



World Food
Programme

SAVING
LIVES
CHANGING
LIVES

COOPERATING PARTNERS MANAGEMENT

STRATEGY

**Regional Bureau for Eastern Africa
Nairobi, Kenya (RBN)**

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BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

In response to the Agenda for Humanity and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, WFP shifted its strategic orientation in 2016 and has since been working on reorienting organization's strategic objectives as well as programmatic and administrative mechanisms for cooperating partnerships. At the corporate level, WFP has been committed to the Grand Bargain commitments, the shift towards country-level and multi-year strategic planning, and the increased focus on long-term engagement with national partners.

WFP emphasizes partnerships as essential not only for ending hunger, but for realizing all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and it strives to be a credible and relevant partner across the humanitarian and development systems. WFP works with a vast network of partners, both national and international, on the design and implementation of its strategies, policies, programmes and projects.

An external audit of WFP's management of cooperating partners took place at the HQ level in 2020 and 2021. It identified several gaps in the areas of business process, strategic engagement and capacity development. In its management response, WFP accepted all recommendations made by the audit.

To address these gaps and establish baselines in Eastern Africa region, the Regional Bureau Nairobi (RBN) commissioned a thematic evaluation of cooperating partnerships in 2021. The evaluation confirmed the audit findings and highlighted localization agenda and engagement with women-led and organizations mandated for working on gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE) as additional areas in cooperating partners management that needed improvement.

The purpose of WFP Regional Cooperating Partners (CP) Management Strategy is to outline the current and future approach to CP management in the Regional Bureau Nairobi (RBN) and country offices in Eastern Africa region, in a consistent and systematic way. The strategy is informed by the corporate guiding frameworks, country and regional evaluations and audits of CP management practices, discussions with country office and RBN staff involved in cooperating partners management, and consultations with the HQ.

The strategy will inform the development of the second generation of country strategic plans (CSPs) and is timely in this respect. Kenya and Sudan are to start the new CSPs cycle in 2023; Rwanda, Burundi and Djibouti in 2024; Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan and Uganda in 2025.

The strategy has two goals:

- **More effective and efficient delivery of Country Strategic Plans and achievement of WFP global Strategic Plan results.**
- **Better alignment with long-term National Development Plans to ensure sustainability.**

The zero-hunger goal cannot be achieved in isolation, and collaboration among different actors is essential for results across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. WFP RBN recognizes that the efficiency and effectiveness with which we manage relationships with our cooperating partners has a direct impact on the quality and sustainability of our work. This in turn determines the value that WFP adds to the national development and peace building in the region.

This regional strategy outlines the need for a WFP-wide CP management approach that requires an evolution of our work culture and roles, as well as existing processes and systems, focusing on establishing the minimum consistent infrastructure to increase coordination, formalize roles, standardize common processes and bring together headquarters and country systems.

REGIONAL CONTEXT – CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The WFP RBN oversees operations in ten developing, low- and middle-income countries in the Eastern Africa region: Burundi, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda.

The Eastern Africa region is one of the most food-insecure regions in the world. Since 2016, the region has experienced high levels of food insecurity, driven by widespread conflict/ insecurity and related displacement, weather-related shocks and economic crisis. According to the Global Food Crisis Report of 2022, three of the world's eight largest food crises were from this region – Ethiopia, Sudan and South Sudan. The region contains 23% of the global population facing crisis or worse food insecurity, with an estimated 43.6 million people across the region food insecure in 2021. Furthermore, nearly 90% of the global population facing catastrophe famine like conditions are found in East Africa as well.

The countries in which RBN operates have diverse institutional contexts with different governance structures that entail different levels and strategic orientation of WFP engagement. Three countries – South Sudan, Sudan and Somalia – have active conflict and/or persistent ethnic tension, as well as inadequate policies, institutional frameworks and capacities for Emergency Preparedness and Response (EPR). Burundi and Eritrea are characterized by an emerging strong central government, but weak institutional capacity to address EPR and food insecurity. Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Djibouti and Ethiopia have higher level GDP, generally peaceful country context (although there is active conflict in some parts of Ethiopia) and government that is able to play its EPR role.

In this context, RBN has received a budget of USD 6.3 billion and reached over 30 million people in the past three years. Most of these funds are implemented via cooperating partners. In the past three years, WFP contracted almost 400 cooperating partners in the Eastern Africa region.

There are several ongoing initiatives that this strategy builds on and complements.

At the global level, WFP has been making efforts to streamline and standardize cooperating partners management practices by introducing new tools and guidelines. The WFP HQ has also been providing support for their implementation. In Eastern Africa region, the country offices have, to different extents, adopted most of the tools and they have been making efforts to align with the corporate principles of 'good' partnership.

Gender and protection accountabilities have been enhanced in partnership Field Level Agreements (FLA) and other tools. Cooperating partnerships in the region are aligned with the country strategic plans and they respond to evolving country contexts. Most country offices have begun transitioning to multi-year field level agreements. The cooperating partners selection and performance management processes have become more standardized. The communication with cooperating partners has improved to a certain extent.

