sup>71</sup> See page 68 of: UN, 2020. [Global Interim Report of the UN COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund, May to September 2020](#). UN Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office: New York.

channelled through the GNHC to district Departments of Agriculture (DOAs) who, despite access restrictions that affected WFP staff, were largely able to continue the provision of production assistance to smallholder farmers in line with the ECP's Agricultural Stimulus Plan (ASP, 2020).<sup>72</sup>

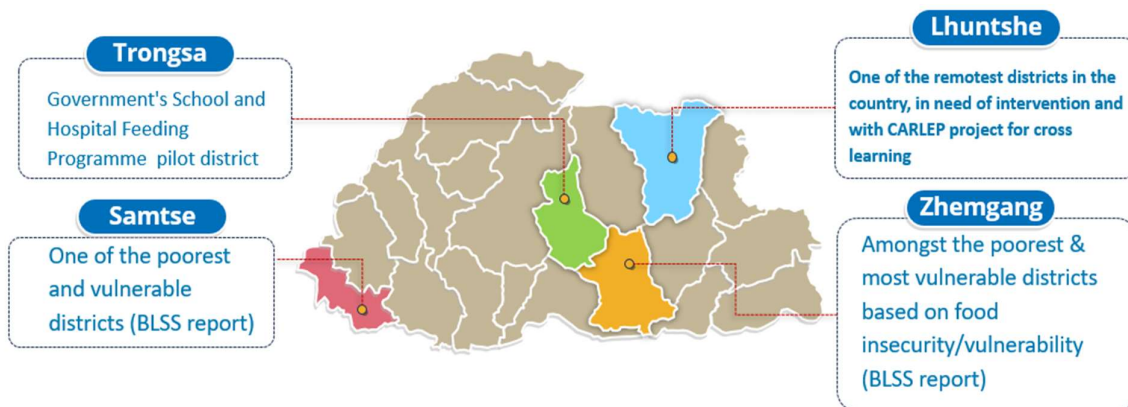
42. No theory of change was developed by WFP for its agriculture portfolio. Instead, through the evaluation process, the ET used its analysis of WFP activities and a range of stakeholder platforms to build a retrospective intervention logic (Annex 4) that summarised the areas (geographic, thematic, resource) where WFP's future agriculture-related programming could provide the greatest added value in Bhutan. The main developmental themes were explored under the findings and conclusions, alongside cross-cutting GEWE, Innovation, Supply Chain and Partnership considerations. They included:

- Governance and oversight of food systems;
- Empowering women and youths through successful farmer groups, cooperatives and businesses;
- De-risking nutritious food production;
- Building value through improved post-harvest management practices;
- Strengthening farmer-to-market linkages and infrastructure; and,
- Strengthening the national RNR digital ecosystem.

43. The focus on women's empowerment in the intervention logic reflected the widely reported feminisation of agriculture that has resulted from rural male out-migration.<sup>73</sup> Close attention to the analysis and support for women's engagement in agriculture was thereby considered an essential component of the evaluation and focus of WFP agriculture interventions. In 2020, 83 percent of women were employed in agriculture compared to 66 percent of men.<sup>74</sup> This figure was significantly higher in middle belt districts where women were responsible for all aspects of cultivation, harvesting, storage and marketing. The slower movement of women than men reflected gaps in higher level education outcomes, lower employment rates attributed to domestic responsibilities, and a high incidence of early pregnancy affecting girls' economic participation.<sup>75</sup>

44. The geographical scope of the evaluation focused on the four Districts of Trongsa, Zhemgang, Lhuntshe and Samtse targeted by the KOICA project and Activity 1 of the CSP (Figure 3).<sup>76</sup> This sample represented a fifth of the 20 Districts in Bhutan and encompassed a diversity of contexts that allowed the evaluation to explore the relevance and feasibility of any future expansion of the agriculture portfolio including with respect to GEWE aspects.

**Figure 3. Evaluation coverage and WFP agriculture intervention area, 2019-2020**



Source: WFP Bhutan, 2020

45. Trongsa represented the RGOB's pilot district for building linkages between farmer groups and cooperatives with schools and markets through the production and supply of fresh fruit and vegetables.

<sup>72</sup> RGOB, 2020. [Economic Contingency Plan](#). Prime Minister's Office: Thimphu

<sup>73</sup> See also paragraph 30. Literature includes RGOB, 2019, [Gender and Climate Change](#). National Commission for Women and Children; ADB, 2014. [Bhutan Gender Equality Diagnostic of Selected Indicators](#); and, RGOB, 2020. RNR Strategy 2040

<sup>74</sup> RGOB, 2020. [Labour Force Survey](#). National Statistics Bureau: Thimphu

<sup>75</sup> Asian Development Bank, 2014. [Bhutan Gender Equality Diagnostic of Selected Indicators](#)

<sup>76</sup> RGOB, 2017. [Poverty Analysis Report](#). Thimphu: National Statistics Bureau, World Bank.

Lhuntse and Zhemgang were two of the poorest districts in Bhutan targeted for an analysis of opportunities and constraints to scaling-up farmer-school linkages. Samtse also represented a District where WFP was keen to explore opportunities to build a partnership with FAO and the World Bank through the ongoing Food Security and Agriculture Productivity Project (FSAPP).<sup>77</sup> Lhuntse also provided a comparative analysis based on its isolation from markets, high transport costs and supply chain constraints. Like Samtse, it was also targeted by WFP as a platform for potential collaboration with IFAD which was overseeing the Commercial Agriculture and Resilient Livelihoods Assistance Programme (CARLEP).<sup>78</sup>

46. Drawing on its analysis of the existing WFP agriculture portfolio, and the factors that influenced its formulation and potential for change, the evaluation was also tasked with ascertaining the “organisational readiness” of the CO to expand its agriculture portfolio.<sup>79</sup> An analytical model was developed and tested by the ET during the inception phase that was designed to address Evaluation Question 5 of the TOR (Section 2.5) by linking the CO’s existing and potential development contributions in agriculture to its organisational capacities and capabilities.

## 1.4. METHODOLOGY, LIMITATIONS AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

### *Methodology*

47. The inception, data collection and analysis phases of the evaluation were conducted between June and December 2021. The evaluation analysis used evidence for the years 2019 to 2021, corresponding to the period when WFP’s modality shifted from direct implementation to supporting government management of the National School Feeding and Nutrition Programme (NSFNP) and associated SHFP. The evaluation timeline and field mission schedule are provided in Annex 5.

48. Five overarching evaluation questions (EQs) were explored. No changes were made to the EQs and sub-questions from the TOR or Inception phase. The EQs, associated evaluation criteria, indicators and methods to assess them were elaborated in the Evaluation Matrix (Annex 6). In shorthand, the overarching EQs can be summarised as: EQ1 – How relevant and responsive was the agriculture portfolio? EQ2 – What results were achieved? EQ3 – How flexibly did WFP respond to changes in the development context? EQ4 – How well did WFP integrate its portfolio with those of its partners? and, EQ5 – What is the potential for the results to be sustainable? The questions were aligned to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) criteria of Relevance (EQs 1 and 3), Coherence (EQs 1 and 4), Effectiveness (EQs 2, 3, 4 and 5), Efficiency (EQs 2, 3 and 5), and Sustainability (EQs 4 and 5).

49. With respect to gender, the core request of the CO was to explore gaps and maximise utility. To this end, EQs 2.1 and 2.2 (Results) were used to focus the evaluation’s gender analysis with respect to the CO’s central question as to how efficiently and effectively it had reached beneficiaries (Finding 4). This was supplemented by a review of WFP’s use of gender analysis in Bhutan (EQ3.3) and the sustainability implications of its approach to GEWE (EQ5.1). A comprehensive gender analysis was developed as part of the evaluation findings and provided as a stand-alone Annex 17 (Leave No-one Behind) covering the gender context and needs, national policies and frameworks, WFP policies and programming, and gender-related conclusions and recommendations. By concentrating the gender analysis in a single annex the ET avoided repetition and provide a platform for GEWE improvements by the CO. The ET included a female gender specialist. All findings were cross referenced against the WFP Office of Evaluation’s Technical Note for Gender Integration in WFP Evaluations, and the objectives of the WFP Gender Policy (2015-2020) and 2020 evaluation.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> See, <https://www.gafspfund.org/projects/food-security-and-agriculture-productivity-fsapp>

<sup>78</sup> See, <https://www.carlep.gov.bt>. Both GAFSP and CARLEP were funded by the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP), a multilateral financing instrument dedicated to fighting hunger, malnutrition, and poverty.

<sup>79</sup> The analytical model was presented in Figure 4., Section 2.2 of the Inception Report. Design of the model drew directly on: WFP, 2021. [Strategic evaluation of the Contribution of School Feeding Activities to the Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals](#). Reference was also based on: Lee, E., *et al.*, 2019. [Identifying indicators of readiness and capacity for implementing farm-to-school interventions](#). *The Journal of School Health*, 89:5. See also: Weiner, B. J., 2009. [A theory of organizational readiness for change](#). *Implementation Science* 4, 67; and, Scaccia, J.P., *et al.*, 2015. [A practical implementation science heuristic for organizational readiness](#). *Journal of Community Psychology*, 43: 4 (p 484-501)

<sup>80</sup> WFP, 2017. [Technical note: integrating gender in WFP evaluations](#); WFP, 2015. [WFP Gender Policy 2015-2020](#); WFP, 2020. [Evaluation of the Gender Policy \(2015-2020\)](#)

50. An evaluability assessment provided in Annex 7 covered evaluation assumptions, risks and mitigating factors. As part of the analysis, the Evaluation Matrix (Annex 5) adopted a Red-Amber-Green review of the availability and quality of information to enable the ET to explore the evaluability of each EQ. The process indicated that while documentary evidence reflecting WFP and government policies and programmes and reporting were adequate, qualitative indicators relied on strong stakeholder process engagements and the triangulation of findings across groups. The most difficult evidence gaps were identified for gender where the ET needed to contrast secondary documentation with WFP quantified data and stakeholder perceptions that were often passive and gender neutral.

51. As its starting point the evaluation considered WFP's planned agriculture-related activities of Activity 1 of the CSP, the KOICA funded project, "Consolidating a fully integrated universal National School Nutrition Programme in Bhutan", and the CO's MPTF-funded ECP response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The evaluation then extended its analysis beyond the KOICA and MPTF-supported interventions to the larger portfolio of WFP interventions in agriculture including digitalisation, and knowledge sharing and advocacy. In the context of Bhutan's ECP (2020), and adjustments to the strategic RNR priorities following the Mid-Term Review (MTR; 2021) of the 12<sup>th</sup> FYP (2018-2023), a "developmental evaluation" approach was agreed with the CO (Box 2).<sup>81</sup>

### **Box 2. Adoption of the developmental evaluation approach**

For WFP Bhutan, adoption of a developmental evaluation reflected the CO desire to support decision-making in the face of a complex, uncertain and rapidly changing development context for agricultural development in Bhutan. This led the evaluation to include extended 3-month inception and data-collection processes whereby it could address significant COVID-19 travel restrictions and enable the ET to foster constructive relationships with internal and external stakeholders through continuous exchange, feedback and co-creation. The ET was also able to embed the evaluation process within the day-to-day decision-making of both the CO and its RGOB counterparts regarding WFP's ongoing and future strategic contributions.

With the backing of RBB, adoption of a developmental approach allowed the evaluation to integrate a formal, summative review of the evaluation findings in Section 2 – assessing CO delivery against agreed accountabilities within its new agriculture portfolio – with a developmental process by which formative learning was captured in the form of conclusions and recommendations that worked at the strategic, programmatic and organisational levels. The promotion of real-time learning based on critical observation and active engagement of WFP and external stakeholders was essential to this. Both WFP and government stakeholders were able to influence the formulation of WFP Bhutan's emerging value position for agriculture (Conclusion 3). One consequence was that the conclusions and recommendations in Section 3 were given greater emphasis in the report than in most decentralised evaluations as were associated annexes co-developed to support national follow-up.

52. Three analytical frameworks underpinned the developmental evaluation methodology.<sup>82</sup> They included the building of a retrospective 'Intervention Logic' to frame and clarify the planned and actual results achieved (EQs 1, 2 and 4); adoption of an 'emergent modelling' analysis to engage stakeholders in exploring evolving aspects of WFP's agriculture portfolio (EQs 3, 4 and 5); and use of an 'organisational readiness' conceptual framework to assess the CO's ability to deliver against a value proposition for agriculture and enhance the sustainability of results (EQ 5).<sup>83</sup>

53. To support these frameworks, the evaluation adopted a *mixed methods approach* (relevant to all EQs and evaluation criteria) summarised in Box 3. This allowed data triangulation across key informant interviews (KIIs), focus group discussions (FGDs), Documentation and Communications in line with the Evaluation Matrix

<sup>81</sup> For more information, see: Patton, M. (2011). [Developmental evaluation: applying complexity concepts to enhance innovation and use](#)

<sup>82</sup> Annex 8 provides an overview of the developmental evaluation approach. Note that a precedent example of a WFP developmental evaluations identified by the ET was outlined in the TOR to: WFP, 2020. [Evaluation of WFP's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic \(2019-2020\)](#)

<sup>83</sup> For an example of WFP evaluations using an Organisational Readiness analysis, see: WFP, 2021. [Strategic evaluation of the Contribution of School Feeding Activities to the Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals](#)

(Annex 6). Triangulation comparators included stakeholder type and representation; local, regional and national levels; and quantitative versus qualitative data analysis.

54. A number of data gathering methods and analytical tools were adopted (see Annex 9 for more detail). They included:

- *An extended inception period* involving interviews and briefings with the CO and external stakeholders;
- *Policy mapping* of key RGOB and WFP policy themes, priorities and shifts, and response to COVID-19 (EQs 1 and 3);
- *Programme results analysis* and tabulation against the Intervention Logic (EQs 1 and 2);
- *Budget analysis* (by activity area, by year), that explored funding levels and adjustments and correlation with the results achieved (EQs 1 and 2);
- *Process analysis* of WFP internal and inter-agency liaison, relationships and decision-making (all EQs);
- *Timeline analysis* of the inter-relationships between organizational, policy and programme findings (all EQs);
- *Partnership analysis* of how effectively WFP supported inter-agency coordination, knowledge sharing and joint operations (EQ4); and
- *Resource mobilisation* analysis of the efficiency and effectiveness of WFP fundraising efforts (EQ4).

### **Box 3. Summary of evaluation mixed methods**

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with

- 15 WFP employees (6 females and 9 males)
- 22 National government stakeholders across 5 departments (6 females and 16 males)
- 6 UN representatives (1 female and 5 males)
- 11 CSO, independent and cooperative representatives (6 female, 5 male)

Focus groups discussions (FGDs)

- Multiple WFP internal
- 6 farmer groups in 2 Districts (50 females; 5 males: 5 of the groups were entirely female)<sup>84</sup>
- 5 Schools (15 males; 8 females)
- 4 formative FGDs with DAMC, UN and WFP

Document review of 36 WFP corporate and 18 CO documents; 30 government policies and reports; 24 UN, bilateral and multilateral reports and plans; 165 press cuttings; and 17 external reports.

55. Stratified random sampling of two farmer groups and two schools across two sub-districts in Trongsa and Zhemgang districts ensured the representation of women across different ethno-linguistic groups. When agreeing sites with DAOs, consideration was given to the age of groups, their proximity to markets and schools, activity status and estimated land holdings.<sup>85</sup> Sensitivity to gender considerations during data collection was supported by adoption of sex-disaggregated FGDs, keeping a record of the sex of KII and FGD participants, use of a female interviewer to guide gender-related discussions, and triangulation of gender-related questions across groups, cooperatives, AEAs, district and national agricultural officials, and CSO representatives. After random sampling led to FGDs with five all-women farmer groups, deliberative sampling was used to cross-reference preliminary findings with a remote mixed group in Zhemgang, and a youth group in Trongsa. Time, COVID-19 and access constraints did not allow the ET to visit Lhuntse or Samtse districts. Field visits were instead supplemented by remote interviews successfully undertaken over digital platforms with district stakeholders as well as regional officers in Mongar.<sup>86</sup>

56. To support the breadth of the evaluation methodology, close relationships were at all times maintained with evaluation reference group members (Annex 10). As the data collection process evolved, the evaluation used market systems analysis to engage multiple stakeholders in a formative process of mapping fresh

<sup>84</sup> The group in one village where the evaluation found more male farmers represented did not supply fresh produce to schools due to its remoteness but did sell to market through an aggregator intermediary

<sup>85</sup> Group maturity was identified through the date of registration that ranged from 2 to 10 years. Activity status considerations allowed the ET to compare active groups with one where the membership was falling

<sup>86</sup> The methodology design was assessed against OEV's [Technical Note for Gender Integration in WFP Evaluations](#) and the [UN System-Wide Action Plan 2.0 on mainstreaming Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women](#).

produce value chains to build common understanding about gaps and opportunities. The framework was based on WFP's Smallholder Agriculture Market Support (SAMS) model and use of an Emergency Market Mapping and Analysis toolkit.<sup>87</sup>

57. A focus on sustainability analysis was included to address EQ5 that covered WFP attention to policy, institutional, financial, social, environmental and technology factors that have, and may in future, affect the durability of WFP support for agriculture.

### **Limitations**

58. Data limitations were caused by the short time period during which agriculture related interventions had been undertaken by the CO. Implementation only properly got underway in 2020 following the receipt of an initial tranche of KOICA funding and were immediately followed by COVID-19 related restrictions to field access that started from March 2020 and affected all programme sites. This led to quantitative data limitations. While the ET made efforts to triangulate WFP and government quantitative data for production, farmer groups and cooperatives, this did not prove possible. Focus was instead given to validating available quantitative data against more substantive qualitative assessments.

59. While access restrictions to Trongsa, Zhemgang and Lhuntse districts were lifted in 2021, they were still in place for Samtse during the evaluation data collection phase. Differences in the sex ratio of farmer group members in Samtse (estimated by District Officials as 1:1) compared to other districts (where the ET found most groups were entirely female), made it difficult for the ET to extend gender-based learning to Samtse where male-female relationships in more patriarchal Lhotshampa communities differed from those of the other central belt districts targeted by WFP. In the absence of WFP or government experience or targeting, the ET was also unable to integrate disability within the field data gathering missions and disability was absent from WFP datasets.

60. To compensate, the evaluation used an extended data collection visit. This allowed the ET to combine national face to face KIIs and FGDs with a two-week field visit to Trongsa and Zhemgang supported by a series of remote interviews with all target districts whereby evidence could be built iteratively. High levels of consistency in the summative and developmental findings, including for GEWE considerations, was triangulated across KIIs and FGDs with farmers groups and members (mostly women), schools, and district and national officials. This allowed the ET to build confidence in the evaluation's data and analysis. All preliminary findings were compared to those of earlier evaluations, studies, agency reports and assessments, and reviewed against WFP Annual Country Reports (ACRs) and KOICA project reports.<sup>88</sup>

61. Government restrictions on the gathering of groups in the build-up to local elections also led the ET to bring forward the timing of planned field visits to Trongsa and Zhemgang districts and undertake FGDs and KIIs over two weeks and consecutive weekends with the support of district officials and beneficiaries. However, time limitations meant school visits had to be shortened making FGDs with students unworkable.

62. Difficulties in planning and coordinating co-creation workshops with WFP, government and UN stakeholders due to heavy year-end time pressures led the ET to instead use support a series of small-scale stakeholder discussion groups in Thimphu that met regularly over the period 8<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2021.

