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An Enabling Decade:

Capacity Strengthening of National Actors and Systems
(2013-2022)

Asia and the Pacific

EXECUTIVE BRIEF

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Executive Brief

This brief is issued ahead of the publication of Asia and the Pacific's Country Capacity Strengthening (CCS) Qualitative Review i.e., **An Enabling Decade - Capacity Strengthening of National Actors & Systems**.

The internal review focused on upstream enabling work and collation of evidence on systems strengthening done by the 16 countries in Asia and the Pacific during the decade from 2013-2022 and encompassed both retrospective and formative perspectives to achieve three key objectives:

1. To document WFP's decade-long impact (2013-2022) of capacity strengthening initiatives for national actors and systems across Asia and the Pacific;
2. To assess the effectiveness of these efforts on regional program and supply chain interventions and;
3. To provide a set of actionable recommendations to support the refinement of WFP's capacity strengthening approach in the region.

Capacity strengthening is an integral part of the UN's development assistance aimed at reinforcing government capacities and systems so that national actors are better placed to meet the socioeconomic needs of their populations. By WFP providing expertise, resources, and guidance, governments

enhance their ability to effectively implement policies, legislation and programs that promote sustainable growth and development from a Food Security and Nutrition (FSN) standpoint. Corporately, this work is referred to as **Country Capacity Strengthening (CCS)** underpinned by the [2022 Policy Update](#).

WFP Asia and Pacific region covers 16 countries and the Pacific Multi-Country Office (MCO), all of which were included in the review except the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) - where WFP has limited engagement with national actors. The review focused on six thematic work areas: climate and resilience, emergency preparedness and response, nutrition, school feeding, social protection, and supply chain, along with the mainstreaming of gender and disability inclusion.

Capacity strengthening context

WFP strengthens capacities across all its regional programs, from fragile states to upper-middle-income countries (excluding DPRK). Even in emergency contexts where the UN does not recognize de facto governments, WFP engages with other state and non-state national actors, advocating and partnering to further the food security and nutrition (FSN) agenda, with a view to continuing comprehensive capacity strengthening work once the context permits.

Changing global and corporate discourse on capacity strengthening

The review identified significant changes in the global discourse on capacity strengthening during the decade, reflecting the changing perceptions and approaches of the international development community. This discourse resulted in the launch of several global initiatives that contributed to increased recognition of the role of national capacity strengthening in international development.

The 2015 launch of Agenda 2030 i.e., the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the international initiatives that followed, and the growing momentum for strengthening national capacities contributed to the introduction of WFP's "Changing Lives Agenda" in 2017. This new agenda saw the start of a strategic corporate shift, with an increased focus on strengthening national capacities and a move towards an enabling role.

Key findings

In Asia and the Pacific, WFP has a strong long-term development focus in all the thematic areas under review, with several areas focusing on capacity strengthening for the entire ten-year (review) period, and others more recently.

A highly relevant CCS agenda: RBB's focus on social protection, school feeding; supporting climate risk identification, mitigation and emergency preparedness and response; strengthening community resilience and national supply chains and integrating nutrition, is a powerful combination of effective interventions to support national actors to meet the needs of the people of Asia and the Pacific into the future.

The provision of technical assistance to governments and other national actors, positions WFP as a leading partner in achieving SDG2 and several other SDGs. Finding ways to transfer WFP's knowledge and skills to national actors is the core of capacity strengthening and long-term sustainable action.

Changing ways of working: Over the review period, WFP ways of working evolved in tandem with changes in national socioeconomic and development contexts. Several WFP-supported countries moved up to lower middle-income status, with Indonesia achieving upper middle-income status in 2021. To remain relevant, WFP increasingly shifted its work towards capacity strengthening assistance to help governments achieve positive and sustainable FSN outcomes. As of 2023, the region had four Country Offices (CO) implementing capacity strengthening-specific portfolios, playing a purely enabling role to national actors.

Countries like Bhutan, India, Indonesia, and Pakistan have paved the way for enabling roles and new ways of working – leading by example on the importance of long, strong, and trusted relationships with government, the importance of demonstrated success in direct implementation and the power of evidence-based advocacy. The region's rapid development demands innovative capacity strengthening approaches and more effective collaboration with national and sub-national actors to ensure WFP supports national development goals and remains a valued partner.

WFP's capacity strengthening in Asia and the Pacific resulted in several successes, enabling national actors to support their populations more effectively. Host governments' officials recognize the positive effects of WFP's capacity strengthening interventions, permitting national actors to expand the reach of effective FSN programming. In this vein, WFP has supported national actors to transform national social protection, education, and health systems, and ensured that national actors are better able to identify, mitigate and minimize the effects of disasters. This has been achieved by reinforcing the underlying core systems for government action: policy and legislation, planning and budgeting, procurement, logistics and supply chain, statistics (i.e., data analytics), management information systems, and supporting mandated government agencies to be better resourced.



Working with national actors to strengthen national social protection and school feeding systems with support from supply chain and nutrition (including fortification), produced the most significant results in terms of scale and sustainability, with national actors assisting at least 940 million people in Asia and the Pacific. In comparison, in 2022, WFP directly supported 37.4 million beneficiaries across the region.