The establishment of a dedicated cooperating partner management (CP Mgmt.) team at the RBN has enabled the bureau to increase its focus on effective support and guidance to country offices on FLA management, risk management and strategic engagement with cooperating partners. In some country offices, the establishment of CP Mgmt. teams and the commitment of senior management has enabled them to make progress in addressing the transactional and strategic aspects of partnerships. The RBN has provided technical support and oversight of the country offices, as well as has provided guidance and learning opportunities, and facilitated information sharing among the country offices.

Despite the notable efforts and progress, there remain challenges and gaps in practice that need to be addressed. Few efforts in the country offices have focused on increasing strategic partnerships with cooperating partners, capacity strengthening of cooperating partners and ensuring a greater focus on gender equality and women's empowerment. No systematic efforts have been made to engage more with local organizations, women's organizations, women-led organizations, GEWE-mandated organizations and organizations prioritising gender transformative approaches in their work. Some country offices are still using short-term field level agreements as a common practice.

Apart from the selection process, in other stages of the partnership management cycle there has been little to no significant improvement in all country offices. Few country offices have done a comprehensive scoping for new prospective partnerships. Efficiency of the contracting process has not improved. Delays in financial processes, disbursements of payments and delivery of commodities remains a major challenge. There is no adequate collaboration with other UN agencies to harmonize cooperating partners management practices. Data management, digitization and contracting tools and procedures remain key limitation as well. Inadequate gender capacity in country offices has limited how cooperating partners are used to support more gender-transformative programming.

GUIDING FRAMEWORKS

Several global and corporate frameworks call for more strategic engagement with local actors involved in the food security sector. They provide direction, guidance and, to some extent, a monitoring system to make it possible to measure progress.

WFP strongly supports **the Grand Bargain 2.0 (2021)** and its commitments to transparency, localization, harmonized reporting, flexibility of funding and reduced management costs. Through this, WFP commits to: i) increasing and supporting multi-year investment in the institutional capacities of local and national responders¹; ii) working to remove or reduce barriers for partnering with local and national responders; and lessening their administrative burden; iii) supporting and complementing national coordination mechanisms; and including local and national responders in international coordination mechanisms; iv) channelling at least 25 per cent of humanitarian funding to local and national responders as directly as possible²; and v) making greater use of different funding tools including pooled funds.

The Grand Bargain emphasizes support for leadership, delivery and capacity of local responders and participation of affected communities in addressing their own humanitarian needs as the main enabling priority. It calls for effectiveness, visibility, risk sharing, transparency and accountability of all stakeholders. It reinforces the importance of dedicated resources, intentionality and enabling engagement platforms for effective engagement of local actors.

The commitment to the Grand Bargain is fully reflected in the **WFP Strategic Plan 2022-2025**. WFP commits to supporting governments, other United Nations entities, international financial institutions, NGOs, civil society and the private sector in areas of its expertise and through its operational footprint, ensuring alignment with national priorities, strengthened collaboration, coherence and greater synergies. The Strategic Plan makes commitments towards multi-year funding, reviewing the working modalities and tools to streamline the administrative burden of partnerships, investing in the long-term institutional capacity of local actors, promoting more equal partnerships and ensuring better integration with local coordination mechanisms. It also commits to prioritizing partnerships with national and local organizations, including women's and youth groups, and strengthening their long-term sustainability as well as depth of impact.

WFP Corporate Results Framework 2022–2025 includes indicators that measure cooperating partnership management: i) number of beneficiaries reached through private sector partnerships; ii) percentage of WFP funding to cooperating partners, awarded as directly as possible to local and national responders; and iii) number of WFP country offices adopting the United Nations Partner Portal to harmonize United Nations processes for engaging civil society organizations/non-governmental organizations and reduce duplicate information reviews/requests of partners.

WFP Gender Policy 2022 identifies enhanced and equitable participation and strengthened leadership and decision making among its priorities that provide foundation on gender best practices. It puts partnerships at the centre of WFP's efforts to accelerate progress in gender equality and women's empowerment. It commits to partnering with the international, national and local actors who possess comparative advantages to drive gender results in specific countries or contexts. It calls for partnerships that seek to leverage financing for gender results and expects all employees to work with partners and beneficiaries to support a people-centred model of delivering assistance to and enabling the participation of the individuals, communities and societies with which WFP works. Through this policy, WFP has committed to a more strategic approach and to strengthening partnerships with local and national governments, other UN entities, public and private institutions, NGOs and gender mandated, feminist and women's civil society organizations that are best positioned as first responders and key development partners in humanitarian settings.