63. The ET did not consider these limitations to have affected its analysis and findings. Indeed, the ET considers the support for an iterative data collection approach and multiple discussion groups to have allowed it to share and revise formative aspects and build ownership with greater levels of stakeholder participation than would have been possible using the original co-creation workshop method.

### **Ethical considerations**

64. This evaluation conformed to the 2020 United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Ethical Guidelines,<sup>89</sup> the Standards of Conduct for the International Civil Service (ICS),<sup>90</sup> and WFP Code of Conduct.<sup>91</sup> A Statement of

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<sup>87</sup> Reference materials include, WFP, 2018. [Smallholder Agriculture Market Support, Programme Guidance](#); EMMA, 2021. [Market System Mapping and Analysis Toolkit](#); and, WFP, 2013. [Comparative review of market assessment methods, tools, approaches and findings](#). For more on market systems methods see, Practical Action, 2021. [Four Core Principles of PMSD](#)

<sup>88</sup> A detailed list of documentation used was provided in the IR and listed in Annex 2

<sup>89</sup> UNEG, 2020. [Ethical Guidelines](#) for Evaluation. UNEG Secretariat: New York

<sup>90</sup> ICS, 2013. [Standards of Conduct](#) for the International Civil Service. ICSC: New York

<sup>91</sup> WFP, 2014. [Code of Conduct](#). Ethics Office: Rome

Ethical Principles followed by the ET was included in the IR. All interviews followed WFP Decentralised Evaluation Quality Assurance (DEQAS) standards and protocols to ensure methodological appropriateness, accuracy, and rigour.<sup>92</sup> Attention was paid to protecting privacy, confidentiality, and the anonymity of participants. The ET addressed safeguarding concerns and ensured informed consent was obtained from stakeholders.

65. At all times the ET adhered to government guidelines for COVID-19 that included safe distancing from KII and FGD participants and the wearing of face masks during transit. No visit was undertaken to Samtse district due to quarantine restrictions. Examples of further measures taken to ensure ethical considerations were addressed included,

- Close attention to cultural and economic dynamics surrounding gender, power, age and social exclusion with beneficiary KIIs and FGDs conducted in ways that sought to minimize stigma;
- Data collection practices that ensured the successful participation of women, men and youths alongside representatives of minority linguistic groups;
- Interview times that were limited to allow beneficiaries to proceed with their daily activities;
- At least 2 ET members present in all beneficiary FGDs and KIIs;
- Participation in KIIs and FGDs on an informed consent basis with stakeholders told of their right not to participate and ability to leave at any time; and,
- Data privacy protocols that ensured the confidentiality and anonymity of stakeholders and prevented the sharing of KII or FGD information.

66. In addition, all beneficiaries and individuals were provided information regarding WFP and Government contacts that could be reached should they wished to register a concern or complaint. KII and FGD participants were also given the opportunity to ask questions of the ET and offer information they considered important that hadn't been covered by FGD questions.

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<sup>92</sup>WFP, 2021. [DEQAS Guidance for Process and Content](#). OEV-WFP: Rome



## 2. Evaluation findings

67. Analysis of the relevance, results, responsiveness and sustainability of WFP support to the needs of smallholder farmers in Bhutan was organized against the five evaluation questions and associated sub-questions of the evaluation matrix (Annex 6). The assessment drew on the triangulation of evidence from WFP and external key informants, a document review, field missions and process observations which allowed the ET to provide findings to each of the evaluation sub-questions.

### 2.1. RELEVANCE OF WFP FARMER-TO-SCHOOL FEEDING INTERVENTIONS

68. This section responds to the evaluation criteria of Relevance and Coherence under two sub-questions of EQ1: “To what extent was the original portfolio of WFP Activity 1 farmer-to-school feeding interventions relevant to the priorities of Government, UN agencies and beneficiaries?” and

***Sub-question 1.1: To what extent did WFP interventions respond to the priorities of national and sector policy frameworks and institutions?***

**Finding 1. In focusing its original technical assistance and resources to support Government strengthening of farmer-school linkages, WFP operations demonstrated clear relevance to a range of national agriculture, education, nutrition and health policies and priorities and adhered to international standards.**

69. A combination of documentary analysis, KIIs and FGDs triangulated across stakeholders was used to explore policy relevance and coherence. WFP, government and UN stakeholders all spoke of GNHC’s strategic requirement that WFP should map the key RGOB policy themes, priorities and shifts to ensure its policy alignment for agriculture. A summary analysis of national policies was developed (Annex 11) that indicated strong apparent relationships with the WFP agriculture portfolio. Negotiations with GNHC and MOAF were found to have appropriately influenced WFP’s strategic direction and decision-making when formulating the KOICA project and the associated agriculture sub-activity of the CSP (2019-2023).

70. Through the design of the original strategic outcome 1 and Activity 1 of the CSP, the ET found WFP had sought to address the right of all school aged children to have access to an affordable and adequate, safe, nutritious and culturally acceptable diet. This aligned with the Food and Nutrition Security Policy (2014) including recognition of the need for a multisector approach to be adopted. It also ensured the WFP’s subsequent agriculture support built on, and supported, Bhutan’s efforts to become self-reliant in the management, coordination, and implementation of a cost-effective, equitable and high-quality National School Feeding and Nutrition Programme (NSFNP, 2019).<sup>93</sup>

71. WFP programming thereby provided support to the introduction of local fresh produce into school meals in 2020 and to ensuring school-based nutrition and agriculture programmes were embedded in the education system in line with the ambitions of the draft National Education Policy (2019).<sup>94</sup> By aligning support to the NSFNP, WFP positioning of its agriculture portfolio was also brought in line with the National Nutrition Strategy and Action Plan 2020-2025 (2020) and joint MOAF-MOE School and Hospital Feeding Programme (SHFP, 2019), where a core aim of the latter was to ensure domestically produced foods met acceptable quality standards and were supplied to schools and hospitals by women and men farmers on a timely basis.<sup>95</sup> This enabled WFP agriculture activities to directly support the RGOB’s introduction of an enhanced school

<sup>93</sup> RGOB, 2019. National School Feeding and Nutrition Programme. Ministry of Education: Thimphu

<sup>94</sup> Annex 11 provides a summary analysis of the policy frameworks outlined under Finding 1

<sup>95</sup> WFP’s first formal linkage with MOAF in 2015 was to help establish the School Feeding Technical Committee. From 2016, WFP increasingly worked with MOAF and MOE to support the planned hand-over of the NSFNP in 2019.

stipend in January 2020 (Section 1.2: Box 1) and its ambitions to stimulate domestic food production that would mitigate the NSFNP's earlier reliance on food imports.<sup>96</sup>

72. Support for the SHFP meant that WFP agriculture activities were coherent with MOAF's introduction of the RNR Strategy 2040 (2020) and RNR Marketing Policy (2017; 2021). Both targeted the building of a nationally self-reliant food system that could support the socio-economic well-being of women and men smallholder farmers and establishment of a more efficient agriculture value chain.

73. WFP's agriculture portfolio reflected the ambitions of the UNSDPF which included Activity areas that aimed to: (i) increase the percentage consumption of perishable food in the National School Nutrition Programme procured from local farmers (Activity 2.3.1); and, (ii) train smallholder farmers in production planning, post-harvest techniques, and the building of farmer organisations and business management approaches to support farmer-school linkages (Activity 4.2.4).<sup>97</sup> Each of these Activities was agreed with GNHC, MOAF, MOE and MOH and formulated against associated key result areas of the 12<sup>th</sup> YFP (2019-2023).

74. More broadly, WFP digital support was coherent with the e-RNR masterplan (2016).<sup>98</sup> Relevant priorities to which WFP activities contributed included support for an integrated rural natural resource statistical management and reporting (RNR M&R) information system and support to supply chain logistics (storage and transport) and stock visibility in school meals services. WFP digital activities also helped government begin to address concerns over data gaps that it recognised as a major challenge to evidence-based policy decision-making and the monitoring of national policy impacts.<sup>99</sup>

***Sub-question 1.2: How well did WFP agriculture-related interventions complement related government, donor and UNSDPF partner initiatives?***

**Finding 2. Although WFP's agriculture-related interventions were coherent and supportive of government and donor sector development programmes, and largely managed through government structures, because the portfolio was recent, the Country Office was yet to establish a strong reputation in the agriculture sector within government or with potential UN agency partners.**

75. In building a picture of WFP complementarity, it is important to recognise that all WFP field level operations were managed through its government partners.<sup>100</sup> This required WFP to respond to the national focus on enhancing food self-sufficiency and equitability in line with the ambitions of the 12<sup>th</sup> YFP (2019-2023), Food and Nutrition Security Policy (2014), and RNR Strategy 2040 (2020) that succeeded it. Contributions to food self-sufficiency were thereby inherent in WFP support to the NSFNP (2019) and SHFP (2019) and were a major requirement of Bhutan's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

76. A combination of process analysis (Annex 12), KIIs and FGDs triangulated across multiple stakeholders explored WFP internal and inter-agency liaison, relationships and decision-making. This was complemented by a timeline analysis illustrating the inter-relationships between national, UN and WFP engagements (Annex 13). The ET found WFP's understanding of Government institutions, roles and responsibilities and the personal history and interests of government stakeholders to be strong both at the national and local levels. All WFP national staff knew their government counterparts, and the CO gave suitable emphasis to protocol which, with the support of the UNCT, allowed it to build strong rapport with RGOB representatives at all levels. Effective relationships were also established with the principal portfolio donor, KOICA, who supported WFP Bhutan on a discretionary basis through its Bangladesh Office.

<sup>96</sup> See, RGOB, 2020. [White Paper on Bhutan's School and Hospital feeding Programme](#). MOAF: Thimphu; and, RGOB, 2020. [Notification for the revision of the stipend for schools](#). Ministry of Finance: Thimphu.

<sup>97</sup> For a summary of all UNSDPF objectives aligning with the WFP CSP (2019-2023) see Annex 11: Table A11.2; and, UN Bhutan, 2018. [United Nations Sustainable Development Partnership Framework](#) (2019-2023)

<sup>98</sup> RGOB, 2016. [Bhutan E-RNR Masterplan](#). Ministry of Information and Communications: Thimphu

<sup>99</sup> KIIs and meeting minutes on digital development of MOAF's RNR statistical, monitoring and reporting services

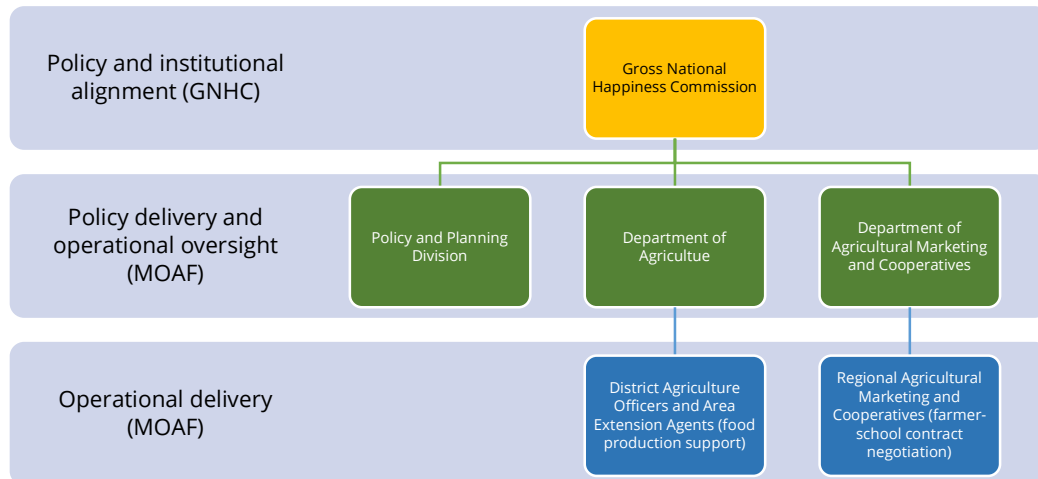
<sup>100</sup> While the CSP described all Activity 1 beneficiaries as Tier 3, reporting for agriculture related activities by WFP has in fact focused on project Activities with Tier 1 project beneficiaries reached through government partners. For definitions see WFP, 2021. [Report of the External Auditor on the management of information on beneficiaries](#)

77. Operationally, the ET found clear evidence of a consistent interpretation of Government policies and priorities across WFP units and functions. This allowed the CO to successfully navigate complex institutional dynamics such as the inter-relationships of the Nutrition Division (MOH), School Health and Nutrition Division (SHND, MOE) and SHFP (DOA, MOAF) who all had interests in school feeding.

78. WFP agriculture programmes were largely managed through government structures with associated capacity strengthening provided to government staff. The decision-making structure for WFP-government liaison of its agriculture activities during the evaluation period is provided in Figure 4. For activities implemented by government under the KOICA and ECP projects, WFP followed the Harmonized Authorization of Cash Transfer modality agreed under the UNSDPF framework, which facilitates UN cash transfers to government agencies to carry out activities agreed with GNHC in the joint Annual Work Plan (AWP). Funds to implement the activities were transferred to the government budget account who responsible for the implementation and monitoring of activities.

79. Within the political and institutional context of Bhutan, its pending status as a middle-income country, government leadership of the NSFNP after 2019, and WFP’s memorandum of understanding with GNHC,<sup>101</sup> this institutional arrangement was considered appropriate. It reflected the liaison arrangements of other UN agencies under the UNSDPF and allowed WFP to build on its earlier strategic partnerships with the MOE and MOH toward a broader delivery of its new agriculture portfolio through MOAF’s National level departments (DOA and DAMC), and their decentralised counterparts, the District Agriculture Offices (DAOs) and Regional Agricultural Marketing and Cooperative Offices (RAMCOs). By working with and through government structures, WFP was also provided a platform of relationships on which to build future collaboration opportunities in agriculture that build on the strengthening of farmer-school linkages especially for women.

**Figure 4. WFP-Government institutional arrangements for agriculture portfolio, 2019-2021**



*Source: Authors’ elaboration*

80. Strong strategic coherence was also identifiable between WFP’s emerging agriculture portfolio and those of RBAs. This was evident in the joint accountability and oversight arrangements under the UNCT and UNSDPF and shared programme objectives of IFAD-CARLEP and FAO-FSAPP, both of which included a component supporting farmer-school linkages. This was also reflected in wider donor priorities for Bhutan beyond KOICA (see Finding 11: EQ4.3, Resource Mobilisation). However, comparative weaknesses in the translation of strategic interests into operational complementarity and functional partnerships during the limited evaluation period were identified. Greater detail is provided under Finding 10: EQ4.2 (Partnerships).

81. Adoption of an integrated approach to school feeding, agriculture and nutrition was in line with best practice as recommended by the inter-agency Home-Grown School Feeding Resource Framework (HGSF,

<sup>101</sup> This agreement included recognition of a shift in WFP’s operational modality from direct assistance to working through government structures

2018) and WFP's School Feeding Strategy (2020).<sup>102</sup> For example, the provision of nutritious and healthy school meals was complemented by activities to improve the design of school menus using fresh local produce, improve the food consumption practices of women, men, girls and boys through behaviour change advocacy, strengthen the formation and management of farmer groups, and stimulate the adoption of food production technologies.<sup>103</sup>

82. Analysis of the relevance of WFP ECP (2020) COVID-19 contributions was covered under Finding 6: EQ3.1 (programme adaptations).

## 2.2. RESULTS OF WFP'S ACTIVITY PORTFOLIO IN AGRICULTURE

83. This section presents findings that responded to two sub-questions relating to the evaluation criteria of Effectiveness and Efficiency under EQ2: "What results has WFP's activity portfolio delivered or contributed to in Bhutan?". This analysis started by assessing the effectiveness of WFP contributions to helping improve student diets under the SHFP (2020) and NSFNP (2019). Building a picture of school level 'demand' allowed the ET to then explore the extent to which changes in smallholder production could be attributed to WFP support, and how supply-side decision-making influenced new farmer-school linkages: thereby anchoring the development analysis against smallholders' longer-term aspirations.

***Sub-question 2.1: What results for agriculture, food and nutrition security did WFP's programme response deliver or contribute to in Bhutan?***

**Finding 3. Despite severe resource and COVID-19 access constraints, WFP interventions supported the School and Hospital Feeding Programme in establishing farmer-school linkages and the emergence of a national fresh produce market, providing new incomes to 7,516 smallholders, two-thirds of them women.**

### *Farmer-school linkages*

84. Despite significant resource constraints,<sup>104</sup> the triangulation of KIIs against the WFP agriculture portfolio indicated an expansion in the scope and scale of WFP policy and programme activities from 2019. These were led by the successful hand-over of the national school feeding programme to RGOB at the end of 2018.

85. Annex 14 provides a summary of WFP's agriculture portfolio (Table A14.1) and contributions (Table A14.2). At the point of hand-over, 86,000 children participated in the national school feeding and nutrition programme representing 59 percent of all school children across 262 out of a total of 512 schools. All National, District and school-level education stakeholders argued that access to school meals had contributed to Bhutan's high net primary school enrolment rate of 96.5 percent (rising to 99.9 percent in 2021), and female to male enrolment ratio of 0.98 (rising to 1.02 in 2021).<sup>105</sup>

86. Across the five schools visited by the ET, all were positive about SHFP contributions to improving school meals and the associated support provided by WFP. School principals, teachers, matrons and mess-in-charges all reported following the Ministry of Education's Food and Dietary Guidelines for School-Aged Children in Bhutan (2020), co-developed with WFP,<sup>106</sup> and allocating two thirds of the school stipend to procure fresh local produce in line with the White Paper on Bhutan's School and Hospital feeding Programme.<sup>107</sup>

<sup>102</sup> FAO & WFP, 2018. [Home-Grown School Feeding, Resource Framework](#). FAO, WFP, IFAD, NEPAD, Partnership for Child Development, Global Child Nutrition Foundation, WFP Centre of Excellence against Hunger

<sup>103</sup> Further analysis of the integrated approach to HGFSF is provided under Finding 13 ('new models and approaches')

<sup>104</sup> Analysis of funding levels and constraints is provided against Finding 5: EQ2.2

<sup>105</sup> RGOB, 2020. [Annual Education Report 2019 – 2020](#). MOE: Thimphu; RGOB, 2021. [Statistical Yearbook](#), 2021. National Statistics Bureau

<sup>106</sup> RGOB, 2020. [Food and Dietary Guidelines for School-Aged Children in Bhutan](#). Ministry of Education: Thimphu

<sup>107</sup> RGOB, 2020. White Paper on Bhutan's School and Hospital feeding Programme. MOAF: Thimphu

87. The one gap in food supply identified by some schools related to concerns that the stipend did not at all times support the procurement of sufficient livestock products (meat, dairy, eggs) in line with government menu guidelines, often due to seasonal shifts in availability. In smaller primary schools, this led to a replacement of meat and dairy products by vegetables that affected at least one meal a week.

88. Women farmer group members in Zhemgang and Trongsa who identified themselves as parents argued children had benefited from meals containing more locally-grown fresh produce. Women also reported an increase in household dietary diversity that correlated directly with the provision of seeds and expanded production and supply of fresh vegetables to schools from 2020 onwards. Examples of vegetables that had entered the diet included broccoli, beans and cauliflower in addition to tomato, onion, and new chilli varieties that have been identified as priority commodities by MOAF due to their high national import dependencies.

