



World Food Programme

SAVING LIVES  
CHANGING LIVES

# Evaluation of Sri Lanka WFP Country Strategic Plan 2018-2022

## CONTEXT

Sri Lanka is a lower-middle-income country. It has several social safety net programmes and made significant progress in reducing hunger. By 2016, the number of poor had been reduced by half. However, past gains in poverty reduction and food security face setbacks due to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and the economic crisis.

## SUBJECT AND FOCUS OF THE EVALUATION

Through this Country Strategic Plan (CSP), WFP planned to gradually shift from direct delivery to technical assistance and advocacy role to address the underlying causes of food security and malnutrition and to support longer-term recovery and resilience while maintaining emergency-response capacity. Through four strategic outcomes, WFP supported country capacity strengthening, including to the national school meals programme and provided in-kind food and cash-based transfers (CBT).

The total budget for the CSP was USD 53.97 million, of which 69 percent was funded by 2021.

## OBJECTIVES AND USERS OF THE EVALUATION

The evaluation was commissioned by the Independent Office of Evaluation to provide evaluative evidence for accountability and learning to inform the design of the next WFP CSP in Sri Lanka. It covers WFP activities implemented from 2018 to 2021.

It was conducted between August 2021 and May 2022 to assess WFP's strategic positioning and role and the extent to which WFP made the strategic shift expected by the CSP; WFP's contributions to strategic outcomes; efficiency and factors that explained WFP performance.

The main users for this evaluation are the WFP Sri Lanka Country Office, the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, WFP headquarters technical divisions, the Government of Sri Lanka and other WFP Sri Lanka stakeholders.

## KEY EVALUATION FINDINGS

### WFP's strategic position, role and specific contribution based on country priorities and people's needs as well as WFP's strengths

The CSP was based on an in-depth country analysis and was well aligned with the overarching government policy frameworks and sector-specific strategies and plans related to achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2 and with cross-cutting linkages to SDGs 1, 3, 4, 5, 13 and 17.

Capacity strengthening initiatives focused on strategy and policy-oriented work at national level. Where CSP activities were implemented through national social protection programmes, WFP targeted the most vulnerable. However, some livelihood activities were designed for the more established farmers to assure that the livelihood assets offered could be successfully used.

WFP successfully maintained its relevance over time adapting its interventions to rapid contextual changes such as COVID-19.

The CSP was implemented in close partnership with the Government of Sri Lanka. WFP also formed project-specific partnerships with other United Nations agencies.

### Extent and quality of WFP's specific contribution to CSP strategic outcomes in Sri Lanka

Strategic Outcome 1 was not fully activated during the period 2018-2021 since the government did not request this support. As part of the pandemic response, however, WFP provided take-home rations to students. As the two-week rations was likely shared with the family, the potential nutritional impact on the most vulnerable (pregnant and lactating women and youngest children) was probably limited.

Direct food assistance under Strategic Outcome 2 was limited, unpredictable, and donor and supply driven. During school closures due to the pandemic, WFP supported the provision of take-home rations, however, there was no evidence that in-kind food distributions led to educational or nutritional outcomes. WFP's home-grown school feeding (HGSF) pilot successfully provided nutritious meals to school children although the activity was unremunerative for some women caterers.

Under Strategic Outcome 3, WFP successfully advocated for the government to improve the quality of Thripasha. WFP also successfully delivered technical assistance to strengthen government capacity. Consequently, children under 5 and pregnant and lactating women likely benefited. However, activities were often stalled due to lack of multi-year funding and consistent follow-up for sustained change.

Strategic Outcome 4 was largely successful. Livelihood activities were generally well received by targeted farmers. The cash-for-work component provided emergency assistance to vulnerable people affected by the economic downturn and COVID crisis. Trainings to improve national disaster action planning and district response capacity of government staff were effective.

Beneficiaries accessed assistance in a dignified manner without facing protection or safety challenges. A disability inclusion training was conducted for the country office staff.

Gender was mainstreamed in the CSP, including through ensuring equal access of men and women to trainings, focused nutrition training for women and selecting women as equal decision-makers under all projects. However, more work is needed for the CSP to be considered gender transformative.

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

The utilization rate of available resources varied from 66 percent (Strategic Outcome 2) and 81 percent (Strategic Outcome 4). Some implementation delays were faced due to uncertain funding or multilevel approvals and slow cashflow through complex government processes.

The CSP's targeting considered vulnerability though some activities did not target the most vulnerable especially pregnant and lactating women and children under two.

The Government covered some of CSP implementation costs and this leverage added to WFP's cost-efficiency although this was somewhat offset by complex government structures, staff capacity and simultaneous involvement and numerous activities.

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

The country office was successful in mobilizing adequate, predictable, and flexible resources. On the other hand, since several initiatives were one-off or short-term it adversely affected their prospects for long-term sustainability.

The CSP was adaptable, evident in its response to several events, including the pandemic. WFP was able to respond to the changing context by increasing support to the vulnerable through budget revisions and moving funds across Strategic Outcomes when permitted by donors.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Overall Assessment**

The CSP was well aligned with national and UN priorities and demonstrated strong relationships with government.

WFP's shift to nutrition mainstreaming in all Strategic Outcomes and to country capacity strengthening was highly relevant given the risk of natural disasters, persistent high levels of undernutrition and the uncertain economic situation.

The performance of the CSP's strategic outcomes on nutrition and resilience were appreciated by stakeholders. However, WFP needs to narrow the CSP's strategic focus on its comparative advantages.

WFP was perceived by the Government and UN agencies, as proactive, responsive, and flexible. However, there is a need to balance ability to adapt and maintaining overall coherence and alignment with the CSP strategy.

While WFP's approach to targeting was good, it could not always serve some of the most vulnerable.

WFP's performance was on track in cross-cutting aspects such as protection and accountability to affected populations. There were good strides forward in mainstreaming gender equality and women's empowerment, but more attention was needed to achieve the CSP gender goals.

The sustainability of Strategic Outcomes' achievements remains uncertain mainly because of the short-term nature of projects, funding uncertainties, lack of strategic tie-ups with other development partners and the civil society.

Sustained collaboration between WFP and other UN partners is needed to build an evidence-base and support momentum for nutrition, social protection, school feeding and disaster management and preparedness.

### **Recommendations**

**Recommendation 1:** Develop the next WFP CSP building on WFP's core mandates and comparative advantages that align with government priority needs

**Recommendation 2:** Maximize longer-term impact of WFP programming and enhance coherence among strategic outcomes and activities and their gender and nutrition sensitivity

**Recommendation 3:** Strengthen strategic and operational partnership with the Government in alignment with other UN agencies

**Recommendation 4:** Continue with country capacity strengthening initiatives, focusing on government prioritized sectoral gaps

**Recommendation 5:** Review targeting to ensure alignment with latest evidence and CSP goals, and make commitment to the most vulnerable more explicit.