WFP Anti-Fraud and Anti-Corruption Policy and Related Guidance (2021) provides a definition of cooperating partners to include government entities, non-governmental organizations and United Nations organizations. It requires that WFP Office/Division Directors ensure that contractual arrangements with any cooperating partners include appropriate provisions for countering fraud and corruption. It also calls on WFP to require cooperating partners to safeguard WFP

1 IASC Humanitarian Financing Task Team, Localisation Marker Working Group provides a detailed definition of 'local and national actors' and it includes: local and national non-state actors (national NGOs/CSOs/FBOs; local NGOs/CSOs/FBOs; Red Cross/ Red Crescent National Societies; local and national private sector organisations) as well as national and sub-national state actors (national and local governments). https://interagencystand-ingcommittee.org/system/files/hftt_localisation_marker_definitions_paper_24_january_2018.pdf

2 IASC Humanitarian Financing Task Team, Localisation Marker Working Group provides a detailed definition of 'as directly as possible' and it includes: i) funding channelled through a pooled fund that is directly accessed by national and local actors; and ii) funding to a single international aid organisation (including a federated/membership organisation) that reaches a local/national actor directly from that one intermediary. https://interagencystand-ingcommittee.org/system/files/hftt_localisation_marker_definitions_paper_24_january_2018.pdf

resources as well as to establish robust policies and procedures for combatting fraud and corruption, and to promptly report to WFP any reasonably suspected case or any attempts thereof. The policy states that information on risks must be communicated to relevant stakeholders, including donors and cooperating partners, together with an assessment of the extent to which the risks can be mitigated. Standards of conduct for cooperating partners are set forth in their agreements. Country Offices are required to have strong internal control systems, to follow rigorous selection procedures for cooperating partners and conduct their regular performance monitoring (performance assessments, complaint and feedback mechanisms).

Through its **Protection and Accountability Policy (2020)**, WFP commits to applying protection understanding in all its programmes and operations. This is to be achieved through the capacity building of its employees as well as cooperating partners, and through the inclusion of protection requirements in its field agreements with cooperating partners. The policy emphasizes that the cooperating partners are to be held to the same protection standards as WFP. It also underscores the importance of strategic partnerships as critical for successful programming and for achieving long-term development outcomes. The policy stresses that the exchange of information on protection needs and risks is necessary to inform multisectoral and multidisciplinary strategies and interventions. It calls for comprehensive context analyses, that include actor mapping, as well as conflict and protection analysis, to inform when and how WFP should partner or coordinate with other actors, including its cooperating partners and other local actors, and to help determine what WFP's protection role should be within these partnerships and relationships. At the same time, such analyses are also instructive in identifying critical gaps that need to be addressed through nuanced and tailored programming that results in strengthened food security, gender and protection outcomes.

WFP **Community Engagement Strategy for Accountability to Affected Populations (2021-2026)** prioritizes relevant and appropriate partnerships that accelerate mutually reinforcing accountability. Through this strategy, WFP commits to ensuring that local accountability structures are integrated in programme design by co-creating its programmes with its cooperating partners and local actors in the field. It also commits to better collaboration through stronger documentation and information sharing with cooperating partners, local actors and other inter-agency coordination fora, which will allow structural pathways to incentivize sustained integration of accountability to affected population practices in the programme cycle.

WFP **Global Partnership Strategy 2014-2017** calls for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment and makes a commitment to tracking the effectiveness of partnerships to achieve this. Through this strategy, WFP promotes a strategic focus on partnerships, obtaining and providing a greater value from them and a consistent approach to their selection, maintenance, monitoring, evaluation and reporting. It calls for a change in organizational culture and commits to consulting and engaging communities at an early stage, exploring more innovative local partnerships, a greater focus on listening to and understanding long-term needs, identifying partners who can deliver complementary skills to those of WFP, and being prepared to contribute to partnerships and programmes without assuming a directive role. It also identifies critical elements to support this change: focus on relationship management with partners, developing staff skills and capacity to partner effectively, supporting staff with adequate resources to build long-term partnerships, and implementation support to offices and staff on partnerships – tools, guidance and advice.

WFP **Strategy on Prevention and Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) 2021-2023** reinforces the zero-tolerance commitment towards sexual exploitation and abuse. It commits to safeguarding people WFP serves and enabling safe access to WFP programmes and operations without being subject to sexual exploitation or sexual abuse by WFP employees or partners. One of its objectives is to strengthen the capacity of WFP employees and partners to identify, prevent and respond to SEA. The strategy emphasizes an obligation on WFP managers to ensure that WFP country offices and cooperating partners inform all people requiring assistance or at risk of SEA of the commitment on prevention of SEA, the standards of behaviour of UN and partner personnel, and where and how to report any misconduct by staff of WFP or its partners. It also requires that a written undertaking of these standards is received and accepted by cooperating partners and beneficiaries.

WFP **Policy on Country Strategic Plans 2016** calls for providing humanitarian assistance in ways that support the recovery of long-term development. It emphasizes that effective responses need to consider differing needs of women, men, girls and boys and their communities. It also requires gender equality and women's empowerment to be incorporated in country strategic plans as well as the performance assessment to include progress towards gender equality.

WFP **Strategy for Partnership Engagement with Non-Governmental Entities 2020-2025** sets a new course for WFP. It looks to business sector actors primarily for technical partnerships that utilize their expertise, capability and advocacy support, for accelerating progress towards zero hunger. It also emphasizes that business sector partners can simultaneously have both a partner relationship and a procurement relationship with WFP. It stresses that partnership and engagement with these entities must be needs-based, focused on sustainability, transparency and accountability, as well as promote innovative engagement models that are solution oriented for increased positive impact for WFP's beneficiaries. To improve the efficacy of technical partnerships, the strategy reinforces the focus on developing and maintaining long-term relationships instead of engaging in short-lived one-off partnerships. With this strategy, WFP commits to investing in restructuring existing resources and capabilities to establish a dedicated team with the skills and expertise needed for technical partnerships with the business sector that is separate from business sector fundraising, including in regional bureaux.