#### ***School procurement from smallholders***

89. The ET found the SHFP had introduced a highly decentralised, non-competitive forward contracting model designed to enable smallholders to receive guaranteed income for the supply of fresh produce to local schools and other institutions. A guaranteed negotiated price was agreed for each commodity based on a weekly supply schedule with standardised DAMC annual contracts signed between schools and one or more farmer groups within the sub-district. Following receipt of delivery (typically every three- to seven- days), schools sent a procurement completion notice to the District Education Office who released a monthly payment directly into group bank accounts.

90. Informal examples of groups supplying hospitals and monastic bodies were also identified with a cooperative reporting its ability to manage periodic variations in hospital numbers.

91. No problems with the payment system were reported by groups and contract facilitation by RAMCO and Agricultural Extension Agents (AEAs) was considered a key accelerator. Nevertheless, in three sub-districts, farmer group members (all of them women) and schools voiced frustration at differences in the commodity prices agreed by other groups and schools and requested stronger facilitation and local level standardisation to ensure a level playing field.

92. All farmer group members reported an advantage of the forward contracting model was its ability to provide certainty for planning production schedules. However, seasonal problems affecting vegetable production (typically cold winter months at higher altitudes and heavy rains during summer months in sub-tropical districts) meant they had needed to enter into informal arrangements with other farmer groups or traders to address production deficits.<sup>108</sup> In Zhemgang, this had led some groups and farmers to prefer supplying schools through an intermediary aggregator (trader or cooperative).

#### ***Schools as a smallholder agriculture market***

93. A majority of DOA and DOE officials in targeted districts considered WFP support to the SHFP to have accelerated the formalization of farmer-school linkages when compared to districts and sub-districts that WFP had not supported. This triangulated with positive results recorded in WFP donor reports and Annual Country Reviews that showed that by the end of 2021, 191 farmer groups had successfully provided fresh produce to schools against a target of 85 groups by the end of 2021 and 225 by the end of 2023 (Annex 15, Table A15.1).<sup>109</sup> 1959 of the 2250 farmers targeted for capacity strengthening were trained. Four out of the six farmer groups visited by the ET were established in 2019 to supply local schools where many members had children: a result confirmed by sub-district AEAs and DAOs across target districts who consistently claimed the SHFP and school stipend had led to a rapid and ongoing increase in farmer group registrations.<sup>110</sup>

94. WFP also trained 44 of 45 planned sub-district AEAs and 11 of 15 National Agriculture Officers in adherence to a national contract template and procurement standards (including food quality management and inspection) and farmer group support (e.g. setting-up and registering the group with a bank account and book-keeping) (Table A15.1: Activity 2.2.3).

<sup>108</sup> This finding was consistent across all farmer group FGDs and DAO and AEA KIIs across all four evaluation districts

<sup>109</sup> This compares to a total of 522 Cooperatives and Farmers' Groups across the country that were linked with 180 schools across the entire SHFP. See: RGOB, 2021. [Transformations for Sustainable Development in the 21st Century: Bhutan's Second Voluntary National Review Report on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#). GNHC: Thimphu

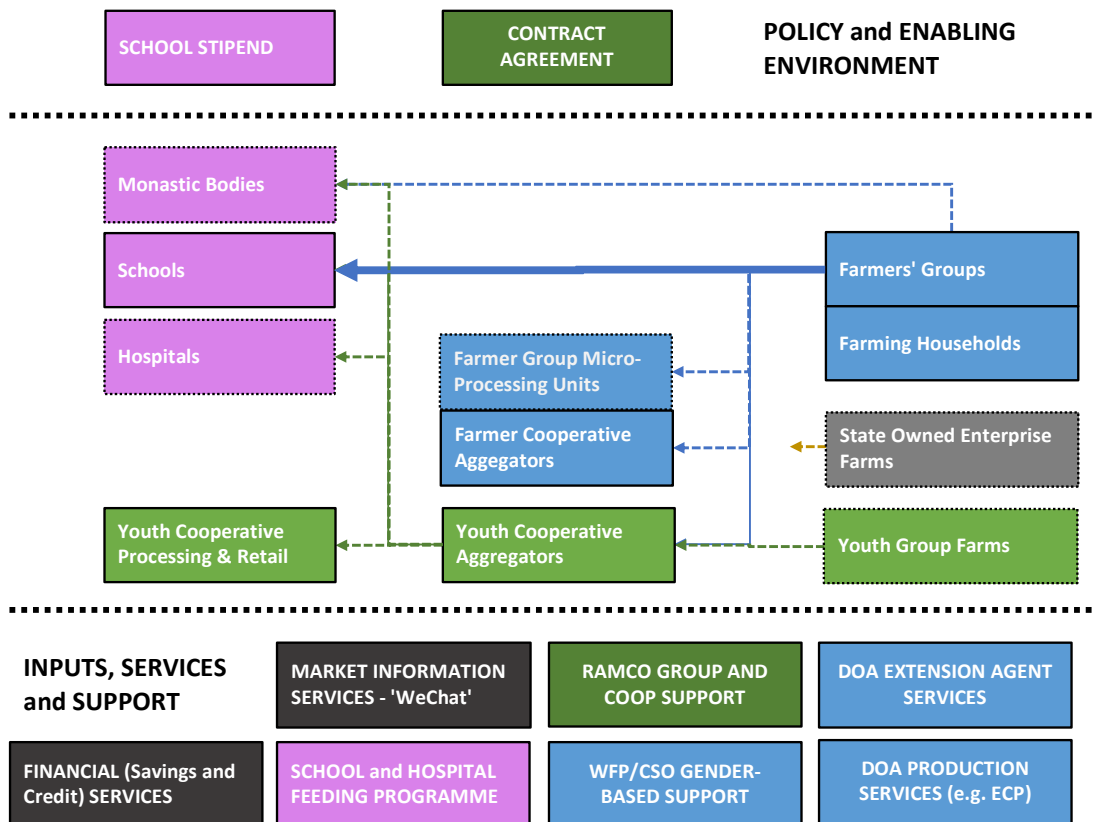
<sup>110</sup> Also validated by data available from the national Agricultural Monitoring Information System

95. Given the absence of 2019 year 1 KOICA project funding and restricted access caused by COVID lockdowns, the ET commends WFP and its national and district MOE and MOAF partners for keeping the project on track.

96. ECP project results showed strong evidence of increased production, marketing and income results for women and men smallholder farmers. Tables A15.2 to A15.4 in Annex 15 summarised how farming materials distributed to 5,557 beneficiaries in 2020 (70 percent of them women) were used to cultivate 523 acres of land yielding 1,176 MT of fresh produce (including onion, chilli and tomato crops prioritised by MOAF to address national shortages). 48 percent of this production was sold, providing an estimated single year return of USD 330,167 to farmers at an average benefit of USD 59 additional income per beneficiary. With most distributed items able to support farmers for multiple years this represented a significant return on investment.<sup>111</sup>

97. Figure 5 presents a model of the school meals market developed by the ET to facilitate stakeholder discussion. It illustrated the comparative transfer of produce (thickness of connecting lines) between producers (to the right) and institutional buyers (left) and identified influencing factors in the enabling environment (top) and services (bottom) that supported market processes.<sup>112</sup> While stakeholder feedback agreed the model could be applied to middle and eastern districts and sub-districts where the supply of fresh produce to schools worked well during the evaluation period, other markets were being explored. This was indicated by just 21 percent of the 48 percent of surplus produce sold by ECP project farmers had been sold to schools. While in Samtse, stakeholders reported many farmers preferred to sell into domestic markets due to higher prices, even if they could not be guaranteed.

**Figure 5. Infographic map of Bhutan's fresh produce market for school feeding**



<sup>111</sup> Equipment distributed under the ECP included drip irrigation kits, sprinklers, pipes, low-cost polyhouses, plastic film mulching, rainwater harvesting materials, water storage tanks, electric fencing, and imported modern variety seeds. ECP funds were also used by Trongsa district to construct two sub-district storage sheds. Details of the ECP funding arrangement are examined under Finding 5: EQ2.2

<sup>112</sup> While the limited evaluation sample (schools, groups) meant exact volumes could not be determined, representation the infographic was developed and validated through 4 multi-stakeholder FGDs and 5 KIIs

### **RNR M&R digitalisation**

98. This trend was verified by national DAO and DAMC stakeholders who confirmed similar difficulties in other southern and more urbanised western districts (Paro and Thimphu) where many schools and District Education Offices had to rely on aggregators (traders and cooperatives) when sourcing fresh produce. A proviso was that aggregators should buy-in locally sourced produce. While this had introduced economies of scale and schools were supplied, aggregators reported taking a 15 percent margin between farm-gate prices and selling-on to schools. The approach may therefore risk squeezing farm gate prices, smallholder returns and potentially the quality of school meals in the longer-term.

99. Weak economies of scale also meant smaller primary schools and extended classrooms (many with fewer than 30 students) were unable to leverage the stipend to stimulate interest among farmers. Here, principals reported their schools were again dependent on DEO-brokered supply arrangements with aggregators. While DAO, AEA and DAMC-RAMCO stakeholders considered the model to function in more remote areas where farmer group members (mostly women) had few income opportunities, without a clear mitigation strategy the ET considered this to have placed potential risks on more vulnerable remote groups and that both WFP and the SHFP had left a gap in their analysis of the potential role of aggregators.

100. WFP support to the digitalisation of the RNR M&R system was based on a diagnostic review undertaken in 2020 partnership with the RNR Statistical Division (RSD).<sup>113</sup> The RSD and WFP initiated this activity as a joint effort to provide sector-wide agriculture data for better production planning, targeting of agriculture services, and for stronger feedback and learning across the sector. WFP supported the RSD and MOAF's Policy and Planning Division (MOAF-PPD) by leading three systems development workshops, providing technical support to set-up the RNR M&R on WFP's Mobile Operational Data Acquisition (MODA) platform, and training national and district stakeholders in system use. 20 modules were tested in 12 districts over the evaluation period.

101. While MOAF stakeholders agreed the introduction had been coherent with RGOB digital ambitions, WFP's corporate decision to migrate to MODA in 2020 (Mobile Data Analytics), shortly after the CO's 2019 introduction of WFP's earlier Mobile Data Collection and Analytics (MDCA) platform to the School Health and Nutrition Division of MOE caused confusion among MOAF users who were already using the MCDA to support initiatives under the SHFP. Although data transfers across the platforms were successful, both WFP and MOAF stakeholders agreed WFP resource limitations had led to gaps in MODA training and support and should have been taken into consideration.

102. Another challenge to adoption of the RNR M&R system was the heavy field level workload reported by AEAs responsible for data collection and uploads. While WFP and MOAF stakeholders considered this a short-term problem resulting from the initial set-up of the database, close monitoring will be needed to ensure this does not present a longer-term barrier to RNR M&R content or obstruction to the wider functions of AEAs.

### **Policy results**

103. In April 2021, WFP initiated the promotion and facilitation of the Food Systems Summit (FSS) process to help raise the profile of Bhutan's international policy engagements in agriculture. With national RGOB commitments secured in May 2021, WFP and IFAD each provided USD 10,000 seed funding to MOAF to support a series of decentralised FSS Dialogues. Despite COVID restrictions, these were successfully facilitated by two national independent consultants. Having used process analysis to follow the FSS (Annex 12) the ET concluded Bhutan's national Dialogues would not have happened without WFP support. The process was widely considered to have been successful in engaging local stakeholders and smallholder farmer representatives. In a second phase, involving USD 15,000 further funding both from WFP and FAO, the dialogue facilitators led the reformulation of RNR Strategic priorities under eight Bhutan National Pathways (BNPs). These were anticipated to streamline the RNR Strategy 2040 (Revised to 2030), RNR Marketing Strategy (2017; 2021), and Low Emission Development Strategy for Food Security (2021),<sup>114</sup> realign

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<sup>113</sup> While at the time the RSD was a Division of MOAF, it was incorporated into the National Statistics Bureau in 2021

<sup>114</sup> RGOB, 2021. [Low Emission Development Strategy for Food Security](#). MOAF: Thimphu

the RNR timeline with Agenda 2030 and underpin MOAF contributions under the 13<sup>th</sup> FYP (2024-2028). This will in turn inform WFP's second generation CSP. A summary of the BNPs is provided in Annex 16.<sup>115</sup>

### Research and development (R&D)

104. WFP interventions also supported MOAF Agricultural Research and Development Centres and supply chain development efforts. Table 1 provides a summary of this support.

**Table 1. WFP support to agriculture Research and Development**

Activity	Partnership	Evaluation comments
Equipment and training to the Regional Post-Harvest Sub-Centre, Brumbi,	National Post Harvest Centre	Training and equipment support to the Brumbi post-harvest centre recovery after a 2019 fire. Post-harvest centres offer opportunities to act as innovation hubs providing training and equipment for post-harvest value addition and enterprise development especially among youths but face gaps in marketing skills, networks and resources.
National Vegetable Commodity	National Centre for Organic Agriculture	WFP provided Nu.1,095,200 (USD 14,000) to support national seed production for the three priority MOAF vegetable crops chilli, tomato and onion, including climate resilient accessions and winter production research. 228 farmers were supported, 25 percent of them women
Post-production management and supply chain development	National Food Security Reserve; School storage	Efforts to help RGOB develop national supply chains included WFP contributions to national guidance for food safety and quality management in warehouses, stock visibility and private sector engagement. At the Education Minister's request WFP funds have been prioritised for the (re)construction of school storage facilities. Market infrastructure has not yet been incorporated in WFP activities.

Source: KIIs with national and regional institution heads and technical leads; MOAF-DOA Reports on Agricultural Development Research Centres

### Sub-question 2.2: To what extent did WFP use its available resources in ways that helped improve the food production, incomes and participation of smallholder farmers including women and other disadvantaged social groups?

**Finding 4. While strong available evidence indicated the majority of agriculture beneficiaries were women, WFP failed to respond to opportunities to promote rural women's economic empowerment across its activities or adjust its technical assistance toward gender mainstreaming through government.**

105. WFP reports based on DOA data consistently identified 60 percent of beneficiary group members were women. Conversely, across the six groups visited by the ET in Trongsa and Zhemgang districts and in interviews with Lhuntse DAOs and AEAs, women's membership was found to be entirely women in almost all cases. Only in Samtse were groups reported to have a balance of male than female members.<sup>116</sup> This lack of

<sup>115</sup> RGOB, 2021. [Bhutan National Pathways: Food Systems for Gross National Happiness Transformative Pathways](#). United Nations Food Systems Summit. MOAF: Thimphu

<sup>116</sup> The Inheritance Act of Bhutan 1980 and the Land Act of Bhutan 2007 provide equal rights to men and women to own land and properties. Heads of households are nevertheless mostly considered men. In central and upland Ngalop and Shar chop communities the dominant division of labour leaves women to control domestic food production, especially vegetables, while men provide seasonal farm labour and seek off-farm income. In southern Lhotshampa (Nepali) communities, a more predominant role for male smallholders is found in food production and farmer organisations.



data clarity was indicative of possible gaps in the integrity of sex-disaggregated data reported by districts and its analysis and use for appropriately targeted support.

106. For example, while the ET found gender equality was referenced in the KOICA project document, an analysis of women's empowerment and disability inclusion was not incorporated in the design.<sup>117</sup> Neither KIIs nor CO documentation referenced WFP frameworks such as WFP's Gender Policy (2015-2020) and Gender Toolkit or relevant government policies in the project design process.<sup>118</sup> Attention was instead given to a broad understanding of vulnerability in relation to community remoteness from administrative centres, and national poverty incidences, thereby targeting more remote and vulnerable rural districts.

107. Geographical targeting was justifiable in terms of WFP's partnership with government in line with the CO's CSP (2019-2023) ensure the fair distribution of UN agency support across districts. It allowed different ethno-linguistic groups to be reached (e.g. Mandip, Khengpa, Lhotshampa), and the ET found no evidence of unanticipated human rights issues having been created.<sup>119</sup> However, the approach lacked attention to the specific needs of women farmers, disabled and youths.<sup>120</sup> The ET found no evidence that WFP underpinned this approach by consulting beneficiary groups when designing the CSP and KOICA programme.

108. No attention was given by WFP to gender capacity strengthening of government counterparts at either the individual or institutional levels. Reliance was given to local efforts to encourage women's participation in the executive committees of farmer groups and cooperatives and provision of women's leadership training and decision-making support. At the field level, this led to an over-dependency on the local intermediation of DAOs and AEAs who lacked gender training and support.<sup>121</sup> The tacit adoption a 'gender-neutral' approach conformed more to social norms in Bhutan than to any needs. It overlooked areas such as empowering women through women's entrepreneurship, group-managed savings and credit schemes, access to credit for women, or the design and promotion of gender-appropriate tools and machinery (e.g. smaller sized power tillers).<sup>122</sup> Nor did the CO assess potential risks. No attempt was made to build a picture of how WFP activities built on women's prior income generation, marketing or domestic activities. In its absence, the KOICA and ECP focus on vegetable production, a sub-sector traditionally led by women, may have actually reinforced gender norms and expectations, thereby creating unintended impacts on women's status, their domestic work burden, relationships and economic opportunities.<sup>123</sup>

109. Although FGDs reported increased household incomes through school payments for fresh produce (Annex 15: Table A15.4), none reported having accessed credit using forward contracts as collateral, or even considering this option. The financial benefit of formal group registrations was instead in setting up bank accounts that would support credit to members.<sup>124</sup> While this gap reflected low levels of credit access in WFP target districts which in 2019 was accessed by just 12 percent of smallholder households,<sup>125</sup> it also indicated a gap in attention to the potentially transformative benefits of savings and credit to group members, especially women. While group members identified examples of savings and credit training by civil society organisation (CSO), none received specialist training or support from WFP or the SHFP. The ET considered this a blind-spot in the design and provision of support to farmer groups, including in Samtse.

110. The ET also found that while some beneficiary data collected by government agencies and reported by WFP was disaggregated by sex, this was not true across all relevant categories. This was in part due to the CO relying on non-sex-disaggregated indicators in WFP's corporate results framework when developing the CSP

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<sup>117</sup> See for example: JICA, 2017. Survey of Country Gender Profile (Kingdom of Bhutan); ADB, 2014. Bhutan: Gender Equality Diagnostic of Selected Sectors; and, Sariyev, O. *et al.*, 2020. [Women in household decision-making and implications for dietary quality in Bhutan](#). Agricultural and Food Economics, 8:13. Berlin: Springer Open

<sup>118</sup> WFP Gender Policy 2015-2020; and WFP, 2019. [Gender Toolkit](#). Gender Office-WFP: Rome

<sup>119</sup> UNSWAP Criterion 3c. See, UN Women, 2018. [UN System-wide Action Plan for the Implementation of the CEB Policy on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women](#)

<sup>120</sup> With respect to people living with disability, the ET accepts this oversight was symptomatic of a corporate- (and UN-) wide gap in focus that WFP has since sought to address by introducing the [WFP Disability Inclusion Roadmap](#) in 2021

<sup>121</sup> Based on KIIs, KOICA and CSP documentation, and meeting minutes between WFP, GNHC, MOAF and other partners

<sup>122</sup> See e.g., <https://kuenselonline.com/empowering-mountain-women-farmers-through-agricultural-mechanisation/>

<sup>123</sup> While no unintentional impacts were identified by the ET, it was unable to explore the hidden gender implications of WFP support such as domestic disputes or violence that might have emanated from women gaining greater autonomy

<sup>124</sup> As an example, one group of 24 women had agreed to collectively save Nu. 100,000 (USD 1350) before offering loans to members at 5 percent interest. The group had so far accumulated Nu. 74,000 (USD 1000)

<sup>125</sup> RGOB, 2019. [RNR Census of Bhutan](#). MOAF: Thimphu

logframe and KOICA monitoring structure,<sup>126</sup> but led WFP focus on “women as numbers” in its reports rather than analysis of how WFP had identified and responded to the specific needs of women, men and youths.<sup>127</sup>

111. This section is supported by Annex 17, “Leave No-One Behind”, which provides an in-depth review of the context, policy and programme analysis used to support the GEWE assessment provided above.