As governments advance the implementation of fortification and expand their social protection systems and national school feeding programmes, with WFP support, these numbers are set to increase. Positive results were also identified from capacity strengthening work in the thematic areas of EPR, climate action, gender, and disability inclusion. However, the scale of benefits to the population at large in these sectors are more difficult to quantify and verify.

While gender mainstreaming and disability inclusion are key elements of WFP’s capacity strengthening work across all thematic areas, *there are several examples of milestones attained, but results are difficult to collate, with only a minor proportion of the work appearing in corporate reporting: strongly limiting its internal and external visibility.*

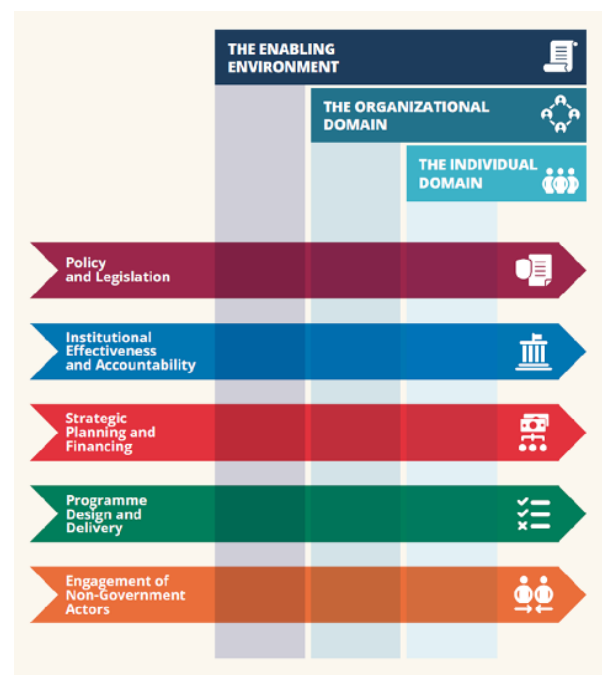
The countries that WFP has worked in for decades – mostly in South Asia – saw the most substantial capacity strengthening results: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, and the Philippines. In these countries, WFP has established strong and trusted relationships with national actors. These national governments have strong capacity in a range of areas and emerged as [South-South and Triangular Cooperation](#) (SSTC) provider countries, willing and able to share their FSN expertise and experience with other countries.

COs and thematic areas that understand the value of the five CCS pathways and consider them in assessments, planning and implementation, were more effective at supporting sustainable national action. The five CCS pathways constitute an effective framework for ensuring that governments and other national actors have the necessary capacities required to sustain long-term FSN action: commitment (policies and legislation), financial resources to act (strategic planning and finance), trained people in mandated agencies to do the work (institutional capacity), effective intervention to implement (programme design, delivery, and M&E) and engagement with non-state actors.

The review found that COs implemented most of their CCS work in three areas: evidence generation/ advocacy/agenda setting; policy and legislation (Pathway 1); and programme design, delivery, and monitoring (Pathway 4). There are mixed results on strengthening national institutional capacity (Pathway 2); and limited results on sustaining FSN interventions (upstream and downstream) through public financing (Pathway 3). Interviews indicated that COs were less confident in acting in those areas. RBB has made efforts to lay the foundations for public financing by developing tools and guidance on assessing institutional coordination and financial capacities notably the [“Introduction to Government Budgeting”](#) guidance (2023).

WFP has made significant contributions to the policy and legislative landscape of all the supported countries in the region, including in the areas of food security, humanitarian relief, disaster risk reduction, climate, nutrition, social protection, education (school feeding) and gender. This includes the [2018 Right to Food Act in Nepal](#), and the [2013 Food Security Act in India](#) whose evaluation (2023-24) was technically supported by WFP.

WFP’s operational expertise made WFP a sought-after partner for capacity strengthening support for programme/intervention design and implementation. The review identified multiple examples of CO-led interventions aimed at enhancing existing national programmes to improve the effectiveness and impact of national actions



including Indonesia's Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis, Pakistan's Benazir Nashonuma Programme, and Bangladesh's Vulnerable Group Development Programme. In some thematic areas, WFP also supported the establishment of national systems including data systems, school feeding, climate risk identification and mitigation systems, and emergency response systems. Examples include WFP Cambodia's support to the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, to establish the national Home-Grown School Feeding Programme and WFP Indonesia's technical assistance in implementing the Ministry of Social Affairs Disaster Mitigation Information System (e-SIMBA): climate change data analytics.

WFP achieved these results by partnering with others. External collaborations with other UN agencies and development partners contributed positively to WFP's capacity strengthening work – through an understanding of common goals, recognition of others' comparative advantage, and clear, agreed roles. The range of partnerships across the region is significant, including with national governments, local authorities, UN agencies, bilateral and multilateral institutions, academia, civil society, and private sector actors. In addition to SDG 2 (and other SDG), this

partnership approach contributes to SDG 17 – Target 17.I – encourage effective partnerships and Target 17.E – enhanced policy coherence for sustainable development.