WFP framework for **Strengthening Strategic Engagement with Governments in Support of National Development 2020** promotes a more systematic engagement with national governments in programme countries as opposed to ad hoc and transactional. It stresses the advisory role of WFP, value addition and strengthening country implementation capacity. With this strategy, WFP commits to consistent engagement in UN coordination mechanisms, working through inter-agency working groups and task forces on SDGs implementation and development issues. The framework calls for adopting a demand-driven as opposed to supply-driven approach to food security assistance, adjusting the discourse to ongoing development paradigms, and adopting the "listen-first" approach.

WFP **Guidance on Capacity Strengthening of Civil Society 2017** recommends that capacity strengthening investments can take place alongside and reinforce other activities in Field Level Agreements. It promotes a "beyond business as usual" approach to capacity strengthening that is less transactional, more collaborative, more long-term and focused on enhancing sustainable national zero hunger solutions. It reinforces the whole of society approach and emphasizes the cross-learning, harmonisation and alignment of investments into civil society capacity alongside investments in host government counterparts as critical for coherent and effective capacity strengthening. This guidance underscores a long-term, flexible and adaptive approach, as well as institutional over individual capacity. It also recognizes the need for country offices to have expertise to transfer knowledge, which goes beyond having the technical know-how, and it recommends that country offices should have a dedicated capacity strengthening focal point to comprehensively mainstream these investments, promote their adaptation and advance their implementation.

WFP **Country Capacity Strengthening Policy 2022** describes the strengthening of national capacities and local-level engagement as factors that enable WFP to deliver on its commitments to affected populations and gender equity. It emphasizes partnerships across the whole of society that maximize the expertise of different actors, as well as commitment and continuity in engagements to build mutual trust among partners. It highlights pathways for capacity change that include training local nongovernmental organization staff on how to integrate gender and nutrition into market analysis, as well as co-convening a neutral platform for brokering partnerships and collaboration between actors in the business community and all actors on nutrition.

WFP **Corporate Guidance on NGO Partnership Management 2021** reinforces the 'whole of society' approach and recognizes the necessary shift in mindsets. It emphasizes the need to question the value of existing partnerships to deliver new country strategic plans and to cast the "partnership net" wider, to explore new and stronger partnerships and their potential to deliver results more effectively to the people we serve, focusing on impact and complementarity. It calls for capacity strengthening investments to develop sustainable national capabilities, both institutionally and programmatically (gender, protection, programming, finance). The guidance recognizes that the existing international and national NGOs may be the "go-to" partners for emergency response, but for other long-standing WFP activities, WFP's action across the full humanitarian/development spectrum requires new partners with skill sets not previously needed. It promotes the use of longer-term FLAs whenever possible, as well as their optimal tracking and monitoring process. Furthermore, the guidance requires all country offices to have dedicated CP management structures, SOPs endorsed by senior management, adequate distribution of roles to apply internal controls at Field Office, Area office and Country Office levels.

THE STRATEGY

WFP defines a **cooperating partner as a non-profit entity that enters into a contractual relationship with WFP for the purpose of assisting in the performance of WFP's work (including government entities, non-governmental organizations and United Nations organizations)**. This is formulated in the Revised Anti-Fraud and Anti-Corruption Policy, adopted by the Board in June 2021. For the purpose of this strategy, RBN expands this definition to include other types of organizations that the COs in the region partner with, such as **academia, research institutions, social enterprises and other non-standard engagements**.

The *fit-for-purpose* and *whole of society* approach is at the core of the strategy. The strategy requires the commitment of all staff at RBN and country offices for successful implementation. The strategy is a living document, and it will be reviewed after three years and updated based on lessons learnt.

Core Partnership Values and Guiding Principles

WFP RBN reiterates a set of key partnership principles as the basis for practical action³. All cooperating partnerships need to be clearly articulated and jointly developed based on the following guiding principles:

1. **Equity** - Equity requires mutual respect between members of the partnership irrespective of size and power. The participants must respect each other's mandates, obligations and independence and recognize each other's constraints and commitments. Mutual respect must not preclude organizations from engaging in constructive dissent.
2. **Impartiality, Transparency, Accountability** - Transparency is achieved through dialogue (on equal footing), with an emphasis on early consultations and early sharing of information. Communications and transparency, including financial transparency, increase the level of trust among organizations.
3. **Result-oriented approach** - Effective development and humanitarian action must be reality-based, action-oriented and cost-effective. This requires result-oriented coordination based on effective capabilities and concrete operational capacities. It also requires the commitment to the 'do no harm' approach, making sure that none of the partnership participants normalize or perpetuate harmful gender norms, as well as making sure that WFP does not contribute to country-level systems that may be excluding some of the most valuable women's organizations.
4. **Integrity and responsibility** - Organizations have an ethical obligation to each other to accomplish their tasks responsibly, with integrity and in a relevant and appropriate way. They must make sure they commit to activities only when they have the means, competencies, skills and capacity to deliver on their commitments. Decisive and robust prevention of abuses committed by humanitarians must also be a constant effort. Roles and responsibilities must be clearly defined at the start of the partnership.
5. **Complementarity and partnership benefit** - The diversity of the humanitarian community is an asset if we build on our comparative advantages and complement each other's contributions. Local capacity is one of the main assets to enhance and on which to build. Whenever possible, humanitarian organizations should strive to make it an integral part in emergency response. Language and cultural barriers must be overcome. A medium to long-term perspective should be adopted whenever possible.