**Finding 5. WFP project expenditures through government partners committed to common development outcomes were an effective and efficient use of limited available resources and operated in accordance with UN inter-agency agreements with GNHC under the UNSDPF and ECP.**

112. As a sub-component of Activity 1 of the CSP (2019-2023) agriculture received USD 225,450 from KOICA and USD 200,000 contingency funding for the ECP from the UN Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) providing USD 425,450 total actual funding for the portfolio over the 2019 to 2021 evaluation period (Table 2).<sup>128</sup> Because agriculture was a CSP sub-Activity, no planned, needs-based budget estimate was identified for the agriculture portfolio, nor did the CO undertake a CSP budget revision to adjust for MPTF support to the ECP.

**Table 2. Financial Resources and revisions to WFP’s agriculture portfolio (USD) (2019-2023)**

Output 2.1 Activities	Year					Total
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	
Original KOICA budget (2019-2023)						
2.1.1 Farmer-school linkages	35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000	30,000	170,000
2.1.2 Farmer capacity building	26,000	26,000	26,000	26,000	26,000	130,000
2.1.3 Government market facilitation	30,000	15,000	29,000	13,000	13,000	100,000
<b>Planned KOICA funding</b>	<b>91,000</b>	<b>76,000</b>	<b>90,000</b>	<b>74,000</b>	<b>69,000</b>	<b>400,000</b>
Revised KOICA Budget (adjustments due to no fund disbursements for 2019 and COVID-19)						
2.1.1 Farmer-school linkages	-	94,000	30,450	31,000	30,000	185,450
2.1.2 Farmer capacity building	-	17,000	30,000	18,000	10,000	75,000
2.1.3 Government market facilitation	-	34,347	19,653	21,000	19,000	94,000
<b>Actual KOICA funding</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>145,347</b>	<b>80,103</b>	<b>70,000</b>	<b>59,000</b>	<b>354,450</b>
<b>Actual ECP funding</b>		<b>200,000</b>				<b>200,000</b>
<b>Total agriculture funding</b>		<b>345,347</b>	<b>80,103</b>	<b>70,000</b>	<b>59,000</b>	<b>554,450</b>

Sources: WFP, 2018. KOICA Proposal Document WFP ACR 2020; WFP, 2020 and 2021. KOICA annual project reports; WFP, 2021. ECP update

113. Despite difficulties in building a line of sight between district level expenditures and the WFP budget, the evidence from the field and monitoring reports indicated that although funding to agriculture was limited, WFP’s use of funds was largely appropriate. The expenditure of KOICA and ECP funding through government structures was also considered an effective and efficient use of resources that operated in accordance with WFP’s CSP (2019-2023) ambitions and UNCT agreements with government under the UNSDPF and ECP.

114. This assessment needs to be understood within the context of extreme difficulties caused by absent KOICA funding in 2019 followed by government adoption of strict preventive measures to curb the spread of COVID-19 in 2020. By mid-2020 all UN agencies were reporting COVID-19-related implementation delays.<sup>129</sup>

<sup>126</sup> Includes CSP Output Indicator F.1 on the “number of smallholder farmers supported/trained”, and “number of farmers that benefit from farmer organisations’ sales to home-grown school meals programme and other structured markets”

<sup>127</sup> WFP’s focus on numbers was apparent across ACRs, the UN-Bhutan’s COVID-19 Situation Reports and donor reports

<sup>128</sup> WFP, 2019. Consolidating a fully integrated universal National School Nutrition Programme in Bhutan. Programme Document to Korean International Cooperation Agency; WFP, 2019, 2020. Annual Country Review

<sup>129</sup> KIIs and UNCT reports. See also: UN Bhutan, 2020. [Socio-Economic Response to COVID-19 for Bhutan](#). UNCT: Thimphu

The impacts on WFP's agriculture portfolio included the realignment of 2020 and 2021 annual budgets and workplans to support the ECP's Agricultural Stimulus Plan (2020) and government requests for KOICA budget re-appropriation to support the (re-)construction of stores and kitchens. These reprioritization exercises required significant negotiation with GNHC to balance government expectations with donor funding, that led to a budgetary realignment that prioritised the safe re-opening of schools, supported by agriculture production, post-harvest management, and introduction of digital management systems.

### 2.3. WFP RESPONSIVENESS TO THE CHANGING DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT

115. This section presents findings that responded to three sub-questions of EQ3: How well did WFP adapt and respond to shifts in national priorities including, but not limited to, in response to COVID-19 related impacts on food systems in Bhutan? Which explored the evaluation criteria of Relevance, Effectiveness and Efficiency in relation to WFP responsiveness and flexibility.

**Evaluation question 3.1: How flexibly and swiftly did WFP initiate its programmatic adaptations to operational needs (e.g. beneficiary targeting, numbers, modalities, activities)?**

**Finding 6. WFP demonstrated a willingness to respond flexibly to government requests for support in agriculture. This included a range of policy and programme contributions such as emergency support to the Economic Contingency Plan. However, limited resources, and the absence of a clear CSP sector objective or WFP intervention logic to support negotiations with government meant that agriculture sector development under the Economic Contingency Plan was driven by national agriculture production ambitions rather than wider food and market systems support required by smallholders. This led to weaknesses in WFP beneficiary targeting, and a static operational modality.**

116. All WFP agriculture activities between 2020 and 2021 – including this developmental evaluation – were part of a concerted CO effort to flexibly position itself in the agriculture sector. The broadening of WFP contributions beyond historical school feeding, nutrition and supply chain operations in Bhutan was clearly indicated by the quantitative data presented in Annex 15 (see also Finding 3, Results) and was in line with WFP's dual mandate, "Saving Lives, Changing Lives", and coherent with GNHC requests for greater agriculture sector support in line with the Agricultural Stimulus Plan and RNR Strategy 2040 (2020).

117. In line with its CSP (2019-2023) and government ambitions, the ET found WFP successfully shifted from a school meals provider to an enabler of government efforts to implement school feeding services and establish new farmer-school linkages under the SHFP.<sup>130</sup> WFP resources mobilised under the ECP project were also appreciated as part of the CO's flexible COVID-19 response. Crucially, both the ECP and farmer-school components of WFP's agriculture portfolio were supported by the recruitment in 2020 of a first ever agriculture sector lead in Bhutan.<sup>131</sup>

118. A key area of WFP leadership was its lobbying of MOAF to participate in the FSS process and provision of financial support to the national Dialogues and revisions in the RNR Strategy 2040 (2020) and RNR Marketing Strategy (2017;

**Box 4. DAMC reorganisation, January 2022**

- DAMC realigned the RNR marketing strategy to a 'market-led production' focus dedicated to market research and services
- A new RNR Enterprise Development and Coordination Unit was introduced in DAMC
- RAMCOs were asked to increase their focus on supporting regulatory management (e.g. food safety) and research
- The National Post Harvest Centre (NPHC) was merged with DAMC to support the value addition of RNR products
- A new agriculture marketing facilitation office located in Phuntsholing was to be tested to support RNR markets
- 10 new district marketing officers were approved to support market development and smallholder access to markets

<sup>130</sup> WFP Bhutan, 2019. Bhutan Country Strategic Plan (2019-2023). WFP/EB.1/2019/8-A/1

<sup>131</sup> WFP, UN and government KILs, internal documentation, meeting minutes and communications

2021).<sup>132</sup> This supported a national policy realignment that emphasised youth entrepreneurship, RNR enterprise development and smallholder access to markets backed by a widening of DAMC responsibilities (Box 4). WFP also provided support to the DAMC in its revisions to the RNR Marketing Strategy (2017; 2021).

119. Although WFP responded positively to UNRC requests that it act as the 'Task Team Lead' for Development Partner Coordination for Agriculture, and sought to communicate its expanded role through the publication of position papers,<sup>133</sup> the evaluation found little evidence that WFP had influenced the programmatic response of government or UN agencies.<sup>134</sup> While recognising the CO's newness in the agriculture sector, limited portfolio and field access constraints, the ET considered this to have been symptomatic of gaps in WFP's food systems analysis. Despite preparing a 2020 position paper outlining "WFP's support to Climate Resilient Agriculture and Food Systems in Bhutan (2019-2023)" this provided an insufficient basis for the CO to push through significant changes in its programmatic or operational shifts in the agriculture sector.<sup>135</sup>

120. One result was that while WFP emergency funding for the ECP under the UN's MPTF led to significant increases in beneficiary numbers (Annex 15), the ET found little shift in project modality. No changes were made to WFP's 2018 KOICA project agreement with MOAF-PPD or GNHC. As a result, RGOB prioritisation of food self-sufficiency and import substitution under the ECP (2020) had resulted in the KOICA and ECP projects focusing primarily on supplying inputs for fresh food production and ensuring its supply to schools. While the ET did not question the validity of production for schools as *part* of programme efforts and the COVID-19 emergency response, it questioned why WFP allowed this to dominate the portfolio when KIIs with women and men farmer group members, WFP and many government officials clearly recognised a broader food systems perspective was needed covering GEWE, post-harvest management and smallholder agriculture market access aspects.

121. More positively, the ET found WFP's support to the MOAF digitisation of the RNR M&R system and exploration of a digital ecosystem for agriculture to have been an appropriate and positive use of resources that allowed WFP to provide positive virtual contributions during periods of lock-down.

**Evaluation question 3.2: To what extent did WFP develop a revised agricultural programme portfolio in Bhutan?**

**Finding 7. Although WFP agriculture activities in Bhutan continued as a sub-Activity of the CSP (2019-2023), the evaluation found evidence of significant efforts by the Country Office to develop a revised programme portfolio and positioning in the sector that by late 2021 showed early signs of progress.**

122. WFP's original programme ambitions for agriculture in Bhutan were confined to a sub-component of Activity 1 (farmer-school linkages) under the CSP (2019-2023). Despite the inherent limitations of the associated objectives no effort was made to update the CO's CSP commitments.<sup>136</sup> Instead, priority was given to efforts to adjust and enhance its agriculture contributions and profile in Bhutan. Initial emphasis was given to circulating a position document in January 2020 that aimed to broaden the scope of WFP's 'planned' portfolio for Bhutan by introducing an end-to-end agriculture value chain approach linking climate smart agriculture to post-harvest management, marketing and nutrition (Figure 6).<sup>137</sup>

<sup>132</sup> See Annex 12 (Process observation) and Finding 3: EQ2.1

<sup>133</sup> WFP, 2020. [WFP's support to Climate Resilient Agriculture and Food Systems in Bhutan](#) (2019-2023). Analysis of WFP operational partnerships, coordination and knowledge sharing is provided under Finding 10: EQ4.2

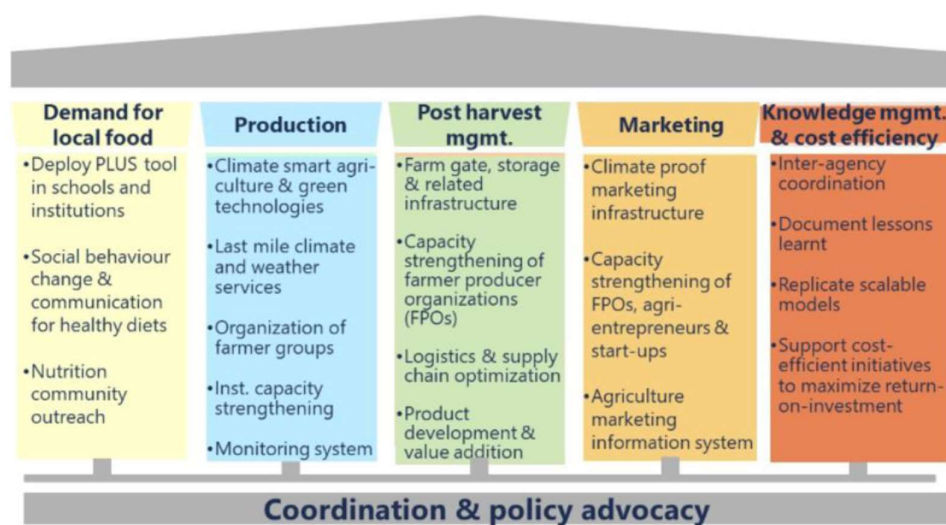
<sup>134</sup> Evidenced through multiple stakeholder KIIs at all level and daily press reports during 2020-2021. See also: F. Dizon *et al.*, 2019. [Harnessing Spatial Opportunities in Agriculture for Economic Transformation](#): World Bank Bhutan Policy Note

<sup>135</sup> Ibid

<sup>136</sup> Process observation findings are summarised in Annex 12; Timeline analysis in Annex 13

<sup>137</sup> WFP Bhutan, 2020. [WFP's support to Climate Resilient Agriculture and Food Systems in Bhutan](#) (2019-2023)

**Figure 6: WFP framework for assistance to agriculture value chains in Bhutan**



Source: WFP Bhutan, 2020. WFP's support to Climate Resilient Agriculture and Food Systems in Bhutan

123. The paper was complemented by efforts to secure GNHC and MOAF-PPD support for a broader WFP coordination role within the UN development partners working group for agriculture. This included the promotion of lesson sharing among UN partners and closer RBA collaboration in areas such as UN support to the FSS process, and MOAF's 2021 policy updates (see also Finding 1: EQ1.1, Policy Relevance, and 6: EQ3.1, Flexible Response). When complemented by information presented under other Findings, evidence was therefore found indicating preliminary examples of WFP initiatives that sought to extend its operational portfolio across the framework for assistance (Figure 6). For example,

- Demand for food: introduction of national digital platforms including the RNR statistics and M&R system and PLUS menu optimiser for school meals (Finding 13: EQ5.2, New Models and Approaches);
- Production: the distribution of climate-responsive technologies under the KOICA and ECP projects (Finding 3: EQ2.1);
- Post-harvest management: capacity support to farmer groups and (Finding 3: EQ2.1);
- Marketing: preliminary support for private sector integration in national efforts to develop supply chains for disaster preparedness and response (Conclusion 3: WFP's Value Proposition for Agriculture);<sup>138</sup>
- Knowledge management: introduction of a post-harvest loss assessment for fresh produce in 2021 as a stepping-stone for CO efforts to help MOAF develop a national strategy for post-harvest management (Finding 8: EQ3.3, Context Analysis); and,
- An expanded focus on Resource Mobilisation (Finding 11: EQ4.3).

124. Nevertheless, given the recent nature of the WFP agriculture portfolio after 44 years of focus on school feeding, it was perhaps unsurprising that some external stakeholders were at times confused by CO efforts to reposition itself. Examples of resistance should be seen as an important point of learning about how CO repositioning needed to take a step-by-step approach that paid closer attention to securing the buy-in of external stakeholders (Finding 10: EQ4.2, Partnerships).<sup>139</sup>

**Evaluation question 3.3: In what ways did WFP respond to evidence-based analyses of the climate, nutrition and other relevant needs and concerns of different communities in Bhutan, including women, men, girls and boys?**

**Finding 8. While the initial design of WFP's support to home-grown school feeding was coherent with the findings of a 2016 evaluation, significant gaps in evidence-based analysis were apparent**

<sup>138</sup> For example, supply chain integration of the Agriculture Logistics and Marketing Cooperative was identified as an opportunity to help develop national fresh produce markets as well as an emergency response logistics provider

<sup>139</sup> For more detail, see the findings for partnerships (Finding 10, EQ4.2) and resource mobilisation (Finding 11, EQ4.3)

that were in part the result of government imposed COVID-19 restrictions on field access, evaluations and assessments in 2020. Appropriately, with the relaxation of restrictions in 2021, WFP did start to invest in evidence-based analysis to support its programme and policy efforts.

125. Within Strategic Objective 1 of the CSP (2019-2023), the CO promoted local purchases as a means of providing students a more nutritious diet that included fresh and locally produced foods. This was in line with the findings of the 2016 midterm evaluation of WFP contributions to children’s education access which called for WFP to support a roadmap for the full handover of school feeding to government.<sup>140</sup> It was also coherent with recommendation 9 that suggested WFP should re-assess the national commodity procurement system and review options for local purchases and linkages with local farm-to-school, agriculture productivity and market development programmes.

126. In responding to this recommendation, the ET found WFP demonstrated a clear understanding of relevant government and WFP policies in its support to the subsequent design of both the NSFNP and SHFP.<sup>141</sup> WFP’s project agreement with KOICA (2019) also successfully integrated targeted support for farmer-school linkages, production, farmer groups, and market access in line good practice.<sup>142</sup> This was evidenced by relevant monitoring data generated through WFP’s DAO partners (see Finding 3 Results and Annex 15). However, the limited implementation timeline meant the evaluation was unable to adjust its programming in response to monitoring analysis.

127. Although no resources for agriculture-related assessments were identified in WFP’s annual workplans during 2019 and 2020, several factors compounded the situation that the ET considered unavoidable. As a sub-activity of Strategic Objective 1 in WFP’s CSP (2019-2023), WFP’s prioritisation of agriculture was overshadowed by a focus on school feeding and nutrition that did not recognise the potential expansion of the agriculture portfolio. While with hindsight this might have been considered an omission, the position was in line with GNHC expectations and reflected WFP’s lack of sector experience at that time.

128. Partly as a consequence, the CO funding status for agriculture analysis was severely limited at the start of the evaluation period. No staff member was recruited to lead the portfolio until a first tranche of KOICA funding was received in 2020. Immediately thereafter, the situation was further compounded by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic which led to RGOB imposing travel and access restrictions on all groups entering and leaving targeted districts. Between March 2020 and June-2021, only the direct transfer of goods (as opposed to assessments) was considered appropriate by government (Table 3).

**Table 3. Government COVID-related Annual Work Plan requirements for UN agencies (2020)**

Category / Activity	Approved	Not approved
<b>Key priority areas</b>	Projects should address ECP and agricultural stimulus targets. They should provide ‘tangible’ outcomes (e.g. infrastructure and inputs) to support economic recovery including production, import substitution, export promotion and digitization efforts	Training services, communications, social and behaviour change activities and capacity strengthening
<b>Activity funding levels</b>		No activities with less than USD 15,000 funding
<b>Training and capacity strengthening</b>	Essential technical training, workshops and meetings only, emphasising support to key priority areas	No out-of-country training; no non-essential national or local training or communications activities
<b>Consultancy support</b>	Technical assistance support	No non-essential consultancies

<sup>140</sup> WFP, 2016. [Bhutan Development Project 200300 Improving Children’s Access to Education: A midterm evaluation of WFP’s Operation](#) (2014-2018). Historically, no other evaluation has been undertaken by the Bhutan CO

<sup>141</sup> Supporting evidence included policy analysis, timeline analysis, and district and national stakeholder KIIs and FGDs

<sup>142</sup> WFP, 2020. [A chance for every schoolchild - WFP School Feeding Strategy 2020 – 2030](#); FAO & WFP, 2018. [Home-Grown School Feeding, Resource Framework](#)

<b>Assessments and Reviews</b>		Avoid all national and field assessments and monitoring and evaluation visits requiring face-to-face meetings
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Sources: GNHC presentation to the RGOB & Development Partners Coordination Meeting, May 2021; WFP-GNHC and PPD meeting minutes; and evaluation KIIIs exploring UN adjustments to the COVID-19 pandemic

129. With the relaxation of travel restrictions, the picture in 2021 improved when WFP used KOICA funds to initiate an assessment of post-harvest losses in the supply chains of perishable commodities (fruits, vegetables, dairy products, meat and eggs) in Trongsa, Zhemgang and Punakha districts, including in relation to the SHFP.<sup>143</sup> In its findings, the report identified the urgent need for nine “strategies and operational measures” to improve post-harvest management and marketing efficiency that aligned closely with ongoing revisions to the RNR Marketing Strategy (2021), BNPs and reorganisation of DAMC (Box 4, Finding 6).

