



# Evaluation of Lesotho WFP Country Strategic Plan 2019-2024

## CONTEXT

Lesotho is a lower-middle income country with an estimated population of 2.3 million, 71 percent of whom live in rural areas.

In the period 2019-2021, undernourishment reached 34.7 percent of the population. Stunting in children under 5 is of 32.1 percent (2020) and 2018 data indicates it is more prevalent in boys (36.6 percent) and in rural areas (36 percent, compared to 28 percent in urban areas).

Vulnerability to climate change is high with frequent droughts and floods related to the El Niño and La Niña phenomena. The Covid-19 pandemic had profound effects in income generation, gender-based violence and health.

## SUBJECT AND FOCUS OF THE EVALUATION

The CSP focuses on responding to crises, addressing chronic vulnerability and building resilience. It continued the shift initiated in the previous cycle towards country capacity strengthening, which was the main mode of engagement along with cash-based transfers and commodity vouchers, with in-kind transfers restricted to some crisis response interventions and feeding for pre-school.

The original needs-based plan for the CSP was USD 110.7 million, increasing to USD 168.1 million by 2022, reflecting four budget revisions. The funding level ranged from 40 percent for resilience building activities; to 33 percent for crisis response and 30 percent for root causes

## OBJECTIVES AND USERS OF THE EVALUATION

The evaluation was commissioned by the WFP Office of Evaluation to provide evaluative evidence for accountability and learning to inform the design of the next CSP for Lesotho. The evaluation covered CSP activities implemented between July 2019 to mid-2023 and also took account of T-ICSP covering January 2018 – June 2019. It

assessed: WFP's strategic positioning and the extent to which the organization made the shifts expected under the CSP; WFP's effectiveness in contributing to strategic outcomes; the efficiency with which the CSP was implemented; and factors explaining WFP's performance.

## KEY EVALUATION FINDINGS

### Strategic Positioning and Alignment

The CSP is firmly aligned with national policies and plans, focusing on supporting the Government to achieve SDG 2, zero hunger, and SDG 5, gender equality. It is aligned with the United Nations Development Assistance Framework. Strategic alignment among UN organizations, however, did not always result in clear operational complementarity.

The CSP largely built on the transitional interim CSP (T-ICSP) that preceded it and the design was informed by evidence from national reviews and summaries of evaluations, however, there was limited analysis of Lesotho's particular livelihood challenges, and limited explanation of how WFP activities would contribute to nutrition outcomes.

The CSP was grounded in WFP comparative advantage in humanitarian action, and its strategic focus remained relevant during implementation, but linking humanitarian and development programming was challenged by the need to respond to several crisis.

### WFP's contributions to the CSP outcomes in Lesotho

WFP responded flexibly to a fluctuating beneficiaries caseload, contributing to their food security during emergencies in rural and urban areas. However, the short-term nature of these interventions, and weak linkages with development programming are not conducive to sustainable outcomes.

During the T-ICSP, WFP provided school meals to primary schools in all districts of Lesotho, contributing to



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maintaining high school attendance rates and serving as an instrument of social protection. From 2020, at the request of the Government, the school feeding programme was handed over to national institutions and WFP was asked to support direct delivery of school feeding in Early Childhood Care and Development Centers. These centers, however, are privately and community owned and not free of charge, so some of the most vulnerable children were inevitably excluded from WFP school meals delivery as families could not afford to pay the Centers fees.

WFP's capacity strengthening activities contributed to generating evidence to inform food security and nutrition components of national programmes.

Analysis of the different community and household asset activities showed positive results related to household food production and consumption. Limited success observed in linking smallholder farmers to school feeding programme.

Cross-cutting themes

WFP paid sufficient attention to **protection** concerns across the CSP, through assessments to ensure security and accessibility for beneficiaries receiving transfers.

The ability of WFP to achieve **gender** and other cross-cutting aims was limited by staff time and capacity.

WFP's support to capacity-strengthening largely focused on individual capacities, with less evidence of success in the system-strengthening, which limited broader effectiveness and **sustainability**. At community level, ownership of assets was limited, which hampered long-term viability of livelihood activities.

Limited evidence that **environmental** standards were applied to the design, planning and implementation.

### Efficient use of resources

Procurement affected timely delivery of outputs, despite efforts to strengthen compliance and efficiency in WFP systems. Nevertheless, WFP mounted a rapid and timely response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

WFP reduced rations rather than coverage, in a context where it could only reach a fraction of those in need. Districts with high food insecurity were targeted, however most vulnerable people were not always reached in part due to delays in access to the national Social Assistance database.

To reduce costs, the Country Office used global long-term agreements for procurement and identified alternative suppliers outside Maseru. Cost-efficiency data are not systematically used to inform decision-making

### Factors that explain WFP performance

71.9 percent of confirmed contributions were earmarked at strategic outcome (SO) or activity level, and even at project level within activities. Shortfalls were experienced across all SO and focus areas, which challenged the ability to manage and deliver the CSP as a coherent programme; for instance linking emergency response and resilience implementation areas.

Output data were used for accountability and informing operational decisions, but there was limited evidence of use of outcome monitoring for strategic decision-making.

Partnerships provided access to key skills, including gender and protection capacities and capacity strengthening. It remained a struggle to generate joint implementation with UN agencies. Relationship with civil society organizations involved operational and some strategic coordination.

The Country Office skillset was adequate to the CSP focus on country capacity strengthening, but understaffing translated into some functions being overstretched.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Overall Assessment

The basic strategic orientation of the CSP was appropriate for WFP in Lesotho, it was well aligned with national policies and with the joint objectives of the United Nations system.

The CSP was relevant to the needs of the vulnerable but the scale of WFP's humanitarian responses was limited by financial constraints. These constraints limited the delivery at the scale envisaged by the original CSP as well as the efforts to bridge the humanitarian-development nexus.

WFP was insufficiently analytical in its design of resilience-building activities. Similarly the reorientation towards capacity strengthening made significant progress, however the time needed for analysis, design and implementation limited the effectiveness and sustainability

The CO made efforts to mainstream gender across its activities, but ensuring gender-transformative programming was limited by staff time and capacity. There is a risk of overstretching the human resources.

### Recommendations

**Recommendation 1:** WFP should reinforce its approach to capacity strengthening across the new Country Strategic Plan.

**Recommendation 2:** Link the next CSP's theory of change to stronger monitoring, evaluation and learning and deeper gender analysis.

**Recommendation 3:** Reconsider WFP's approaches to resilience building and the humanitarian-development nexus in Lesotho.

**Recommendation 4:** While maintaining its own capacity to respond to humanitarian crises, WFP should strengthen targeting and prioritisation to meet the needs of the most vulnerable given limited resources.

**Recommendation 5:** WFP should contribute to strengthening of the humanitarian-development nexus by deepening its engagement with the national social protection system.

**Recommendation 6:** Strengthen Country Office capacity to align with emerging roles while making best use of limited resources.