Strategic Objectives

The WFP RBN CP Management Strategy has three objectives:

1. Improved effectiveness and efficiency of delivery.
2. Strengthened strategic engagement to ensure sustainability of results.
3. Improved accountability and transparency in resource management.

³ Adapted from the WFP Global Partnership Strategy 2014-2017.

Theory of Change

The strategy is anchored in five interconnected themes and the following changes need to happen in all of them if the objectives of this strategy are to be achieved:

1. Business process

- The business process for CP management must be further standardized and streamlined.
- The digitization of CP management cycle should be further enhanced.
- Data on all aspects of CP management should be available and easily accessible.
- Uptake of revised CP management practices must be increased in country offices.

2. Strategic engagement

- Shift in mindsets in country offices and increased focus on long-term collaborative partnerships are necessary, as opposed to transactional and short-term ones.
- Increased levels of commitment and expertise in strategic CP management among staff in country offices is needed.

3. Institutional capacity development

- Strengthened organizational and financial capacities of cooperating partners (human resources, skills and knowledge, logistical and financial management, equipment) are necessary.

4. Gender transformative programming

- Increased engagement with women's organizations, women-led organizations, organizations mandated with gender equality and women's empowerment, and organizations prioritising gender transformative approaches in their work is critical.
- Increased baseline knowledge and capacity for CO teams to be able to seek out the right partners, critically assess their fitness for becoming a partner, ensuring we are not perpetuating any harmful or exclusionary dynamics in whom we partner with.

5. Localisation

- Increased and enhanced engagement with local actors is needed, particularly with those that have a strong track record in the community and are well respected / valued by the community.

The strategic objectives can only be realized through significant commitment to and progress in all five areas. The synergies are needed and progress in each area requires, and contributes to, the achievement of the others.

For example, strategic engagement can only be realised when the business process is efficient (e.g. reduced administrative burden and timely payments). Localization can only be realised when local actors have the institutional capacity to manage the resources provided to them. Gender transformative results can only be realised if women's/women-led/GEWE-mandated/gender transformative organizations are involved in the programme design and implementation, and they can only be meaningfully involved if WFP country offices know and understand who they are, where they operate and what their roles are in respective communities, as well as have the institutional capacity to sustain operations. The contributions of local actors, including women's/women-led/GEWE-mandated/gender transformative organizations, can only be sustainable if they have the institutional capacity to keep contributing long term. Their capacity, in turn, can only be strengthened if WFP country offices recognize their strategic value for their own interventions and invest in building this capacity.

For the purpose of this strategy, RBN adopts the following gender related definitions:

- *Women's organizations* refer to all voluntary organizations, led and managed by women, that promote women's welfare and gender equality. This definition includes a variety of women's organizations, ranging from grassroots women's groups to national advocacy organizations designed to influence public policies and that operate in the interests of all women and gender equality.
- *Women-led organizations* refer to any non-governmental, non-for-profit and apolitical organization a majority or two-thirds of whose board members (including the chair) are female, and which focuses on women and girls as a primary target of programming.