Similarly, cross-sectoral internal collaborations between programme thematic areas, supply chain and gender mainstreaming, and extensive support from RAM, Partnerships, Monitoring and Evaluation, and other teams, helped ensure that national actors received the required technical and financial support.

The key challenges are to better incorporate capacity strengthening into WFP reporting and monitoring systems and continue to improve the effectiveness of capacity strengthening actions.

WFP's measurement, quantification, and contribution to capacity strengthening results can be improved. Until 2023, WFP had a limited number of outcome indicators to monitor CCS results, including its effects on national systems and the impact on populations. This contributed to limited visibility of WFP's capacity strengthening work, and in turn limited opportunities for WFP to showcase its long-term development milestones with bilateral and multilateral development partners, among others.





Further, WFP's monitoring system tends to report capacity strengthening as a homogenous activity, that can be standardized, measured, and monitored quantitatively. However, there is a wide range of capacity strengthening work across the region that differs by thematic programme area, by country, by stage of national development, and by the capacity strengthening goal, making it difficult to report results using standardized quantitative indicators.

The review found limited information about the indirect effects of WFP's capacity strengthening work on populations at large. This is because, assessing results requires identification of the likely population that is affected, and then evaluating the national programme that supports them. The review found few examples of evaluations of national programmes, some of which assessed outcomes or impacts on the population. Rather, the evaluations were carried out to ensure the programmes were implemented as intended. At present, the beneficiaries of national programmes are not routinely identified by WFP, since they are government beneficiaries. Even for the thematic areas where the targeted population was known, such as social protection beneficiaries or children receiving school feeding, there was little information on the effect of the national actions on the population.

There are emerging opportunities for funding capacity strengthening. There are good prospects for new financing for WFPs enabling work for COs that articulate how capacity strengthening actions sit within WFP programme strategic objectives and align with national development goals. Funding opportunities such as direct budget support are available from IFIs and multi-lateral development banks and the private sector in upper-middle-income countries, among others.

Finding ways to make WFP's capacity strengthening efforts more visible and valuable, both internally and externally, will help enhance WFPs long-term development financing prospects.

Recommendations

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS



- 1** Elevate CCS to the forefront of strategic planning to enhance WFP's internal and external visibility, and partnerships for sustainable FSN action.

Integrate capacity strengthening into all strategic objectives of the CSP during the design phase and articulate the intended goals of capacity strengthening work by thematic area and how it will contribute to the achievement of national FSN targets and achievement of the SDGs.



- 2** Invest in national FSN systems and actor capacities by leveraging private and public resources aligned with RBB's programme and supply chain strategic priorities.

Identify and utilize funding opportunities that align with national FSN priorities. Focus on the demonstration of recommendation action then leveraging national resources or financing mechanisms to scale up.



- 3** Improve regional WFP internal understanding of the purpose and value of capacity strengthening action and application of the CCS pathways.

Improve the effectiveness and sustainability of CCS by routinely considering all five CCS pathways during CSP implementation, which align with the key elements that must be in place for national sustainable action.



- 4** Reinforce and leverage external partnerships and internal collaborations to unlock collective impact on FSN through capacity strengthening.

Partner with other actors to jointly strengthen national capacities. Maximize internal collaborations, reducing thematic silos to better support national action.





PROGRAMMATIC RECOMMENDATIONS



1 Standardize CCS-related context analysis into CSP design and implementation.

Refine CCS context analysis to ensure a clear understanding of the political context, stakeholder analysis, roles of other actors and national interests in CSP implementation during CSP design.



2 Promote and facilitate a qualitative CCS monitoring focus alongside existing monitoring frameworks.

Utilize qualitative monitoring for progress monitoring alongside the existing corporate CRF indicators, and use of customized indicators where necessary, to better reflect CSP capacity strengthening objectives and their progressive attainment.



3 Enhance CCS reporting and dissemination.

Institute the consistent documentation and dissemination of capacity strengthening actions and achievements so that there is more evidence of WFP's role in long-term development outcomes through strengthened FSN national systems and institutions.



4 Leverage RBB's knowledge management strategy to increase access to, and utility of CCS resources to improve programming and supply chain actions.

Ensure that documented CCS evidence is available for learning and use by other thematic areas and by COs – including assessments, analysis, reporting, evaluations, case studies etc.



5 Empower human resources to drive WFP's enabling agenda.

Ensure that WFP has sufficient people with expertise in capacity strengthening to be able to support COs and internal CCS capacity strengthening as required.



Conclusion

WFP's capacity strengthening efforts across Asia and the Pacific have demonstrably strengthened national systems and enabled governments to improve food security for millions in a more sustainable way. Moving forward, WFP should enhance its impact by focusing on innovative approaches, improved measurement, development-oriented staff, and stronger communication of its valuable contributions to long-term development.

The review found that capacity strengthening actions and intended outcomes vary widely by thematic area and by country due to the specificity of national contexts. The main report provides a range of examples across the thematic areas of focus, analyses the challenges, and draws valuable lessons from WFP's shifting role to an enabler of sustainable change and development from an FSN lens.

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