



World Food Programme

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# Evaluation of India WFP Country Strategic Plan 2019-2023

## CONTEXT

The world's second most populated country, India is also the sixth largest economy. It is a lower middle-income country with persisting important disparities in human development. Despite the ample coverage of government safety nets, access to a nutritious diet remains a challenge for many. Factors such as gender, disability, age, caste and tribal identity compound vulnerabilities. Climate variability and extremes, and economic slowdowns are key drivers of food insecurity and malnutrition.

## SUBJECT AND FOCUS OF THE EVALUATION

The India Country Strategic Plan (CSP) (2019-2023) focuses on providing technical assistance and country capacity strengthening (CCS) to support India towards its SDG 2 targets, through three strategic outcomes (SO) and four activities. It initially covered the timeframe 2019-2023 and was shortened by one year to align with the UNSDF. The total budget for the CSP was USD 20.02 million, of which 78 percent was funded by December 2021.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE EVALUATION

The evaluation aimed at providing evidence for accountability and learning to inform the design of the next WFP CSP in India. It was conducted between August 2021 and April 2022 and examined WFP's strategic positioning and the extent to which it has made the strategic shift expected by the CSP; WFP's contributions to strategic outcomes; and efficiency and factors explaining performance.

The evaluation covers WFP activities implemented from 2019 to November 2021 as implemented both at the national level and in the states of Kerala, Odisha, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh.

## KEY EVALUATION FINDINGS

**WFP's strategic positioning and role against country priorities, people's needs and WFP strengths**

The CSP was aligned to national goals and strategies thanks to continuous dialogue with institutional partners, which also ensured its adaptation during the pandemic. Yet, strategic positioning was limited by a geographical reach focused on a few states, aligned to modest resources.

WFP has established its comparative advantage among UN agencies by focusing on technical CCS around food-based safety net programmes. Although WFP's enabling role in the country limits its influence on targeting, there has been no systematic assessment of the extent to which the benefits of the capacity strengthening support percolated to the poorest communities, nor has the CSP sufficiently promoted approaches integrating risks of exclusion of disadvantaged groups. Yet, WFP's support to the Government's COVID-19 response attended to advocating for most vulnerable groups to access food safety nets.

### Extent and quality of WFP's specific contribution to strategic outcomes in India

WFP made distinct contributions across all three SOs. Under SO1, WFP's partnership with national and state governments has positively contributed to improving the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of the Targeted Public Distribution System implementation, as well as its supply chain management and targeting. Yet, WFP could have more proactively advocated to promote adequate investments at state level to scale-up some of the technical innovations.

Under SO2, WFP's contributed to sensitizing on and mainstreaming rice fortification in all the three of the Government's food based safety nets; to scaling-up take-home ration (THR) production, and to strengthening national school feeding programme staff capacity. A more proactive advocacy by WFP to the Government could help ensure the financial viability of THR units, which are negatively affected by inflation.

Under SO3 Activity 3, leveraging on the government's push for evidence-based decision making, WFP analyses and capacities strengthening promoted use of food security and nutrition evidence for policy making. However, limited dissemination and continuity between analyses restricted impact. And refocusing on urban food insecurity, which gained prominence during the pandemic, would be relevant.

Under SO3 Activity 4, WFP strengthened Government capacities for disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation and facilitated practice exchanges between India and other countries under South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC). Re-prioritizations due to COVID-19 disruptions limited results.

While playing an enabling role, WFP contributed to strengthening national food safety nets' protection and accountability mechanisms and raising enhancing beneficiaries' awareness about their entitlements. WFP India sought environmental co-benefits of its programmes, while ensuring its operations do not harm the environment.

WFP has integrated considerations of gender equality and women's empowerment across SOs. It could more systematically integrate a gender lens in programmes and approaches and make better use of evidence on gender and inclusion through more systematic dissemination and advocacy.

The sustainability of results and innovations, and required government ownership remain dependent on government funding.