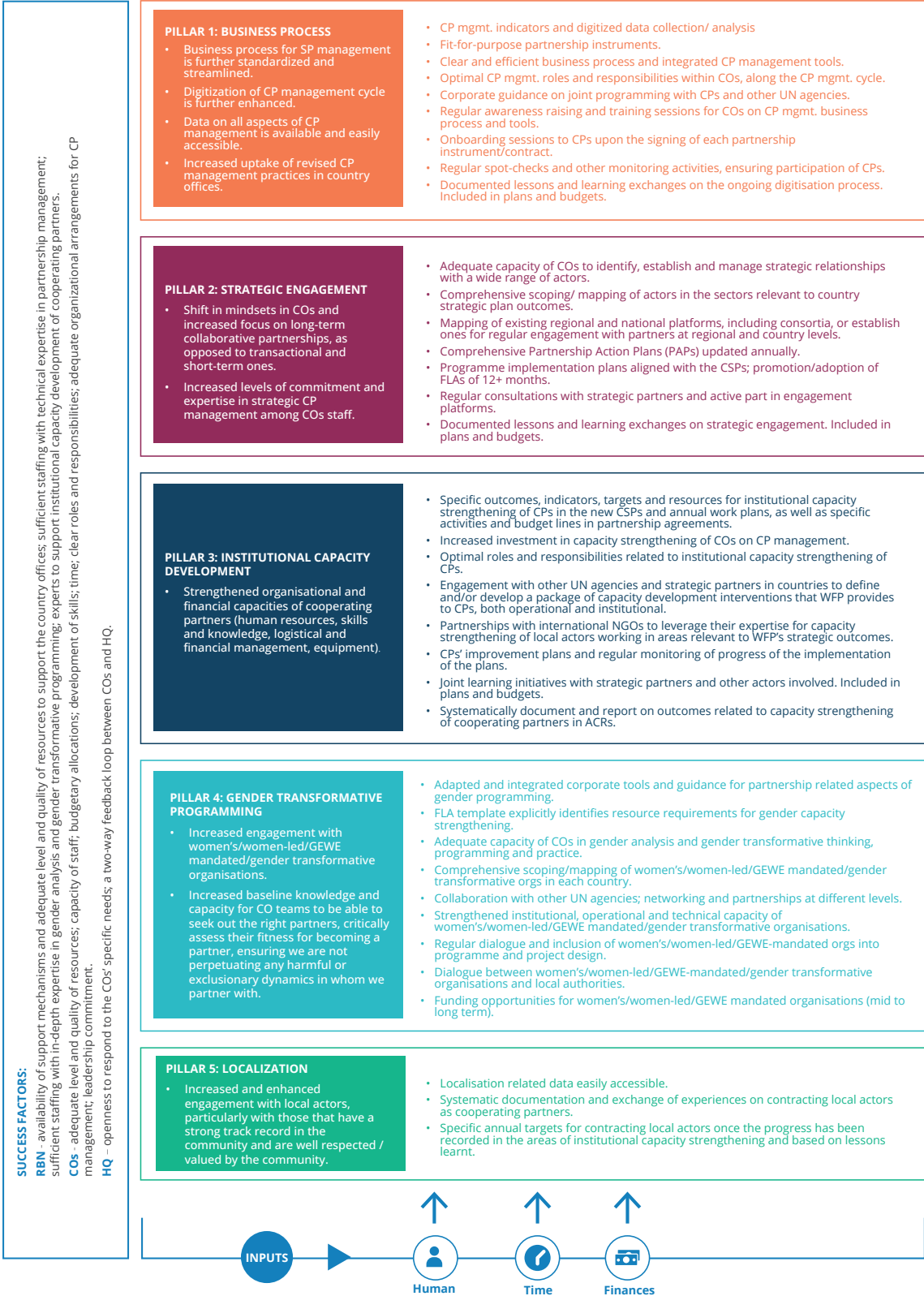
- *Organizations mandated with gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE)* is a broader term and refers to an organizations' mandates regardless of the composition of their board and staffing.
- *Organizations prioritising gender transformative approaches in their work* refer to organizations working on transforming harmful gender norms that drive food insecurity, with less of an emphasis on their board and staffing.

RBN also adopts the following definitions related to the localisation agenda, developed by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Humanitarian Financing Task Team, Localisation Marker Working Group:

- *Local and national responders* include both non-state and state actors: i) national NGOs/CSOs/FBOs operating in the recipient country in which they are headquartered, working in multiple subnational regions, and not affiliated to an international NGO; ii) local NGOs/CSOs/FBOs operating in a specific, geographically defined, subnational area of an aid recipient country, without affiliation to an international NGO/CSO; iii) Red Cross and red Crescent National Societies based in and operating within their own aid recipient countries; iv) local and national private sector organizations run by private individuals or groups as a means of enterprise for profit, that are based in and operating within their own aid recipient countries and not affiliated to an international private sector organization; v) national government agencies, authorities, line ministries and state-owned institutions in aid recipient countries; and vi) sub-national government entities in aid recipient countries exercising some degree of devolved authority over a specifically defined geographic constituency e.g. local/municipal authorities.
- *Direct funding* refers to the direct onward transfer of publicly raised funding (i.e. funding that does not come from institutional donors) to local and national organizations.
- *As directly as possible* when referring to funding includes: i) funding channelled through a pooled fund that is directly accessed by national and local actors; and ii) funding to a single international aid organization (including a federated/membership organization) that reaches a local/national actor directly from that one intermediary.



IMPACT PATHWAYS



Our Commitments and Actions

To drive these changes, WFP RBN commits to work with the HQ and country offices, and to invest in several strategic actions that will be implemented in short-term, medium-term and long-term.