130. In recognising gaps in its portfolio analysis, WFP also worked with RBB to secure WFP Contingency Evaluation Funding for this Decentralised Evaluation of WFP Bhutan’s agriculture portfolio in March 2021.

131. The introduction of the PLUS menu optimizer tool also introduced a positive link between nutrition analysis that may inform future opportunities for optimising the production and marketing schedules of farmer groups (see Finding 13: EQ5.2, New Models and Approaches).

132. Gaps in the use of sex- and age- disaggregated data and gender analysis were also identified by the ET (Finding 4: EQ2.2) that mirrored the cross-cutting analysis behind Recommendation 7 (address data gaps) of the MTR.<sup>144</sup> It was also a concern that despite identifying gaps in resources and access restrictions that affected the CO analysis, the ET found only limited evidence that WFP had explored a strategy using external assessments to mitigate gaps in analysis in areas like gender mainstreaming.

**2.4. STRENGTH OF WFP PROGRAMME INTEGRATION AND PARTNERSHIPS**

133. This section explored the evaluation criteria of Coherence, Effectiveness and Sustainability of the agriculture portfolio in relation to three sub-questions of EQ4: How well did WFP work to integrate its emerging programme response with that of its partners in Bhutan?

**Evaluation question 4.1: To what extent and how well has WFP supported government responses to COVID-19 and other trends?**

**Finding 9. Although WFP made efforts to adopt and promote a food systems approach to the national COVID-19 response, a combination of WFP’s programme integration with government efforts and field access restrictions led to a dominant focus on the provision of inputs for agriculture production in line with MOAF priorities. This left gaps in WFP’s strategic response to wider food systems requirements also relevant during the pandemic, such reducing post-harvest losses and improving market resilience.**

134. COVID-19 had a dominant influence on WFP’s agriculture portfolio. The ET found WFP’s main response in the agriculture sector was conducted under the leadership of RGOB which, with UNCT support, moved quickly to respond to the pandemic in the first quarter of 2020.<sup>145</sup> By the end of March 2020, the UN agencies introduced the UN’s Socio-Economic Response to COVID-19 for Bhutan with UNRC guidance.<sup>146</sup>

<sup>143</sup> WFP Bhutan, 2021. Agriculture post-harvest management and marketing assessment of fruits and vegetables in Trongsa and Zhemgang. WFP: Thimphu  
<sup>144</sup> WFP Bhutan, 2021. Mid-Term Review of the WFP Bhutan Country Strategic Plan 2019-2023. WFP: Thimphu  
<sup>145</sup> Sources include KIIIs with national and district government and UN stakeholders; the UN-Bhutan SERP; WFP and UNCT project reports; and WFP-government meeting minutes and communications  
<sup>146</sup> UNCT, 2020. [Socio-Economic Response to COVID-19 for Bhutan](#); see also: RGOB, 2020. [Economic Contingency Plan](#). Cabinet Office: Thimphu

135. Ongoing WFP agriculture activities under the KOICA and MPFT-funded projects showed strong coherence with GNHC requests that UN agencies align existing project activities with the ECP's Agricultural Stimulus Plan (2020).<sup>147</sup> Despite the closure of schools from March 2020 and COVID-19 field access restrictions, by working through District Agriculture Offices, WFP was able to provide agriculture production support to smallholders across its four target districts and assist in the safe re-opening of schools in 2021.

136. While this message of coherence and responsiveness allowed WFP to maintain effective and efficient support to government without significant realignment during the pandemic, the evaluation also found that WFP allowed a dominant focus on production to emerge.<sup>148</sup> Across the ET's field visits, support to post-harvest management and smallholder market access was limited. Although the ET did not question the validity of production as *part* of the CO's support to the government's COVID-19 emergency response, it did question why WFP allowed this component to dominate its COVID-19 response when KIIs with women farmers and government officials indicated a broader food systems perspective was needed.

137. Key to this should have been recognition of the essential role of post-harvest management and market systems play in sustaining food systems during emergencies and the associated role of credit, logistics, storage and transportation facilities.<sup>149</sup> While the ET did find evidence of WFP adoption of a food systems approach in its efforts to support the development of a National Food Security Emergency Action Plan for COVID-19, Standard Operating Procedures for targeting food distributions and management of the National Food Security Reserve, at the field and market levels the continued focus on production meant farmer group members, mostly women, continued to struggle to store surplus production or sell it on to consumers.<sup>150</sup> In discussions with CO and government counterparts, it was apparent that without an intervention logic or CSP Strategic Objective to frame its operational agreement with GNHC and MOAF, the recent nature of WFP engagement in agriculture in Bhutan meant the CO was unable to clearly establish a coherent basis for its portfolio, negotiate red lines, or argue the case for a broader food systems response to the pandemic.

***Evaluation question 4.2: To what extent has WFP maintained or broadened its operational partnerships, coordination, and/or knowledge sharing and what, if any, mutual benefits did this bring?***

**Finding 10. While WFP reached out to partners and promoted sector coordination, its recent entry into the agriculture sector meant the CO only started to build the trust and support of government and UN agencies towards the end of the evaluation period. Despite this, relationships remained remarkably positive and several opportunities for new collaboration were identified that emphasised the provision of more focused support on smallholder market access.**

138. To build an understanding of WFP's partnership approach the ET explored examples of CO policy level engagements, interagency coordination, knowledge sharing and programme collaboration a combination of KIIs, FGDs, process and timeline analysis were used. These allowed provided a consistent picture of how the CO navigated both formal and informal aspects of their engagement with central and district government authorities, UN agencies and CSOs.<sup>151</sup>

139. Annex 18 supported this analysis through an in-depth review of WFP partner arrangements and includes tables summarising partner collaboration and relationships.

***Partner constraints***

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid

<sup>148</sup> Typical examples of ECP support reported by district and sub-district stakeholders and farmer groups focused on the distribution of farming materials including seeds, drip irrigation kits, sprinklers, pipes, low-cost polyhouses, plastic film mulching, rainwater harvesting materials, water storage tanks and electric fencing to protect farms from wild animals

<sup>149</sup> See for example, WFP, 2009. [Hunger and Markets. World Hunger Series](#). London: Sterling; Juillard, H., *et al.*, 2016. [The influence of market support interventions on household food security. An evidence synthesis protocol](#). Oxfam GB: Oxford; and, Catholic Relief Services, 2017. [Supporting markets in emergencies](#). CALP Network.

<sup>150</sup> This was a major theme in the Bhutan press. See, Kuensel online: [Pandemic triggers development of agriculture sector](#) (November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2020), and [Opposition expresses concerns on farmers' inability to sell vegetables](#) (July 5<sup>th</sup>, 2021)

<sup>151</sup> An analysis of donor relationships was covered separately under Finding 11: EQ4.3



140. Despite staff recognition of the importance of partnerships and references to WFP's Corporate Partnership strategy,<sup>152</sup> the ET found no concerted, CSP-led initiative supporting the CO's broad aspiration for "leveraging synergies with the initiatives of United Nations [and other] partners".<sup>153</sup> Instead, the CO's formal systems and processes for developing and managing partnerships were led entirely by its Letter of Understanding (LOU) with GNHC supporting a "Mutual Commitment to Successful Implementation of WFP's CSP (2019-2023)" (2019) associated and commitments under the UNSDPF. All WFP agriculture activities were thereafter implemented under AWP agreements with WFP's designated government partners, the MOE and MOAF, who were to operate as the "channels of communication and main interlocuters between the Government and WFP".

141. At the project level, the ET found this combination of LOUs and AWPs successfully provided WFP with a national framework agreement through which project agreements (under KOICA and the ECP) could be successfully negotiated and reported. All WFP-supported agriculture activities were implemented through DOA and DAMC, through whom the CO was successfully able to introduce field-level monitoring by DAOs and RAMCOs and the channelling of reports to the CO.<sup>154</sup>

142. However, while district level structures indicated this relationship largely worked well, direct reporting also created dissatisfaction in MOAF-PPD and GNHC when they were "left out of the loop". For PPD and GNHC to gain a coherent picture of WFP contributions, more attention was needed to communicate a coherent picture of inputs and results over and above a list of activities. Even at the Departmental level (whether DOA or DAMC), the gap in any formal sector level agreement with MOAF to frame WFP's strategic contributions meant that if ever WFP engaged in activities outside of the agreed AWP it risked causing frustration at WFP's apparent lack of transparency or focus.

143. This analysis mirrored Finding 9 which described how the lack of a clear WFP sector position for agriculture meant it had little leverage over the governments COVID-19 response. Without a WFP blueprint, the ECP project was viewed by some (but by no means all) government counterparts as a general emergency fund rather than strategic assistance that could be identifiably linked to WFP. Without this differentiation, WFP (as well as other UN agencies) were often referred to as "donors" rather than development partners offering specific country capacity strengthening skills and competencies the government was looking for.

144. Among UN agencies, and at the request of the UNRC, WFP adopted a coordination role for the Development Partner Working Group for Agriculture (DPWGA) in 2020. This allowed the CO to demonstrate increasing levels of participation in UNSDPF Outcome Group meetings with UN agencies and government departments.<sup>155</sup> This was constructive. To WFP, the aims of this engagement were to engage in RNR policy analysis, strengthen bilateral and multilateral donor partnerships, and build stronger relations with the RBAs, UNDP and ITC. Despite these efforts, consultations with UN counterparts indicated relations with WFP continued to require attention. Even in the case of MTPF joint funding to WFP and UNDP under the ECP project, the ET found little evidence of cross-agency collaboration.

145. Some UN stakeholders attributed these gaps in inter-agency collaboration to result from a necessary prioritisation of bilateral relations with GNHC. It was also evident that the ECP and ASP had introduced a broadening of the space for agriculture that led to a level of competition among UN sector agencies.<sup>156</sup> As an agency looking to advance its position in agriculture, WFP became a focus for criticism. Unfortunately, the ET found some external stakeholders still viewed WFP as a humanitarian organisation with strengths in supply chain development and school feeding. To address this, WFP needed to communicate its dual mandate and role as part of a step-by-step approach to repositioning itself in Bhutan.<sup>157</sup> Being seen to have undertaken a detailed analysis of gaps in UN sector support may have provided a clearer justification of areas where the CO could add value.

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<sup>152</sup> Partnerships were an agenda item in at least four staff meetings during the data collection period. See also, WFP, 2014. [WFP Corporate Partnership Strategy \(2014–2017\): We Deliver Better Together](#)

<sup>153</sup> WFP Bhutan, 2019. [Bhutan Country Strategic Plan \(2019-2023\)](#)

<sup>154</sup> RAMCO offices reporting to WFP included Mongar (for agriculture activities in Lhuntse district); Gelephu (Trongsa and Zhemgang districts); and Thimphu (Samtse district). DOA ECP project reports through the in Thimphu.

<sup>155</sup> See for example, Kuensel online: [Bhutan observes world food day](#) (October 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020)

<sup>156</sup> This situation may not have been helped by the UNSDPF (2019-2023) agriculture focus on climate change that, while highly relevant, may have limited the scope for UN agency differentiation in the sector

<sup>157</sup> See: WFP, 2021. [WFP's support to Climate Resilient Agriculture and Food Systems in Bhutan](#) (2019-2023)

### *Partner opportunities*

146. Despite these shortcomings, the ET found WFP relationships remained open with many examples of time-constrained WFP staff reaching out to other agencies to develop a common agenda. One example was in WFP's mobilisation with MOAF of inter-agency support for the 2021 FSS Dialogues and generation of eight Bhutan National Pathways. This involved the CO working closely with FAO and IFAD to help MOAF translate the Pathways into a revised RNR Sector Strategy for 2030, a process that complemented WFP support to DAMC in its update of the RNR Marketing Strategy.

147. While the ET process observation concurred with the common view of RBA, UNDP and ITC stakeholders that inter-agency co-ordination was easier around joint advocacy than in developing joint projects,<sup>158</sup> the evaluation did identify examples of progress in other areas. For example, the ET was able to accompany WFP in the co-development of a concept note to the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP) with IFAD and MOAF. Initiated by the CO in June 2021, the original WFP concept was taken-up by IFAD in August after MOAF-PPD had secured Ministerial approval. The full GAFSP concept note was submitted in September 2021 and given preliminary donor approval in December.

148. Continuing as the DPWGA lead, in 2021 WFP began to work with MOAF and UN agencies to map their geographical and technical focus areas and lessons learned. A virtual agriculture platform for DPWGA knowledge sharing was established. Process observations also revealed new WFP efforts to mobilise inter-agency knowledge by arranging a series of informal debates among DPWGA members and external holders. Across these events, and reflecting the gaps identified in COVID-19 response analysis under Finding 10 (EQ4.2), the ET found a growing interest in the strengthening of Bhutan's domestic food markets among UN agencies. This triangulated with the results from field, district and national level consultations with farmers, CSOs and government representatives exploring stakeholder perceptions of WFP's future role in agriculture.

149. Over the evaluation period the ET found no examples of WFP-CSO partnerships in agriculture. In part this was a legacy of WFP's school feeding portfolio that operated entirely in partnership with government. With some government stakeholders viewing UN agencies as donor and CSOs as UN agencies as funding competition, there was also an understandable reluctance in the CO to upset government relations by entering into CSO partnerships. As a result, WFP's first ever partnership with a CSO in Bhutan only began in 2020.<sup>159</sup> This presented a weakness in strategic thinking about the role of CSO partnerships as a means of addressing WFP's own capacity gaps.<sup>160</sup> Some first steps were nevertheless taken. With ratification by Parliament of the Civil Society Organisations (Amendment) Bill (2021) the operating environment for CSOs was expected to improve, offering WFP an ability to expand its field-level partnerships in critical areas such as rural women's economic empowerment.

#### ***Evaluation question 4.3: To what extent have the CO's external and internal resource mobilisation efforts allowed it to respond flexibly to changing needs?***

**Finding 11. In looking to support the rapid expansion of the country office and address its weak funding position WFP prioritised resource mobilisation but efforts often remained inefficient. Recognising the problem, the Country Office introduced a more structured approach to fundraising based on a funding cycle with associated tools and clearer roles and responsibilities.**

150. To build a picture of efficiency and effectiveness for CO resource mobilisation, the ET explored WFP Bhutan's fundraising systems and processes, management structures and reviewed a range of WFP corporate guidelines.<sup>161</sup> Through staff KIIs, process observations, a review of WFP-donor communications, and a fundraising capacity strengthening workshop, the ET adopted a fundraising cycle model and set of associated indicators to guide the evaluation analysis and support CO follow-up. A representation of the cycle is provided in Figure 7.

<sup>158</sup> See also: FAO, IFAD and WFP, 2021. [Joint evaluation of collaboration among the United Nations Rome-Based Agencies](#)

<sup>159</sup> A community outreach project with the Tarayana Foundation focusing on rural nutrition and health advocacy

<sup>160</sup> This was evidenced by internal and external KIIs as well as a review of ACRs and reports to the UNSDPF

<sup>161</sup> See, Resource Mobilization for Country Strategic Plans: [a collection of information and resources to help country offices](#), and; WFP, 2016. [Resource Mobilization for Country Strategic Plans](#) (CSPs). The ET considers these resources dated

**Figure 7. WFP Bhutan fundraising cycle**



Source: Evaluation team elaboration

151. To achieve this, the CO looked to strengthen its funding pipeline in agriculture. They included the late identification of a GAFSP opportunity in July 2021 when WFP initiated a partnership with IFAD and MOAF that led to the successful submission of a concept note (paragraph 139).

152. With RBB support the CO began to develop draft proposals for the Innovation and Regional components of climate Adaptation Fund for submission in 2022 reflecting the increasing importance given to climate funding to bolster WFP’s potential resource base and support to government;<sup>162</sup> and began to improve its intelligence about future donor pipelines. The limited range of pipeline opportunities for agriculture (Table 4) was indicative that WFP resource mobilisation efforts sat within a weak funding environment for development activities in Bhutan: a constraint that was common across WFP COs, especially in Middle Income Countries.<sup>163</sup>

**Table 4. Donor priorities for agriculture (2021)**

Donor	Opportunity	WFP priority areas
<b>Global Agriculture and Food Security Programme (GAFSP)</b>	Annual calls for public investment proposals <sup>164</sup> (2021 successful submission)	Raising agricultural productivity; linking farmers to markets; reducing risk and vulnerability; improving non-farm rural livelihoods; and technical assistance and institutional support
<b>European Union (EU)</b>	EU programme for Bhutan (2023-2027) (2022 planned submission)	Market system development; Climate sensitive production and conservation (UNDP); Food and nutrition security
<b>Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)</b>	Under development <sup>165</sup> (2022 submission)	Integrated approach to transitioning agriculture and nutrition
<b>Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA)</b>	<i>Ad hoc</i> support to Bhutan through the Bangladesh office emphasising building	Climate proofing food systems; Youth entrepreneurship; Digital support to market access;

<sup>162</sup> See, <https://www.adaptation-fund.org>

<sup>163</sup> WFP, 2020. *Strategic evaluation of funding WFP’s work (2014–2019)*. WFP/EB.A/2020/7-C. This was also reflected in multiple KIIS and FGDs with WFP, government and UN partners

<sup>164</sup> See, [Global Agriculture and Food Security Program](#) (GAFSP Online)

<sup>165</sup> Priority areas identified by a JICA strategic mission to Bhutan during meetings with the ET and WFP in November 2021 included: (i) Market systems development; (ii) Sustainable land use; (iii) Digital services; and, (iv) Scaling up nutrition

	Korea-Bhutan linkages (2022 submission)	Strengthening post-harvest value addition, quality and marketing
<b>South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)</b>	Action plan on climate change (2022 submission)	Regional and national adaptation strategies and programmes
<b>Adaptation Fund</b>	Build resilience in national food systems and adapting to climate change (2022 submission)	Building a regional adaptation portfolio with WFP Nepal and introducing national strategies for weather-based index insurance

Sources: process observations, KIs and FGDs with WFP, UN and donor representatives

153. While the prioritisation of resource mobilisation was understandable, no dedicated structure, staff member or plan was in place to oversee the CO fundraising process, donor research, liaison or proposal development. Given the small size of the office, this led to a heavy burden on a time-limited Head of Office and programme staff. CO fundraising meetings were also inefficient. Many were often convened as an immediate response to new donor intelligence with multiple staff members called in. While communicating a sense of urgency and shared commitment, the focus on short-term needs, heavy engagement of staff, lack of consistent oversight and absence of standard decision-making tools across the fundraising cycle led resource mobilisation to become a time-consuming process that competed with essential functions such as project oversight and delivery.

154. This situation was not helped by CO efforts to explore WFP internal funding opportunities where the CO faced a lack of transparency, capacity or support from RBB or Rome that hindered its assessment of available options. Here, as in its external fundraising efforts, the CO was left to go at it alone. Only in the case of RBB support to proposal development under the Adaptation Fund did the ET find any evidence of a strategic corporate approach to support CO fundraising.

