



World Food Programme

SAVING LIVES  
CHANGING LIVES

# Evaluation of Bhutan

## WFP Country Strategic Plan 2019-2023

### CONTEXT

The Kingdom of Bhutan is a small lower-income country with a population of 650,118 of which 24 percent are under the age of 15. Agriculture supports more than half of the population, but only 3 percent of the land is arable, and is highly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change. Prior to the COVID -19 pandemic the country had made considerable progress in reducing poverty through strong economic growth and social sector investments. However, poverty rates increased in 2022. Bhutan faces the triple burden of malnutrition and persistently high rates of stunting in children.

### SUBJECT AND FOCUS OF THE EVALUATION

WFP has been engaged in Bhutan since 1974. Up to the end of 2018, support to the national school feeding and nutrition programme (NSFNP) remained the main focus. The Transitional-Interim Country Strategic Plan (T-ICSP, January - December 2018) supported the Government in NSFNP delivery, and included some in-kind direct assistance. The Country Strategic Plan (CSP) (2019-2023) sought a strategic shift to capacity strengthening only. It had two strategic outcomes focused on support to: 1) the national school feeding and nutrition programme and 2) emergency preparedness measures.

Operationally, WFP's assistance focussed on access to quality meals in school, quality and safety of fortified foods, emergency preparedness and disaster management and coordination. It also included pilots on local purchases and 'farm-to-school' linkages. From 2020 onwards, support to smallholder farmers was geographically expanded and evolved into support for agricultural value chain development including several sub-activities (partially in response to COVID-19) not planned in the original CSP. By August 2022, 65 percent (USD 5.4 million) of the needs-based plan (USD 8.4 million) was resourced.

### OBJECTIVES AND USERS OF THE EVALUATION

The evaluation was conducted between April 2022 and December 2022, to inform the design of the next CSP. It covered activities implemented from 2019-July 2022, as well as the CSP design period during the T-ICSP in 2018. It examined the relevance of WFP's strategic positioning, its contribution to outcomes, including on cross-cutting priorities, its efficiency and the factors explaining performance.

### KEY EVALUATION FINDINGS

Extent to which the CSP is evidence based and strategically focused to address the needs of the most vulnerable

The CSP was based on an array of evidence sources including studies by international partners and some specific assessments by WFP. It was fully aligned with selected national key results areas within Bhutan's 12th five-year development plan (2018-2023) as well as the main sectoral policy documents.

The CSP aligned to United Nations frameworks in Bhutan and was well-positioned strategically on school nutrition and rice fortification, however some overlap with other agencies occurred in the disaster risk management sector. Despite some joint programming, most WFP activities were implemented as unilateral support to the Government.

The CSP was aligned to WFP's comparative advantages but its vertical structure, coupled with an absence of a full theory of change, led to limited interconnections between the two outcomes.

### Contribution to strategic outcomes

CSP efforts under Strategic Outcome 1 on strengthening government capacities were most effective in school nutrition and rice fortification. These interventions resulted in strong national systems, effectively managed by the government. Results were achieved through a mix of

support to policy and coordination processes, systems building, staff training and improvements to school infrastructure (kitchens and stores). WFP helped draft the National School Feeding and Nutrition Strategy 2019-2030 and national standards for fortified rice kernels, and supported the building of a rice fortification plant. There is evidence of improved nutritional quality of school menus, and the evaluation found WFP support to social and behaviour change communication on nutrition well placed to deliver future results.

Agricultural value chain work was of high value, benefiting farmers and cooperatives. WFP capacity building at the institutional level helped the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests to strengthen its policies for agricultural marketing capacities and monitoring and reporting systems though some challenges remain.

**Under Strategic Outcome 2**, WFP interventions focused on technical support and training on use of disaster impact assessment tools and studies. Owing to funding challenges, most activities were discrete pieces of work supporting the Department of Disaster Management, and there remains a need to ensure further integration and use.

WFP helped facilitate regular coordination among partners, including playing a leading role in a working group on emergency logistics and in planning within the emergency telecommunications cluster. In response to Government requests, WFP provided infrastructure and equipment for use in the national COVID-19 response. Integrating WFP's work in government systems will require an endorsed national disaster risk management roadmap and increased government commitment and financial resources.

### Cross cutting issues

WFP is contributing to gender equality as a cross-cutting aim through its support to school nutrition, although the school meals programme stipends and meal planning are based on flat rates irrespective of age group or sex-related nutritional needs. Two thirds of the participating farmers in agriculture value chains development activities were women but there was no evidence of broader transformative (or otherwise gender-differential) effects on women.

Environmental sustainability is a priority in Bhutan, and featured highly in the CSP. Most WFP activities were sufficiently contributing to climate change adaptation.

### Sustainability

The evaluation found that WFP country capacity strengthening achievements on school nutrition, rice fortification and agriculture are mostly potentially sustainable. Owing to a shift in government priorities, sustainability prospects for disaster risk management activities are lower.

### Timeliness and efficient use of resources

Apart from COVID-19 induced delays, the Country Office produced most outputs of expected quality and within anticipated timeframes, although with some variation between activities. Adopting innovative measures and systems to acquire inputs for country capacity strengthening

activities, as well as for interventions implemented by national and local counterparts, helped ensure cost efficiency.

### Factors explaining WFP performance

Partnerships with counterpart government departments expanded considerably under the CSP, and were both effective and relevant in implementation. However, there is a need for reengagement with national partners regarding rice fortification and emergency telecommunications, given changes in government priorities.

Monitoring and reporting systems based on corporate guidance showed limited utility for country office decision making.

The shift to a CSP model did not have the intended impacts on resource mobilization, with varied levels of funding available across activities, and high levels of earmarking at the activity level. This has proven challenging for medium-term planning.

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, the evaluation found that WFP assistance under the CSP showed good performance in terms of achieving intended changes at outcome level. While school feeding is still seen as WFP's main contribution, WFP successfully responded to the request for providing support to agriculture value chains when this was raised as a national priority. However, the CSP's engagement in disaster risk management was not as impactful as hoped.

The evaluation found good collaboration between WFP and other United Nations agencies, though with most activities unilaterally implemented. Channelling WFP assistance through the Government and ensuring economic procurement was cost efficient. However, resource mobilization challenges remain, particularly as Bhutan approaches middle-income status by the end of 2023.

**Recommendation 1.** Ensure optimal strategic focus and alignment with national priorities and the SDGs through building on internal capacities and competitive advantages and aligning with changing government priorities and capacities.

**Recommendation 2.** Achieve better harmonization with United Nations (UN) entities and processes. Develop a partnership strategy to position WFP Bhutan more clearly in relation to other UN agencies.

**Recommendation 3.** Enhance management for development results, reporting and accountability and higher flexibility to plan for and respond to dynamic operational contexts. Review existing monitoring indicators and improve performance monitoring and knowledge management.

**Recommendation 4:** Enhance resource mobilization through a strengthened and diversified resource mobilization strategy.