1. The changes in the **business process** will be achieved through the following actions, within the first six months:
 - 1.1. RBN, in collaboration with the country offices, will establish a set of indicators to measure the progress of implementation of this strategy. They will be reflected in the implementation plan. RBN will work with the data and TEC teams to digitize data collection and analysis, and train country offices in CP data management.
 - 1.2. RBN will work with the Legal Office and NGO Unit at WFP HQ, as well as with country offices to facilitate a review, revision and adaptation of the existing cooperating partnership instruments and develop new ones where needed, to respond to different realities on the ground and make available fit-for purpose partnership templates for engagements with all the distinct categories of partners. This will involve developing a comprehensive corporate guidance on non-standard agreements.
 - 1.3. RBN will collaborate with the WFP HQ NGO Unit to map out the business process and integrate all CP management tools, ensuring there are no overlaps and duplication of efforts.
 - 1.4. RBN will work with country offices to determine the most optimal CP management roles and responsibilities. RBN will facilitate the exchange of experiences and lessons on this among country offices and propose a standardized structure (roles & responsibilities along the CP management cycle).
 - 1.5. RBN will facilitate regular awareness raising and training sessions for country offices on CP management business process and tools. Tailored messages and sessions will be developed for country office senior management, CP management focal points, SO/activity managers, gender officers and field officers.
 - 1.6. RBN will work with the HQ to develop a corporate guidance on joint programming with CPs and other UN agencies, ensuring further harmonisation of requirements in terms of contracting, monitoring, reporting, templates and timelines. Based on this guidance, the country offices will advocate with other UN agencies to implement this.
 - 1.7. Country offices will provide onboarding sessions to cooperating partners upon the signing of each field level agreement. Country offices will provide regular training sessions to cooperating partners on WFP partnership management tools.
 - 1.8. Country offices will conduct regular spot-checks and other monitoring activities and ensure participation of the cooperating partners.
 - 1.9. Country offices will document lessons on the ongoing digitisation process every year. RBN will facilitate exchanges of lessons among the country offices.
2. The changes in the **strategic engagement** are medium and long term focused. The main challenge in this area is the capacity and mindsets in the country offices. The following actions will be taken to drive the changes in this area:

In the short term:

 - 2.1. RBN will conduct capacity development sessions with the country offices on identifying, establishing and managing strategic relationships with a wide range of actors.
 - 2.2. Country offices will undertake a comprehensive scoping/ mapping of actors in the sectors relevant to country strategic plan outcomes in each country. The mapping will include diverse types of potential partners: resource partners, knowledge partners, governance and policy partners, advocacy partners, capability partners. RBN will provide technical advice.
 - 2.3. RBN will map out existing regional platforms or establish one for regular engagement with partners at regional level, including consortia.

In the medium term:

- 2.4. Country offices will develop comprehensive Partnership Action Plans (PAP) that reflect the interconnectedness of the partnership landscape and determine WFP's place/ comparative advantage in that landscape. RBN will work with country offices to assess and revise the PAP template where necessary and include a framework to measure progress. Country offices will update the PAP annually.
- 2.5. Country offices will map out the existing engagement platforms relevant to WFP strategic outcomes in each country (e.g. sector steering committees, thematic working groups, task forces, thematic forums, etc.).
- 2.6. Country offices will work with the HQ Legal Officer based in RBN to determine most optimal partnership modality and legal instruments with identified strategic partners.
- 2.7. Country offices will align programme implementation plans with the country strategic plans and promote/ adopt field level agreements (and other partnership agreements) of 12 months and more whenever appropriate.

In the long term:

- 2.8. Country offices will conduct regular consultations, twice a year, with strategic partners and take active part in engagement platforms, for exchange of information, knowledge, policy shifts, lessons and other strategic matters.
 - 2.9. Country offices will document lessons on strategic engagement on annual basis. RBN will facilitate learning exchanges among country offices on this topic.
3. The changes related to the **institutional capacity strengthening of cooperating partners** also have a long-term timeline and the challenge is linked to the capacity and mindsets within the country offices. The following key actions will be implemented to achieve improved organizational and financial capacity of cooperating partners:

In the short to medium term:

- 3.1. RBN will work with the country offices to determine specific outcomes, indicators, targets and resources for capacity strengthening of cooperating partners. Country offices will include these in the new country strategic plans and annual work plans.
- 3.2. RBN will advocate for increased investment in capacity strengthening of country offices in terms of cooperating partners management, gender transformative programming and strategic engagement with a wide range of actors.
- 3.3. RBN will work with country offices to determine the most optimal roles and responsibilities related to capacity strengthening of cooperating partners. RBN will facilitate the exchange of experiences and lessons on this among country offices and put forward a proposed standardized structure.

In the medium to long term:

- 3.4. Country offices will include specific capacity strengthening activities for cooperating partners (on financial management, gender transformative programming, proposal writing and other areas relevant to the sustainability of WFP interventions) in the annual work plans and budgets. Country offices will also include this in partnership agreements with relevant partners.
- 3.5. Country offices will engage with other UN agencies and strategic partners in the country to define and/or develop a package of capacity development interventions that WFP provides to cooperating partners, both operational and institutional. RBN will provide technical support.
- 3.6. Country offices will partner with international NGOs to leverage their expertise for capacity strengthening of local actors working in areas relevant to WFP's strategic outcomes.
- 3.7. Country offices will work with cooperating partners to develop improvement plans and conduct regular monitoring of progress of the implementation of the plans.
- 3.8. Country offices will identify and engage with joint learning initiatives in areas relevant to WFP country strategic plans to share knowledge and good practices with strategic partners and other actors involved in relevant

areas of work. Country office will also facilitate learning exchanges among cooperating partners and include this in annual work plans and budgets.