155. In raising concerns about CO systems and processes for resource mobilisation, the ET was impressed at the speed in which the country team drew on the evaluation's critique. Capacity strengthening was introduced during the evaluation to address inefficiencies and some tools were introduced. Examples of an improved approach included,

- Reviewing the organisational structure and oversight of resource mobilisation;
- Improving the delegation of roles and responsibilities across the fundraising cycle;
- Integrating and updating the corporate Salesforce platform for donor intelligence management;<sup>166</sup>
- Re-examining donor prioritisation based on a liaison effort ('new-old') decision tool;
- Adopting a value estimate and likelihood to win decision model to support prioritisation;<sup>167</sup> and,
- Developing a CO proposal development schedule and planned milestone update meetings.<sup>168</sup>

With the CO benefiting from staff members with government finance and CSO fundraising skills, the CO began to explore a role in leveraging international finance support for national zero hunger efforts. In late 2021 the CO reached out for WFP Rome and RBB support to help it develop a tailored approach with GNHC.

## 2.5. SUSTAINABILITY OF WFP'S EMERGING AGRICULTURE PORTFOLIO

156. This section presents findings that responded to three forward looking sub-questions of the evaluation that also explored the criteria of Effectiveness, Efficiency and Sustainability with respect to Evaluation Question 5: To what extent is WFP's emerging portfolio of agriculture related activities in Bhutan sustainable?

<sup>166</sup> See, WFP, 2020. [Salesforce is powering WFP Partnerships but what can it do for you?](#) Available on WFP-Go

<sup>167</sup> This tool updated WFP's Pipeline Management Tool by introducing a longer timeframe (up to 5 years) and introduced an estimate of value to support prioritisation. For more on WFP tools, see

<sup>168</sup> A list of WFP resource mobilisation tools and guidelines examined by the ET is available on WFP-Go under Fundraising / Resource Mobilization. See, <https://newgo.wfp.org/topics/fundraising-resource-mobilization>

**Evaluation question 5.1: What was the potential for the results of WFP's agriculture portfolio in Bhutan to be sustainable, and what factors are expected to contribute to this?**

**Finding 12. Despite the school stipend having provided a clear incentive for producers in most WFP target districts and sub-districts, the universal nature of payments may have limited the sustainability of farmer-school linkages and many smallholders have started to explore wider market opportunities. This was not helped by a COVID-19 response that emphasised short-term distributions to enhance production but failed to attend adequately to the post-harvest losses and the agricultural marketing needs of farmers.**

157. The sustainability of WFP agriculture results and contributions was underpinned by strong policy relevance in agriculture,<sup>169</sup> and nutrition.<sup>170</sup> The adoption of an operating model by which WFP agriculture programme activities were implemented by MOAF supported the successful integration of WFP portfolio within Bhutan's national, district and sub-district institutional structures and administrative arrangements.<sup>171</sup>

158. At the institutional level, strong collaboration between WFP, MOAF (DAMC-RAMCO; DOA-DAOs) and MOE (SHND, DEOs and schools), supported delivery of the SHFP and ensured the WFP programme portfolio contributed directly to government introduction of a highly decentralised farm-to-school operating model for fresh produce procurement in a short time period.<sup>172</sup>

159. However, at the farmer group level, while this opened new social and economic opportunities for farmer group members, especially women, to organise themselves and establish savings schemes little was done to support these initiatives. Gaps in WFP technical support to farmer groups presented a missed opportunity. Savings and credit discussions with farmer groups indicated that the sustainability of the SHFP and WFP contributions needed to be understood in terms of how the school stipend acted, or might in future act, as an economic multiplier for rural communities rather than a stand-alone procurement. These aspects, explored further in Annex 20, indicated that with appropriately tailored technical and financial support, female and male group and cooperative members wanted to invest incomes into wider economic activities.

160. An additional sustainability challenge was presented by the universal nature of the stipend. Wherever the school, however many pupils, the same stipend was payable on a per child per month basis. According to the particular district or sub-district, this led to pressures on the stipend that are expected to affect the sustainability of WFP contributions. They included:

- The market competitiveness of the stipend as a guaranteed price relative to the prices many farmer households or groups could obtain in the domestic markets in their locality;
- The size of schools and their ability to leverage economies of scale when procuring food, leaving some smaller primary schools and extended classrooms in a weak position to secure local food;
- Seasonal variations in the production surplus or deficit across Bhutan's different agroecological zones and associated costs to farmer groups of meeting contractual agreements with schools during deficit periods;
- The size of farmer groups and their ability to leverage economies of scale when procuring food from other groups and traders to cover seasonal production deficits;
- The effects of remoteness-proximity on the costs of production, and transport to groups;
- Weaknesses in storage and transport infrastructure from the block-village to school levels that led to high post-harvest losses;
- A lack of attention in WFP and government to the emerging role of aggregators (both cooperatives and traders) in meeting procurement gaps in some localities; and,
- The absence of any stipend inflation link to minimise the risks of future farmer group attrition from the SHFP as they seek alternative markets.

161. In many ways these constraints reflected a success of the SHFP by which farmer groups, cooperatives, AEAs and agricultural officers consistently argued that farmer-school linkages provided an entry point for

<sup>169</sup> RNR Strategy 2040 (2020); RNR Marketing Policy (2017: 2021); and Bhutan National Pathways (2021)

<sup>170</sup> RGOB, 2014. Food and Nutrition Security Policy; RGOB, 2019. National School Feeding and Nutrition Programme Strategy

<sup>171</sup> Including DAMC and DOA (national); DAO and DEO (district), AEA (sub-district); schools; and associated administrators

<sup>172</sup> School and Hospital Feeding Programme White Paper (2019) and Nutrition Strategy and Action Plan 2020-2025 (2020)

smallholders to organise themselves to sell produce through local markets. Over the evaluation process, this led to a core SHFP sustainability discussion to focus on how government, with WFP assistance, should ensure the continuing relevance of Bhutan's fresh produce market for school feeding to smallholders (Figure 5) within the context of their engagement in the wider food and market system. The market map in Annex 21 was co-developed with stakeholders as a way of exploring this systems perspective in detail. It was used as a basis for formative aspects over the evaluation as covered under the evaluation Conclusions (Section 3).

162. Greater attention was also needed at the group level. While it was acknowledged that farmer group members received a basic training package to support their formation, registration and book-keeping, the ET identified significant gaps in understanding of the costs of production (both time and financial) and how they affected returns on investment.<sup>173</sup> In the absence of appropriate financial training and support, the evaluation was concerned that group members, the large majority of them women, may have taken on risks they didn't understand affecting the future integrity of groups and sustainability of SHFP results that depended on them.

163. The other main area of WFP programme support was to the government COVID-19 response. Here, the ET found that while the ASP objectives targeted a combination of nutritious crop production with enhanced market linkages and entrepreneurial support, delivery at the field level focused almost entirely on scaling-up production input supplies. Insufficient attention given to the sustainability of the input services, or to post-harvest and market-related aspects of the food system. While this was partly understandable within the context of COVID-19 access restrictions, all farmer groups reported post-harvest storage and transport losses of from 20 to 70 percent depending on commodity. Such losses were not considered sustainable and related in part to the lack of attention to post-harvest support. Even in the one or two cases where WFP ECP funds had been channelled to youth groups, the ET found the focus was on providing production inputs rather than support for post-harvest management and product marketing.

164. The ET also found repeated evidence that ECP project input distributions involved high levels of plastic to support off-season production. Thin-film plastic mulching was offered as a climate smart production technology that would suppress weeds and aid soil water retention. Plastic polyhouses with an 80 percent government subsidy were purchased by farmer groups to support off-season production. While acknowledging the agronomic benefits, examples of decaying plastic mulches and plastic greenhouses were identified. This raised concerns that the use of agricultural plastics may pose an environmental hazard. Waste agricultural plastics that are buried or left to decay risk accumulating microplastics and endocrine disruptors in terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems. Farmers may also burn plastics, releasing persistent toxins into the atmosphere. No WFP effort was made to ensure the ECP project or ASP included strategies for plastic recycling, recovery or reuse, or the promotion of alternative agricultural practices such as organic mulching.<sup>174</sup>

***Evaluation question 5.2: What new models or approaches have been supported or missed by WFP with respect to its agriculture programme portfolio?***

**Finding 13. With WFP support still in its infancy, the Bhutan country office has appropriately begun to build linkages to nutrition and disaster risk management through investments in digital innovation and de-risking agriculture but left gaps in its support for market systems development and business incubation**

165. Under this section, the ET explored examples of programme innovation that could be directly linked to WFP support. By relating models and approaches to the evaluation sustainability analysis, the ET was able to identify gaps that informed the developmental analysis and formative support to the CO team during the evaluation process. These are presented under Section 3, Conclusions.

***Digital services***

166. WFP school-level contributions were strongly associated with an integrated approach to nutrition and HGSA that connected farmer food supplies to school-level decision making through the formulation of weekly menus. With MOE and SHFP support, WFP introduced the digital PLUS menu optimiser to DEOs and schools

<sup>173</sup> While farmer group training was the responsibility of RAMCOs, COVID-19 access restrictions meant many AEAs were required to facilitate new group formation and training despite gaps in their financial and technical skills

<sup>174</sup> See: FAO, 2021. [Assessment of agricultural plastics and their sustainability: A call for action](#). FAO: Rome. It was noted that during in late 2021 FAO and MOAF started to develop a code of conduct for plastic use in agriculture

in target districts in 2019 (Box 5). This provided a first step to helping decision-makers understand the nutrition benefits of different food purchases and to balancing costs.

167. In 2020 WFP partnered with the SHND to roll out the PLUS tool across schools in Trongsa and Zhemgang districts. In 2021 this expanded to the 3 further districts of Wangduephodrang, Haa and Tsirang positively affecting the diets of 18,095 school children (9,538 girls and 8,557 boys). Preliminary findings indicated a 15 percent reduction in the cost of school meals to schools, a 20 percent increase in school purchases of food produced by local smallholders, and 60 percent increase in the consumption of fresh local produce by school children when attending school during the 2021 academic year.<sup>175</sup> With 101,800 children receiving school meals in Bhutan as of January 2022, out of national population 750,000, introduction of the PLUS menu optimiser has the potential to affect the nutrition intake of 15 percent of national population and influence national food systems transformation in the production, marketing and consumption of fresh produce.

**Box 5. WFP PLUS menu optimiser**

The School Meal Planner (SMP) PLUS software is an online digital solution that optimizes school meals by making them simultaneously more nutritious, cost-efficient and locally-sourced. By accessing a set of databases on food prices and composition, the platform calculates a "menu" of meals, ensuring nutritional requirements using locally-sourced food and seasonal ingredients. The programme can be used by any public body (schools, hospitals, monastic institutions). From a preliminary pilot of the software in Punakha district during 2019, by 2021 the tool had been introduced to 5 of Bhutan's 20 districts.

168. Wider examples of WFP digital support in the agriculture sector included CO contributions to the design and roll-out of the RNR M&R platform. Analysis of the results of this activity under Finding 3 (EQ2.1) provided the basis for the summary of MOAF and WFP agreed ambitions for RNR M&R system development over the remaining CSP period. These also provided the basis for a wider exploration of WFP and MOAF ambitions involving adoption of a "digital ecosystem" approach to for adoption of a "digital ecosystem" to support sector development in Bhutan (Section 3: Conclusions).

169. A key component was the recognised need to address gaps in digital market services that related to weaknesses in the development and uptake of MOAF's Agriculture Market Information System (AMIS). Across all field visits, the ET found no example of district or sub-district stakeholders who were aware of the AMIS platform. Farmer groups looking to connect to other groups or traders to buy or sell produce instead relied on the social networking platform We Chat.<sup>176</sup> Release of the Sibjam platform by the Bhutan Foundation in November suggests it will be important for WFP and MOAF to track, and potentially support, such off-the-peg examples of online marketplace roll-out as a supplementary feature of AMIS.

**Home grown school feeding**

170. Introduction of the PLUS menu optimiser in association with wider assistance at the school and farm levels supported an integrated farm-to-school approach that was highly appreciated by national, district and school level education and SHFP decision makers as well as farmers and allowed WFP support to bridge institutional boundaries (Box 6). The ET considered the adoption of an integrated approach to have been a coherent and highly appropriate innovation in the CO's design and support to Bhutan's decentralised operating model for HGsf. It also provided a strong example of good practice.<sup>177</sup>

**Box 6. Benefits of WFP adoption of an integrated approach to home-grown school feeding in Bhutan**

*Farmer groups*

- Organisation of groups led to stronger representation of women
- Production of higher quality more diverse food

*Institutions*

- Use of PLUS menu optimiser to improve school nutrition and fresh food procurement and drive demand for nutritious local produce

<sup>175</sup> WFP Bhutan, 2022. Roll-out of SMP PLUS in Bhutan: Perspectives and Lessons Learnt from the roll-out in 5 districts.

<sup>176</sup> Bhutan Foundation, 2021. [Sibjam to address and solve food supply chain constraints in Bhutan](#). Press Release (November 2021)

<sup>177</sup> For comparators see Section 5.2 in: FAO & WFP, 2018. [Home-Grown School Feeding. Resource Framework](#).

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthened capacities of farmers to meet food safety standards</li> <li>• Sales of food to schools and surpluses into local domestic markets</li> <li>• Formation of group savings and credit schemes</li> </ul> <p><i>Households</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New incomes particularly benefited women</li> <li>• Diversification of food consumption by children and adults</li> <li>• Preliminary social and behaviour change activities to help improve diets</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coherent support across Education and Agriculture entities at all levels</li> </ul> <p><i>Value chains</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Significant shortening in supply chains to deliver fresh produce to schools</li> <li>• Reductions in the carbon footprint of food storage, transport, and distribution</li> </ul> <p><i>Opportunities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Springboard for smallholder access to markets and demand led production</li> <li>• Builds farmer group understanding of production planning, scheduling and markets</li> <li>• Introduction of climate change adaptation concepts, services and practices</li> </ul>
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### **Market led production**

171. To build on these positive contributions, WFP agriculture interventions needed to address the needs of Bhutan’s wider food and market system. For example, to address recognised storage constraints that affected HGSF,<sup>178</sup> WFP interventions focused on the construction, refurbishment and management of school structures. While appropriate to the immediate provision of school meals services, from an agriculture perspective this left a significant gap in WFP support between the farm and school gate where there was a clearly recognised need for storage improvements to reduce post-harvest losses and support the development of the local market system.

172. Another example was the apparent inability of the CO to adopt a strategic role alongside the MOE, SHFP, DEOs and schools in influencing how aggregators and cooperatives might provide economies of scale for the bulk purchase of fresh produce when farmers were unwilling or unable to meet them. WFP, MOAF and district stakeholders saw this as a reflection the original SHFP directive that schools should rely directly on farmer groups which did not allow DAMC to budget for the purchase of produce from the wider market.

173. While understandable within the context of the short programme timeframe and limited portfolio funding or staff level, both examples pointed to the future need for the CO adopt a food systems approach to agriculture. This emerged as a dominant theme across many of the evaluation findings including Results (Finding 3: EQ2.1) and Sustainability (Finding 13: EQ5.1) and is explored under Conclusion 2 (Section 3).

### **Evaluation question 5.3: What is the readiness of the WFP CO to further develop opportunities in relation to agriculture support to Bhutan?**

**Finding 14. In the context of an external environment that was supportive of an amplified role for WFP, the country office struggled to consolidate its management arrangements and clarity of focus for growth in agriculture involving a balanced portfolio of capacity strengthening and resource mobilisation support**

174. To explore WFP Bhutan’s ability to undertake an expanded role across the agriculture value chain, the evaluation adopted an analysis of organisational readiness using a conceptual framework presented in the IR and updated during the evaluation phase (Figure 8). This analysis explored two key areas: the extent to which WFP Bhutan’s external and internal environment supported, and is likely to support, amplification; and how effectively WFP built, or may in future build, on its capacities and capabilities to deliver an enhanced role in agriculture. With many aspects of this analysis covered under earlier Findings, and to avoid repetition, this section focused on the main organisational challenges agreed by internal and external stakeholders and the

<sup>178</sup> Ibid. See also: F. Dizon et al., 2019. [Harnessing Spatial Opportunities in Agriculture for Economic Transformation](#): World Bank. Weaknesses in rural storage infrastructure were identified by KIIs at all levels



CO team. The developmental opportunity for WFP's agriculture portfolio (right hand column) is presented under Conclusion 2, Section 3 (WFP's strategic framework for agriculture).

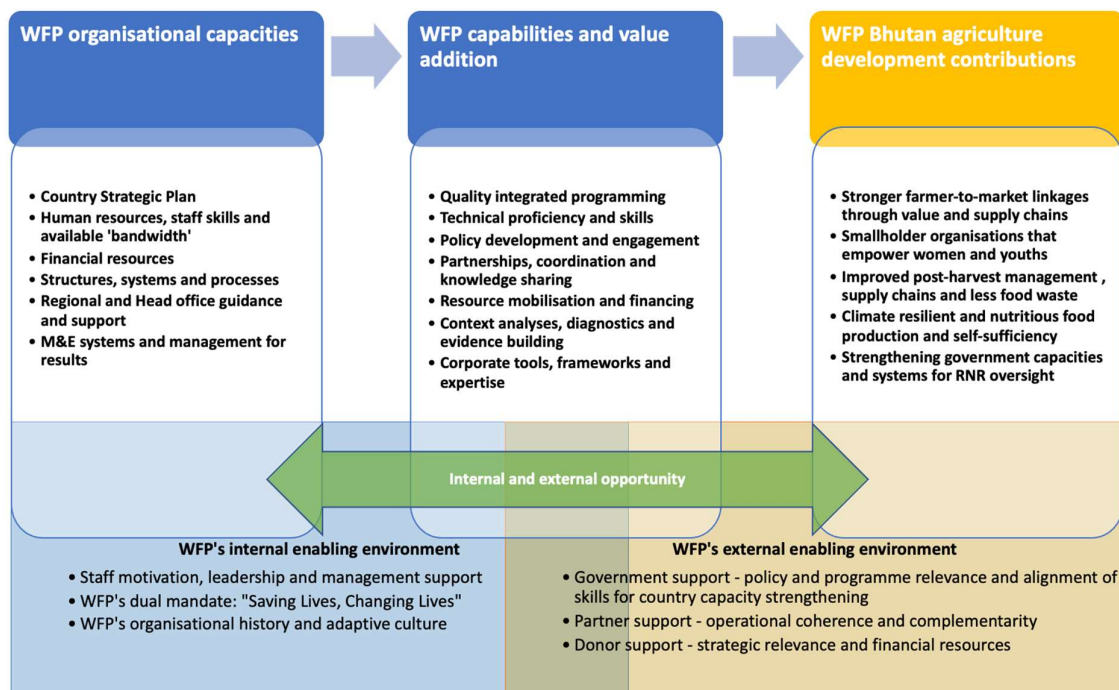
### Enabling environment

175. WFP successfully established its role as a key government partner supporting the handover of school feeding to MOE and the strengthening of farmer-school linkages with MOAF. The adoption of an integrated food and nutrition approach was highly appreciated for its policy relevance and programme coherence. While the development contributions of Figure 8 were recognised, clear priority was given by RGOB to an expanded role for WFP supporting smallholder access to agriculture markets.<sup>179</sup>

176. Key to the delivery expectations of GNHC and MOAF-PPD was growing demand for WFP to contribute to resource mobilisation. To achieve buy-in for WFP technical assistance, it should be associated with resources for agriculture. WFP's leverage of donor contributions in the agriculture sector had however been limited.