### **WFP's efficient use of resources in contributing to CSP outputs and strategic outcomes**

The CSP has generally delivered outputs according to plan. Partial delivery of some was due to pandemic related disruptions, although COVID-19 also created opportunities to increase engagement and communication with partners.

The overall cost-efficiency of CCS in India could not be assessed. However, the evaluation found that the tech-based innovative solutions, pilot-based approach, and secondment of full-time staff to government departments, were cost-efficient modalities to reach indirect beneficiaries and impact at scale. And rationalization of costs have been an integral feature of most of the technical CCS activities undertaken under the CSP.

### **Factors that explain WFP performance and the extent to which it has made the strategic shift expected by the CSP**

The CSP drew extensively on studies, food security and nutrition assessments, reviews and evaluations. Undertaking analyses at the state-level could have enabled WFP to better advocate for food security and nutrition needs where they are highest.

Modest and uncertain funding has adversely affected WFP's capacity to make a significant contribution to CCS in India. Resources for financing studies, assessments, and evaluations (under SO3) were the least forthcoming.

WFP has forged solid and strategic partnerships with national and state governments, research and private sector partners, and with NGOs as part of its support to the Government's response to COVID-19. A broader coalition of partnerships, including other relevant Departments and Ministries and Non governmental organisations could have improved results.

The CSP has proved flexible enough to adapt to new requirements and adapt to the COVID-19 crisis.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Overall Assessment**

WFP maintained its strategic relevance and demonstrated flexibility in responding to emerging needs, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Maintaining close links with government counterparts driven the CSP's strategic positioning, through technical assistance and capacity strengthening. Supporting the food-based safety net programmes' supply chain and systems was

relevant and exploration of technology-based solutions could also be very appropriate at state governments levels.

Subject to the availability of resources, WFP's contribution in India can be further amplified by expanding engagement in areas emerging as priorities for governments, replicating successful interventions in new states where needs are high, and expanding WFP's support to evidence generation to more disaggregated levels of decision-making.

WFP has been successful in supporting the Government to make their programmes and systems more efficient and effective. It contributed to both the supply and demand for quality foods and addressed institutional challenges as well as capacity gaps. WFP also established the importance of rigorous evidence and evaluation and promoted knowledge exchanges between India and neighboring countries.

Further efforts to generate evidence would also support advocacy for more inclusive and gender-sensitive food-based safety net programmes delivery by government, unveiling challenges faced by disadvantaged groups in accessing their entitlements under government programmes.

More targeted efforts to strengthen public policy around specific themes can amplify WFP's impacts on the ground and further galvanize support, including within the UN System, towards SDG 2. WFP can contribute further to national and state level outcomes by pro-actively sharing lessons learned, convening, and advocating for greater visibility of food security and nutrition challenges at the national and state.

Effective partnerships with Governments have been key to the CSP successes. Closer collaborations with certain governmental and non-governmental institutions offers potential avenues for addressing the needs for greater impact to better advance the SDG2 agenda and Leaving No-One Behind.

The CO has mobilised sufficient funds for the current level of operations in India, and active strategies to mobilize resources from new sources are appropriate and needed to further efforts.

### **Recommendations**

**Recommendation 1.** Consolidate, build on successes, and develop medium-term strategies and approaches based on capacity needs assessments for each CSP Outcome in the new CSP, integrating innovation and SSTC within all SO.

**Recommendation 2.** Expand the footprint of CCS initiatives across India for greater impact on the SDG2 agenda.

**Recommendation 3.** Step up on existing efforts to effectively integrate and strengthen gender equality, empowerment, and inclusive approaches.

**Recommendation 4.** Develop long-term strategic collaborations with stakeholders to support efforts towards addressing FSN challenges and 'leave no one behind.'

**Recommendation 5.** Actively pursue the strategies in place for mobilizing additional resources to further WFP's work in other geographic and thematic areas.

**Recommendation 6.** Support the development, in collaboration with the RB and HQ, of immediate and intermediate CCS outcome level indicators to assess WFP's contribution to CCS.