In the long term:

- 3.9. Country offices will systematically document and report on outcomes related to capacity strengthening of cooperating partners in annual country reports. RBN will provide technical advice and support.
4. The changes related to the **gender transformative programming** will happen in the medium to long-term. The main challenge to achieving this is linked to the overall gender capacity in RBN and the country offices. The increased engagement with women's organizations, women-led organizations, organizations mandated with gender equality and women's empowerment and organizations that prioritize gender transformative approaches will be achieved through the following actions:

In the short term:

- 4.1. RBN will collaborate with WFP HQ to adapt, integrate and promote the corporate tools and guidance for partnership related aspects of gender programming to increase their visibility and awareness among the country offices.
- 4.2. RBN will collaborate with the Legal Office and country offices to revise the field level agreement template to explicitly identify resource requirements for gender capacity strengthening.
- 4.3. RBN will support capacity development of the country offices on gender analysis and gender transformative thinking, programming and practice. This will include building the baseline knowledge, understanding and confidence in gender transformative work, followed by applied learning and coaching.
- 4.4. Country offices will conduct a comprehensive scoping/mapping of women's, women led, GEWE mandated and gender transformative organizations in each country. The mapping should highlight relevant factors, such as (a) whether they have an existing contract with WFP or other international partners; (b) the legal status of organizations (i.e.: are they legally incorporated, or more informal?); (c) their existing mandate and capacities (i.e.: what is their primary mission?); and (d) the communities they currently serve, and in what capacity. Ideally, this mapping process also includes a verification stage: which of these organizations are most trusted by local communities?

In the medium to long term:

- 4.5. Country offices will collaborate with other UN agencies in respective countries and facilitate networking and partnerships at various levels: among women's/women-led/GEWE-mandated/gender transformative organizations themselves, as well as between these organizations and government institutions, national/international NGOs, private sector and academia where relevant.
- 4.6. Country offices will invest in strengthening the institutional, operational and technical capacity of women's/women-led/GEWE mandated/gender transformative organizations. This will include building the financial management and proposal writing capacities.
- 4.7. Country offices will engage in regular dialogue and include women's/women-led/GEWE-mandated/gender transformative organizations into programme and project design from initial stages.
- 4.8. Country offices will facilitate dialogue between women's/women-led/GEWE-mandated/gender transformative organizations and local authorities, to enable their access to decision-making spaces.
- 4.9. Country offices will create funding opportunities for women's/women-led/GEWE mandated organizations, and whenever possible provide medium to long term funding. When country offices are not capable of providing this type of funding, they will connect them with funders who can, and they will facilitate the establishment of such partnerships.
5. The progress towards the **localisation agenda** will be achieved in the medium to long-term. This is tied to the capacities of local actors to increasingly take on and carry forward humanitarian and development interventions with various degrees of independence. RBN recognizes and will emphasize close linkages between the strategic engagement, institutional capacity development and engagement with national and local women's/women-led/

GEWE-mandated/gender transformative organizations, as well as organizations that are working with persons with disability and other vulnerable groups, when addressing the localisation agenda. In addition to the related actions mentioned above, WFP in the region will do the following:

In the short term:

- 5.1. RBN will work with the HQ and TEC to make localisation related data easily accessible, considering all the categories included in the localisation definitions.
- 5.2. Country offices, with the support from RBN, will document experiences of contracting local actors as cooperating partners in a systematic way, and share the lessons among themselves and with RBN, to inform future engagements.

In the medium to long term:

- 5.3. Once the progress has been recorded in the areas of institutional capacity strengthening including of the local women's and women-led organizations, and based on the documenting lessons, RBN will start setting specific annual targets for the contracting of local actors.

SUCCESS FACTORS

The implementation of this regional strategy depends on the availability of support mechanisms and adequate level and quality of resources in RBN to support the country offices towards improved cooperating partners management. RBN needs sufficient staffing with technical expertise in partnership management to support the country offices in their efforts. RBN also needs sufficient staffing with in-depth expertise in gender analysis and gender transformative programming. Finally, RBN needs experts to support institutional capacity development of cooperating partners.

Even more so, adequate level and quality of resources in country offices is essential. Capacity gaps, budgetary allocations to cooperating partners management activities outlined in this strategy, development of skills and time are crucial in supporting the successful implementation of the strategy. Adequate organizational arrangements for cooperating partners management in country offices are necessary too. Country office leadership commitment is a key prerequisite for this to be achieved.

Openness by the HQ to respond to the specific needs of the country offices and provide fit-for-purpose normative products and support are another necessary condition for the strategy to succeed. A two-way feedback loop between the country offices and the HQ, via RBN, is required to keep the digitisation process and cooperating partners management instruments and practices relevant for the realities on the ground.

MONITORING OF THE STRATEGY

Adequate monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are an important basis for a more strategic approach to cooperating partnerships.

The implementation plan has been developed to operationalize the strategy (Annex A). Key performance indicators are developed for each of the five areas of the strategy. RBN will identify the best tools to monitor and evaluate the evolving partnership engagements.

RBN and the country offices will collect data on the indicators annually as part of the annual country reporting process. The cooperating partners management team in RBN will work with the data team to collate and analyse the information and share it with the senior management.

After three years of the strategy implementation, and based on data and evidence, RBN will conduct a thorough analysis of various types of cooperating partners engagement. RBN and country offices will identify what works best and provide the basis for improving cooperating partnerships and WFP engagement in them.

RBN will collect case studies and disseminate findings to the HQ, country offices and partners. RBN will conduct periodic surveys among selected cooperating partners to support WFP in the improvement of its partnership performance.