177. In response, WFP appropriately sought to establish new partnerships with UN agencies through joint resource mobilization such as under the GAFSP submission. The evaluation also found clear alignment of WFP agriculture contributions to donor sector strategies (Finding 11: EQ4.3; Table 4). Nevertheless, weaknesses in the CO approach to, and corporate support for, resource mobilisation were a frustration on all sides. With the exception of GAFSP, WFP's approach to resource mobilisation and capacity strengthening suffered from a lack of strategic focus or joint development partners (Finding 10: EQ4.2: Partnership). Addressing this will be especially important as WFP starts to explore opportunities for climate funding such as through its planned Adaptation Fund submissions.

**Figure 8. Organisational readiness conceptual framework**



Source: Evaluation team elaboration

178. Internally, while WFP staff motivations were in favour of an expanded role in agriculture, they were also sensitive to the concerns of government and WFP's development partners. This at times placed staff at odds with a leadership that was looking to build recognition for WFP's dual mandate and proposition for agriculture in Bhutan. Evidence of this tension was voiced in staff meetings, FGDs and retreats. While at no point did the ET find this tension negative, there was a level of frustration when follow-up too often took second place to immediate demands. The primary expectation of staff, government and UN stakeholders, was for the CO to

<sup>179</sup> See also Annex 18: Partnerships. This is developed further under Conclusion 2: Section 3.2

take a more measured approach to establish its sector position. Evidence of this starting to happen was in government approval of the DE and the high level of support provided by staff.

#### *WFP capacities*

179. Part of the CO's underlying tension was attributable to the rapid increase in staff numbers over the evaluation period from seven in 2019 to 23 in 2021. While this was supportive of a stronger positioning of the CO as a whole, staff were time-pressured and did not want to spend too much time on internal reflection and resource mobilisation without clearly identifiable relevance and opportunity. Internal reflection through staff meetings was insufficiently balanced with operational considerations.

180. Structurally, the Bhutan CO operated a horizontal management arrangement. While this provided everyone a voice, in the absence of a head of programmes it created heavy performance management responsibilities for the Head of Office that led potential decision-makers to at times look for authorisation when it may not have been needed. Programme teams also tended to remain focused on their own technical areas of work with limited consideration given to the integration of logistics and supply chain management in agriculture.

181. Resources for agriculture only allowed for the recruitment of a single policy and programme lead for agriculture. Although the ET considered the CO skills and engagement in government liaison, policy support and project oversight for agriculture were effective, WFP efforts to expand its role were not supported by shifts in sector staffing levels and drew significantly on a busy Head of Office. The demands of national CO and MOAF Departmental engagements also meant WFP projects were heavily reliant on district capacities. The effects of fundraising inefficiencies on project oversight were an area of significant concern to staff.

182. During the evaluation the ET challenged senior management on different ways of working. An alternative structure was introduced for discussion by the country team based on the management for results across three areas: Policy and Programmes; Project Development and Delivery; and Finance and Administration. This should be considered alongside the wider recommendations of the evaluation, MTR and development of the country office's 2<sup>nd</sup> generation CSP (2024-2028).

#### *WFP capabilities*

183. WFP made significant and effective efforts to provide country capacity strengthening for school feeding, farmer-school linkages and digital services (PLUS: RNR M&R).<sup>180</sup> Examples from earlier Findings indicated this functioned appropriately at the individual, institutional and enabling environment levels. The increasing strength of WFP engagement with district and national MOAF staff under both DAMC-RAMCO and DOA-DAOs provided a platform for higher-level advocacy such as the CO FSS contributions to the Bhutan Development Pathways and RNR Marketing Strategy (2021).

184. Despite progress, the ET found WFP capacity strengthening contributions lacked clarity and caused a diversity of expectations among stakeholders, including UN agencies, that could not all be met. Opportunities were also missed to build the CO's internal gender capacities and/or engage CSOs in capacity strengthening for women's organisations and supporting government officers at the local, regional and national levels in gender mainstreaming. The ET considered this was in part symptomatic of WFP's transition from an implementation modality to one that increasingly operated through capacity strengthening. A tension that provided an appropriate starting point for the presentation of the evaluation Conclusions.

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<sup>180</sup> Digital support in agriculture was complemented by an integrated platform for education, nutrition and health monitoring and reporting for schools and a '72-Hours Rapid Assessment' tool that used a geo-referenced vulnerability database to support a targeted response to disasters

## 3. Conclusions and recommendations

185. Developmental learning was presented in the following conclusions and recommendations. All conclusions were based on learning from the ET's summative analysis of the evaluation context (Section 1), the evaluation Findings concerning WFP's agriculture portfolio contributions in Bhutan, and its assessment of the CO's organisational readiness to support government expectations concerning WFP's future sector contributions (Section 2). Key areas of formative learning were included as boxes against each Conclusion that linked directly to the evaluation recommendations.

186. In line with the CO ambitions and developmental evaluation approach, the conclusions and were structured against the key strategic, programmatic and organisational themes that emerged.<sup>181</sup> These themes were based on the formative analysis of WFP opportunities to work with its national and international partners. They focused on opportunities for WFP to establish the foundations for future sustainability and scale in expanding farmer-school linkages and strengthening smallholder market access.

### 3.1. ESTABLISHING WFP'S ROLE AND POSITIONING FOR AGRICULTURE IN BHUTAN

**Conclusion 1: While the recent introduction of WFP's agriculture portfolio, weak funding position and COVID-19 response meant the CO struggled to develop its value proposition for agriculture in Bhutan, the relationships and learning established during this preliminary phase provided a useful platform for the developmental analysis of areas where government and WFP should consider focusing future support.**

187. WFP agriculture sector support in Bhutan has to be understood within the context of the country's graduation to a lower middle-income country where empowered and resilient smallholder farmers have been identified as critical to the country's future food system.<sup>182</sup> In seeking to achieve this agenda government recognised that the COVID-19 pandemic had exposed critical gaps in Bhutan's food supply chain that had impacted on food distribution, the reliability of market supplies and food prices in ways that weakened opportunities for smallholder market engagement and food system contributions.<sup>183</sup>

188. In order to contribute to a resilient and self-sufficient food system, WFP appropriately identified some of the key constraints: low productivity, high post-harvest losses, a lack of profitable markets, poor infrastructure, and weak information systems. However, it struggled to develop its agriculture value proposition in ways that would differentiate the CO from other RBAs and UNDP. This was not helped by the limited funding of the WFP agriculture portfolio that, while reflecting its recent introduction in 2019, meant government was unable to get a sense of the direction of WFP's medium- to long- term sector contributions.

189. Nevertheless, using the FSS Dialogues, KOICA and ECP projects as cases in point, key points of strategic learning indicated that,

**Despite limited resources the evaluation period provided opportunities for the CO to establish a strategic role and strong sector-wide RGOB relationships** at the national, regional and district levels. WFP was able to explore the balance between project implementation on the ground, with capacity strengthening at the individual, institutional and enabling environment levels, and its role in sector coordination and advocacy.

<sup>181</sup> For more information see also Box 2, Section 1.4, Methodology

<sup>182</sup> This was emphasised in the 12<sup>th</sup> FYP (2019-2023); Economic Contingency Plan and Agricultural Stimulus Plan (2020); RNR Strategy (2020); RNR Marketing Strategy (2021); and Bhutan National Pathways (2021)

<sup>183</sup> See for example MOAF's, RNR Marketing Strategy (2021) and the second Bhutan Development Pathways (Annex 16)

**The CO also demonstrated value addition to the School and Hospital Feeding Programme** by integrating agricultural support to farmers looking to sell produce to schools with relevant nutrition programming such as social and behavioural communications, school storage infrastructure, and the introduction of the digital PLUS platform to support nutritious school meals.

**Conclusion 2: Government interest in WFP sector contributions focused on gaps and opportunities to accelerate smallholder market access in Bhutan that were coherent with the summative evaluation Findings. While government appetite for the development of joint initiatives in this area recognises the importance of WFP contributions to country capacity strengthening, the quality of relationships this requires will be founded on the CO's ability to provide tangible development outcomes and enhanced resource contributions.**

190. Formatively, the emerging consensus during the evaluation process was for WFP to expand its role in post-production and market support (Annex 18: Partnerships). Examples of WFP outcomes advanced by stakeholders focused on enhancing smallholder access to markets. Potential contributions included the strengthening of farmer groups and cooperatives; improving post-harvest practices and value addition; installing local storage infrastructure; and expanding digital services to government, private sector and smallholder users. It was notable how this consensus aligned with the evaluation Findings including Results (Finding 3), Partnerships (10), Sustainability (12) and New Approaches (13).

191. Indicatively, WFP's approach to country capacity strengthening needed clarification in terms of scope (focus and alignment with policy and WFP planned development contributions) and scale (the balance and focus of national and district support). Both GNHC and MOAF-PPD were looking for WFP to deliver concrete outputs and impacts for farmers. WFP efforts to strengthen capacities at the individual, institutional and enabling environment levels needed to link to tangible outcomes for which the size of investment mattered.

192. Examples identified by external stakeholders where WFP capacity strengthening support might make a difference included:

- Strengthening the capacities of youth groups and cooperative enterprises in market-led post-harvest management and value addition including community level processing activities;
- Improving supply chain and logistics diagnostics to boost district level market access for smallholders, including the mapping of agriculture infrastructure needs, storage locations and commodity supplies;
- Supporting DAMC in their development of strategies establish new kinds of aggregator (cooperatives, federalised farmers' groups) as bulk fresh food suppliers to schools and domestic markets;
- Enabling DAMC-RAMCO support to farmers groups, youth enterprises and cooperatives in establishing group leadership skills (especially for women), financial capacities, access to credit and improved post-harvest practices; and,
- Identifying opportunities to strengthen government expertise in international resource mobilisation and innovative RNR financing approaches.<sup>184</sup>

193. Key areas of formative learning that pointed to opportunities to achieve these and other country capacity strengthening ambitions within the Bhutan context relied on WFP attention to,

**Incorporating country capacity strengthening into the CO's strategic thinking and partnership agreements** in agriculture including in the development of its programme proposition under WFP Bhutan's second-generation CSP (2024-2028); and,

**Building capacity needs assessments into all planned context analyses** (see Finding 8) to ensure its incorporation in relevant project design, resource mobilisation, partnership and implementation efforts.

<sup>184</sup>These correlate to pathways for country capacity strengthening identified in: WFP, 2017. [WFP Corporate Approach to Country Capacity Strengthening: Toolkit](#); WFP, 2021. [Synthesis of evidence and lessons on country capacity strengthening from decentralized evaluations](#); and: WFP, 2021. [Strengthening Strategic Engagement with Governments in Support of National Development](#)

### 3.2. ADVANCING WFP'S VALUE PROPOSITION FOR AGRICULTURE

**Conclusion 3: On the basis of the evaluation findings, and to support the elaboration of WFP's Value Proposition for smallholder access to agriculture markets, WFP and external stakeholders were able to find common agreement over four critical gaps where the CO should consider focusing its future support. These included opportunities for: Rural women's economic empowerment; Strengthening value addition and market opportunities higher up the value chain; Improving market efficiency through enhanced supply chain linkages; and Ensuring the access to digital information services for agriculture market actors.**

194. The elaboration of WFP's value proposition for agriculture in Bhutan was based on two analyses. The first used the summative evaluation Findings for the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability of WFP contributions to farmer-school linkages under the SHFP and its contributions to the ASP and ECP (2020) that guided Bhutan's sector response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The second was a developmental analysis that engaged stakeholders in a market mapping process that identified areas of strength and weakness in the fresh produce market system in Bhutan.

195. By matching the expressed needs and expectations of stakeholders with WFP's dual mandate and corporate capabilities, the ET concluded the CO should embrace its role as a food systems "enabler" in line with the expectations of government stakeholders. Both summative and developmental contributions indicated that WFP had an opportunity to focus its agriculture value proposition on a clearer determination of its role in strengthening smallholder access to markets in line with Bhutan Development Pathways 1, 2, 3 and 6 (Annex 16). This agenda would allow the CO to build on the foundations of its integrated approach to HGSP while also addressing broader opportunities for rural women's economic empowerment, rural entrepreneurship, market systems development for nutritious produce, and digital innovation.

196. Annex 21 introduces an infographic co-developed by the ET with WFP and external stakeholders. By building on the school fresh produce market illustrated in Figure 5, it allowed the evaluation to explore how farmer-school market linkages already operate as part of the broader domestic market for fresh produce in Bhutan. This enabled the ET to explore the emerging role of private sector traders and cooperative aggregators in supplying schools (Finding 3), and in supporting smallholder access to markets beyond the SHFP. It also allowed stakeholders the opportunity to discuss weaknesses in the enabling environment, market relationships, and in the provision of input services and support by government.

197. On the basis of learning from stakeholder market mapping (Annex 21), the ET identified and co-developed four broad outcome areas with WFP and MOAF stakeholders. They included:

**Expanding opportunities for rural women's economic empowerment** through transformative support that builds their group, leadership, financial capacities, strengthens their relationships with institutional and consumer markets, and enhances market opportunities at the sub-district and district levels;

**Strengthening value addition and market opportunities for Cooperative, youth and private sector enterprises higher up the value chain** by ensuring an emerging 'socially-based rural private sector' can support a consistent and cost-efficient seasonal supply of locally produced nutritious food to both institutional (including school) and domestic markets, while also adding value to local products through improved post-harvest management and food processing, and creating new market linkages between the District and National levels in Bhutan;

**Improving market efficiencies and enhanced supply chain linkages** involving the identification and facilitation of improved transport and market infrastructure services in ways that sustain and enhance market linkages through the mapping and provision of a network of appropriate market infrastructure connecting sub-district producers to aggregators, processors and transporters; and,

**Ensuring the provision of enhanced digital market information services and contract services to smallholder farmers and buyers** by supporting the design and promotion of a digital market platform that connects the smallholder producers of quality local farm produce directly to buyers and wholesalers, supports enhanced marketing and logistics services to farmers, and helps farmer groups develop their production strategies based on a stronger understanding of market requirements.

198. Annex 22 explored these themes further in the form a CO value proposition for agriculture. Each outcome summary included a justification based on the evaluation Findings and examples of WFP capacity strengthening contributions to complement future asset transfers.

199. While climate adaptation was raised in several KIIs and FGDs, the prevailing view among government and UN partners was that WFP's comparative advantage was in post-harvest market systems development including supply chain management, post-harvest value addition, food processing and food standards. As part of the request that UN agencies differentiate their contributions under the UNSDPF, WFP should focus on innovation projects exploring the de-risking of food production and market-oriented approaches.<sup>185</sup>

200. A more in-depth development analysis of sector digitalisation in agriculture was also developed (Annex 23). This included a review of past and planned digital contributions to the RNR M&R platform before adopting a 'digital ecosystem' approach that explored outcomes and deliverables co-developed with the CO as a means of shaping WFP's future digital partnership with MOAF.

### 3.3. ENABLING WFP'S STRATEGIC CONTRIBUTIONS

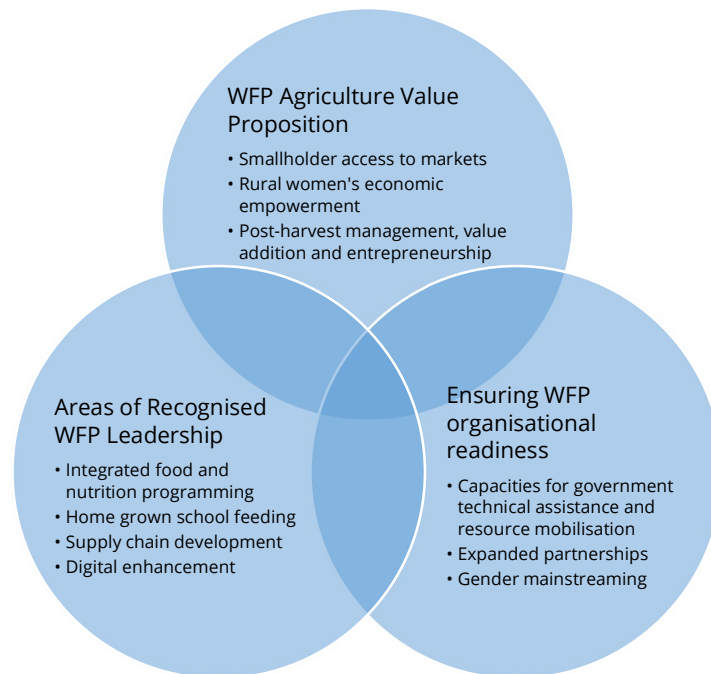
201. For WFP to accelerate its value proposition for agriculture, the evaluation learning pointed to some critical enablers the CO needed to address. Drawing on Findings 10 and 11 (EQ4: integration and partnerships) and 12 to 14 (EQ5: Sustainability), Figure 9 was developed to explore this dynamic and summarise the evaluation's key areas of learning surrounding future delivery of the value proposition. A first step was to explore areas integral to the value proposition where internal and external stakeholders were able to differentiate significant examples of CO leadership and good practice (*cf.* Findings 2, 3 and 10). These provided both an operational basis for the CO's value proposition in agriculture, and the business areas around which its partnerships, coordination, communications and advocacy could be built (Conclusion 4).

202. The Findings for Results (EQ2: Findings 3 to 5) Sustainability and Organisational Readiness (EQ5: Findings 12 and 14) also pointed to three critical cross-cutting areas of organisational readiness that need to be considered if the CO is to successfully build on its value proposition and areas leadership. Explored under Conclusions 5 to 7, these included: ensuring the successful provision of technical and resource contributions to support government development efforts; building effective partnerships; and mainstreaming gender at both the programmatic and organisational levels.

**Figure 9. Learning from the portfolio: establishing WFP's programme identity for Agriculture in Bhutan**

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<sup>185</sup> Examples of WFP approaches to integrated climate risk management include weather- and index- based insurance methods. See, WFP and IFAD, 2011. [Weather Index-based Insurance in Agricultural Development: A Technical Guide](#); and, WFP, 2021. [Does Climate Insurance Work? Evidence from WFP-supported microinsurance programmes](#). Footnote 73 provides links to resources on market systems development and smallholder market-oriented production



Source: Evaluation team elaboration

**Conclusion 4: In the absence of a clear value proposition for agriculture or logic model, WFP struggled to build on areas of good practice and leadership. While indicating a clear willingness to flexibly engage with government and development partners, WFP efforts to build partnerships, coordination, communications and advocacy beyond its project engagements were at times considered aspirational and unfocused. By drawing on areas of recognised leadership that are integral to the emerging value proposition, WFP has a strong foundation to expand its programme portfolio in agriculture and to further develop its government, partner and donor relations.**

203. On the back of a relatively new programme portfolio for agriculture, the CO struggled to establish its sector positioning engage among its government and potential UN partners (Findings 2, 3, 10, 12 and 13) or secure significant new long-term funding (Findings 4 and 11) over the evaluation period.

204. The absence of any intervention logic, theory of change, or significant basis within in the CSP (2019-2023) weakened the CO's clarity of purpose and ability to establish an effective negotiating position with government in areas such as ASP prioritisation of food production (Findings 6 and 9). In its efforts to find agreement with partners, the CO at times lacked the authority to follow-through on its ambition to expand sector contributions in Bhutan.

205. Nevertheless, the ET found the level of awareness, responsiveness, and sense of urgency within the CO was admirable (Findings 6 and 9). External stakeholders credited WFP with its efforts to engage on multiple levels despite limited staff numbers. Significant examples of progress and good practice in integrated food and nutrition programming, HGSP and digital enhancement for agriculture (Finding 3) provided clear pointers to areas where WFP was requested to build on its recognised leadership and expand its contribution (Annex 22: Conclusions 2 and 3). Construction and capacity strengthening to improve the country's local agricultural supply chain and market infrastructure were also seen as critical to smallholder market access.

206. Building on the evaluation's learning about these enablers of its value proposition for agriculture, and to strengthen its institutional relationships and positioning, WFP should consider,

**Developing the value proposition and country office identify into a theory of change** to guide WFP's future contributions to agriculture in Bhutan, including clear definition of areas it will not support (boundaries), in line with the evaluation's developmental analysis (Annexes 17 to 23) and intervention logic (Annex 4);

**Adopting areas of recognised leadership as a platform for communicating its value proposition**, will provide the CO an opportunity to underpin its partnerships and coordination with practical examples that illustrate WFP's dual mandate in Bhutan, and prevent the organisation being pigeonholed simply as a humanitarian and school feeding programme provider;

**Strengthening WFP's external communications and inter-agency coordination functions** including under the Development Partner Working Group for Agriculture, should continue to build on WFP's proactive engagement with government, UN, CSO and donor counterparts while reflecting the CO's value proposition, areas of leadership, and programme boundaries; and,

**Ensuring strategic and operational coordination across programme and operational areas** supports the CO value proposition by ensuring the cross-cutting integration of nutrition, digital and logistics and supply chain services in future agriculture programming, including under the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation CSP (2024-28) and CO resource mobilisation efforts.

**Conclusion 5: While WFP successfully adopted an integrated approach to home-grown school feeding, it struggled to establish some key organisational capacities to deliver a balanced portfolio of innovation projects, country capacity strengthening and resource mobilisation support for government. Areas that will require attention include agreeing appropriate levels of programme staffing for agriculture, addressing gaps in internal capacities, and streamlining systems and processes for fundraising.**

207. The integrated nature of KOICA project funding meant the CO was successful in providing cross-sectoral support to government under the SHFP and NSFNP. Limited staff and financial resources nevertheless meant it struggled to build on this platform and secure an expanded role in the agriculture sector (Findings 5, 7, 10 and 11). In the face of limited available resources, the CO simply did not have the bandwidth to meet all its government liaison, partner engagement, project support, resource mobilisation, monitoring and accountability tasks at the levels it would have liked. A shortage of expertise on specific topics such as gender mainstreaming and financial innovation also prevented WFP from developing partnerships, tapping into dedicated corporate resources or exploring new ways of accessing funding at scale. While gaps were clearly recognised and led to a high level of focus on resource mobilisation for internal needs, the CO failed to establish a clear position that would ensure its agriculture portfolio provided a sound basis for also supporting government needs. This component of sector capacity strengthening needed to be understood within the context of Bhutan's transition to a lower middle-income country. A balanced approach was required based on close negotiation with government counterparts in association with other UN agencies.

208. Resource mobilisation fell within the responsibilities of different CO staff members. This required strong coordination and coherence that was at times lacking. More clarity on relative priorities, roles and responsibilities was required to improve efficiency (Findings 11 and 14). While significant efforts were made to improve fundraising systems and processes, these required time to translate into a stronger funding approach. The CO also came under pressure to explore joint resource mobilisation opportunities with government. This needs to be integral to WFP's strategic approach to sector support. To this end, the evaluation process explored how available expertise within the CO might be optimised to ensure opportunities for innovative partnerships and financing in agriculture are followed through. Without a level of restructuring to streamline the CO resource mobilization functions, to which a stronger emphasis on project delivery oversight will be important (Figure 7; Annex 19), this is likely to require additional resources.

209. To improve effectiveness, learning from the evaluation findings suggested some key areas of organisational readiness the CO should attend to included,

**Preparation of a sector capacity strengthening strategy for agriculture** that provides clarity on the thematic and technical areas, stakeholders and capacity gaps that will be targeted by WFP. This should be formulated on the basis of a joint capacity needs mapping process involving WFP's departmental counterparts in MOAF (primarily DAMC-RAMCO but also DAOs and district innovation hubs), and focus on the value proposition and areas of CO leadership identified by the evaluation;

**Ensuring a consolidated approach to resource mobilisation that builds on existing efforts** by incorporating tools and approaches that not only address the CO's internal fundraising requirements but also its support to government efforts. This should involve preparation of a consolidated plan,



prioritisation rationale, and clearer delineation of roles and responsibilities across the fundraising cycle. WFP should also continue to build on its efforts to explore innovative approaches to development financing for agriculture in partnership with government; and,

**Establishing adequate staffing levels and skills to support the agriculture portfolio.** This should include consideration of a programme and policy lead, such that WFP can integrate project oversight, monitoring, policy and partnerships with country capacity strengthening and resource mobilisation.

**Conclusion 6: In the absence of any partnership strategy WFP struggled to develop a clear focus and direction for its engagements with government, UN and CSO counterparts beyond its project activities. Links to planned outcome areas e.g. who will help strengthen GEWE or youth entrepreneurship**

210. Despite strong programme relevance and coherence (Findings 1 and 2), the CO adopted a loose interpretation of partnership that tended to refer to examples of WFP collaboration rather than any common agenda with government departments, UN agencies or CSOs (Finding 14). While this was to an extent a consequence of the CO operating under the broad aspirations of the CSP (2019-2023) and associated LOU with GNHC, it resulted in a lack of attention to how the CO might identify and address national needs and capacities, as well as its own capacity gaps in areas such as gender mainstreaming. While WFP was by no means alone in this shortfall among its UN counterparts, disappointingly it continues to reflect a broader corporate problem facing WFP COs that needs addressing (Box A18.2: Annex 18).

211. For WFP to move beyond the compliance arrangements of the UNSDPF and LOU and begin to achieve sector-wide impacts across Bhutan's food system, the CO will need to develop new opportunities for sector-wide partnerships with specific government, UN and CSO counterparts based on relevant, practical and innovative support to Bhutan's smallholders. Formalising expectations and agreements with government, UN and CSO counterparts will be essential to delivery across the range of evaluation recommendations. A number of technical and institutional areas that provided the basis for future partnership arrangements for the CO were identified under the partnerships analysis in Finding 10 and Annex 18. Specific learning from the evaluation that should be considered as a basis for future partnerships included,

**Adopting a basic partnership framework that identifies the role of direct and indirect partner contributions to WFP's value proposition for agriculture** and identifies the actions the CO will need to undertake to ensure formal and informal aspects of its this relationship are recognised. For all formal and informal requirements, the CO should clearly allocate oversight accountabilities to WFP staff and ensure its partnership approach is collaborative, long-term, and avoids being overly transactional;

**Formalising Departmental agreements with critical government counterparts such as DAMC** as a basis for future WFP collaboration and support (including operational, capacity strengthening and joint resource mobilisation). This should include consideration of joint memoranda of understanding that may be included as annexes to the GNHC LOU and basis for long-term agreements that guide WFP's Annual Work Plans agreements with its government partners;

**Engaging the Rome Based Agencies in the development and introduction of a common approach to country capacity strengthening and resource mobilisation** that builds government understanding and support for UN contributions and clearly establishes the expected roles and responsibilities of different agencies; and,

**Enhancing the role of civil society organisation partnerships in areas of WFP-supported programming** including with respect to gender mainstreaming, building the organisational and financial capacities of farmer groups, and increasing the voice of beneficiaries in programme monitoring and decision-making.

**Conclusion 7: While aware of the high levels of engagement of rural women in its agricultural portfolio, WFP failed to commit to the transformative opportunities of organisational capacity strengthening for rural women, farmers' groups and cooperatives, build its internal capacities, or explore approaches to gender mainstreaming through government. This was a missed opportunity**

**for the CO to build on the foundational aspects of agriculture contributions toward gender equality and women's empowerment in Bhutan.**

212. In its approach to addressing crosscutting concerns such as gender, WFP failed to give adequate attention to mainstreaming opportunities in its projects and partnerships with government implementers (Finding 4: Annex 17). Greater attention to the opportunities of GEWE could have helped WFP better target agriculture support to the specific needs of women and youths and allow WFP to assume an advocacy and facilitation role with its national and district level counterparts. Unfortunately, the failure to understand the WFP Gender Policy (2015-2020) or ensure the Gender Action Plan was kept up to date led to weaknesses in CO capacities and support to country capacity strengthening. As a result, WFP's wider engagement with its government partners lacked attention to the potential role for WFP to promote gender mainstreaming through its support to government agriculture policies and programming.

213. Looking ahead, gender and disability mainstreaming provide a clear example of where country capacity strengthening at the individual, institutional and national levels may provide a significant contribution to national development efforts. Clear and immediate opportunities exist for gender mainstreaming within the support WFP can provide within the agriculture value proposition. Disability and youth inclusion (including in line with WFP's Disability roadmap) should be considered as WFP seeks to expand its agriculture portfolio in Bhutan and ensure that no one is left behind. Relevant learning identified by the evaluation included the need for attention to,

**Aligning WFP programming and operations with the WFP Gender Policy and WFP Disability Inclusion Roadmap 2020-2021** through an update to the country gender action plan and participation in the gender transformation programme. These strategies and associated tools should provide a foundational pillar for WFP's agriculture value proposition and practical basis for leaving no one behind. They should also specify the specific operational and programmatic responsibilities for gender mainstreaming among WFP staff. To this end, the CO is encouraged to reach out to the Regional Bureau in Bangkok and Gender Office for support and consider participating in the gender transformation programme;

**Integrating gender disaggregated data collection and gender and inclusion considerations in all future monitoring and context analyses for agriculture** to ensure an adaptive and responsive approach to gender mainstreaming is integrated and tracked across all aspects of the portfolio as well as through its emerging partnerships with government, UN and civil society organisations;

**Sensitising governmental officials at local, regional and national levels** concerning gender issues and providing relevant training to support rural women's economic empowerment either directly or in partnership with relevant organisations with appropriate skills;

**Embedding consultations with vulnerable populations at all stages of the programme cycle** in line with WFP's corporate strategies, the Country Office in ways that ensure meaningful contributions of women, youths and other vulnerable groups and/or their representative organisations to the WFP programme;

**Addressing WFP internal capacity strengthening needs for gender equality** by outlining a capacity strengthening strategy to ensure the CO has the requisite capacity and technical skillsets to provide appropriate assistance to its implementing partners in terms of ensuring GEWE and inclusion concerns. This may entail investing in building and/or strengthening capacities of national programme officers such as through the Gender Transformation Programme and seeking out corporate expertise from other groups; and

**Exploring opportunities to address GEWE and inclusion through partnerships** with relevant Government and non-Government entities including the National Commission for Women and Children and its network of gender focal persons across the country and CSOs such as the Tarayana Foundation and Bhutan Association of Women Entrepreneurs (BAOWE).

214. Gender mainstreaming should not be seen as yet another burden for the Bhutan CO. The developmental evaluation has identified a range of opportunities to build on its immediate initiatives in ways that support these recommendations. They include:

- Integrating the GTP within ongoing management and programme processes;

- Bringing agriculture into the scope of the inter-agency Gender Working Group, and gender into the scope of the Development Partner Working Group for Agriculture;
- Building on the support it has been providing to strengthening and digitising the RNR statistical and M&R system by facilitating the integration, collection and use of RNR sex-disaggregated in the sector;
- Including farmer groups as stakeholders in preliminary research work for its Social Behavioural Change Communication (SBCC) programme under the CSP and remaining period of the KOICA project;
- Strengthening WFP support to the country's fresh produce market systems by ensuring the integration of GEWE and inclusion in relevant policy reviews and the development of implementation strategies;
- Integrating targeted actions for women and people with disability into WFP and government partner (DAO-RAMCO) capacity strengthening of farmer-based organisations (e.g. women and youth leadership, managing group finances, accessing credit, value addition and business development);
- Expanding the scope of WFP's partnership with Tarayana Foundation and exploring areas of partnership with other relevant CSOs and youth groups; and,
- Ensuring strategies to support youth engagement address the different needs of female and male youth farmers, entrepreneurs and cooperative members including in value addition and product marketing.

### 3.4. RECOMMENDATIONS

215. Building on the conclusions, the following 5 recommendations focus on action areas where the CO may make significant progress in advancing its future portfolio and value proposition for agriculture, identify appropriate timelines, and identify those who should be responsible for follow-through.

Recommendation	Priority, Responsibility, Deadline
<p><b>Recommendation 1. Expand WFP's role and positioning for agriculture in Bhutan to support tangible development outcomes, enhanced resource contributions and expanded support for country capacity strengthening.</b> This includes,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporating country capacity strengthening into the CO's strategic thinking in the development of WFP Bhutan's programme proposition under its second-generation CSP (2024-2028);</li> <li>• Co-developing and agreeing strategic partnership agreements for agriculture with targeted government departments, private sector entrepreneurs and civil society organisations (Recommendation 3);</li> <li>• Integrating resource mobilisation into WFP strategic support to its government partners (Recommendation 4); and,</li> <li>• Integrating country capacity needs assessments into all planned context analyses to ensure its incorporation in relevant project design, resource mobilisation, partnership and implementation efforts.</li> </ul>	<p>Timeline: Ongoing 2022</p> <p>Responsibility: Head of Office</p> <p>Supported by Agriculture Programme Officer, Communications Officer,</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 2. Advance WFP's value proposition for agriculture in Bhutan through a primary focus on supporting smallholder access to agriculture markets as a basis for the development of effective government, partner and donor relations that draw on the Country Office's areas of recognised leadership.</b> This should include,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing the value proposition and country office identify into a theory of change to guide WFP's future contributions to agriculture in Bhutan, including a clear definition of areas it will not support (boundaries);</li> <li>• Adopting areas of recognised leadership as a platform for communicating its value proposition and dual mandate in Bhutan, and prevent the organisation being pigeonholed as a humanitarian and school feeding programme provider;</li> </ul>	<p>Timeline: September 2022</p> <p>Responsibility: Agriculture Programme Officer</p> <p>Supported by Head of Office, Programme leads and Communications Officer</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthening inter-agency coordination functions including under the Development Partner Working Group for Agriculture, in order to build on WFP's proactive engagement with government, UN, CSO and donor counterparts; and,</li> <li>• Ensuring the cross-cutting integration of nutrition, digital and logistics and supply chain services in future agriculture programming and coordination efforts, including under the 2nd generation CSP (2024-2-28) and through resource mobilisation.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Recommendation 3. Develop a WFP partnership strategy providing a clear focus and direction for the Country Office's engagements with government, UN and CSO counterparts beyond its project activities and that links directly to the future delivery of planned outcome areas in line with the value proposition, such as DAMC and CSO support to rural women's economic empowerment, and youth entrepreneurship.</b> This should include,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adopting a basic partnership framework that identifies the role of direct and indirect partner contributions to WFP's value proposition for agriculture and identifies the actions the CO will need to undertake to ensure formal and informal aspects of its partner relationships are recognised and addressed;</li> <li>• Clearly allocating oversight accountabilities to WFP staff and ensure its partnership approach is collaborative, long-term, and avoids being overly transactional;</li> <li>• Formalising departmental agreements with critical government counterparts such as DAMC as a basis for future WFP collaboration and support (including operational, capacity strengthening and joint resource mobilisation). To this end, consideration should be given to preparation of joint memoranda of understanding that may be included as annexes to the GNHC LOU and basis for long-term agreements that guide WFP's Annual Work Plan agreements with its government partners;</li> <li>• Engaging the Rome Based Agencies, UNDP and ITC in the development and introduction of a common approach to country capacity strengthening and resource mobilisation that builds government understanding and support for UN contributions and clearly establishes the expected roles and responsibilities of different agencies; and,</li> <li>• Enhancing the role of civil society organisation partnerships in areas of WFP-supported field-level programming including with respect to gender mainstreaming, building the organisational and financial capacities of farmer groups, and increasing the voice of beneficiaries in programme monitoring and decision-making.</li> </ul>	<p>Timeline: End of 2022</p> <p>Responsibility: Timeline: Ongoing 2022</p> <p>Responsibility: Head of Office and Agriculture Programme Officer</p> <p>Supported by all Programme leads and Communications Officer</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 4. Establish key organisational capacities to deliver a balanced portfolio of innovation projects, country capacity strengthening and resource mobilisation support for government.</b> This includes,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing a sector capacity strengthening strategy for agriculture that provides clarity on the thematic and technical areas, stakeholders and capacity gaps that will be targeted by WFP. This should be formulated on the basis of joint capacity needs mapping with WFP's departmental counterparts in MOAF (e.g. DAMC-RAMCO, target DAOs and innovation hubs), and focus on WFP's value proposition for agriculture;</li> <li>• Establishing a consolidated approach to resource mobilisation that builds on existing efforts by incorporating tools and approaches that not only address the CO's internal fundraising requirements but also its support to government efforts;</li> </ul>	<p>Timeline: End 2022</p> <p>Responsibility: Head of Office and Agriculture Programme Officer</p> <p>Supported by all Programme leads and Communications Officer</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preparing a consolidated resource mobilisation plan, prioritisation rationale, and clearer delineation of roles and responsibilities across the fundraising cycle;</li> <li>• Ensuring adequate staffing levels and skills are in place across the agriculture portfolio, and/or recruitment of a programme and policy lead, in order to integrate WFP project management, monitoring, policy and partnerships in country capacity strengthening and resource mobilisation.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Recommendation 5. Build on high levels of existing engagement of rural women the agricultural portfolio and commit to the transformative opportunities of organisational capacity strengthening for rural women, farmers' groups and cooperatives.</b></p> <p>At the programme level, this should include,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aligning WFP programming and operations with the WFP Gender Policy and WFP Disability Inclusion Roadmap 2020-2021;</li> <li>• Integrating gender disaggregated data collection and gender and inclusion considerations in all future monitoring and context analyses for agriculture to ensure an adaptive and responsive approach to gender mainstreaming is integrated and tracked across all aspects of the portfolio as well as through its emerging partnerships with government, UN and civil society organisations;</li> <li>• Sensitizing and supporting governmental officials at local, regional and national levels concerning gender issues; and,</li> <li>• Embedding consultations with vulnerable populations at all stages of the programme cycle in line with WFP's corporate strategies, the Country Office in ways that ensure meaningful contributions of women, youths and other vulnerable groups and/or their representative organisations to the WFP programme.</li> </ul> <p>At the organisational level, this should include,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outlining a capacity strengthening strategy to ensure the CO has the requisite technical skillsets to provide appropriate assistance to, or seek assistance from, its implementing partners in terms of ensuring gender mainstreaming and disability inclusion concerns;</li> <li>• Investing in building and/or strengthening capacities of key national programme staff including through country office participation the Gender Transformation Programme;</li> <li>• Exploring opportunities to address GEWE and inclusion through partnerships with relevant Government and non-Government entities including the National Commission for Women and Children and its network of gender focal persons across the country and CSOs such as the Tarayana Foundation and Bhutan Association of Women Entrepreneurs (BAOWE);</li> <li>• Reaching out to the Regional Bureau in Bangkok and Gender Office for support and consider participating in WFP's gender transformation programme; and,</li> <li>• Updating the 2018 country gender action plan to reflect WFP's gender and social empowerment ambitions in advance of its preparation of the next CSP (2023-2027).</li> </ul>	<p>Timeline: Ongoing 2022</p> <p>Responsibility: Agriculture Programme Officer</p> <p>Supported by Head of Office and all Programme leads</p> <p>Timeline: Ongoing 2022</p> <p>Responsibility: Head of Office and Gender Focal Points</p> <p>Supported by all Programme leads</p>

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