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WFP's support to strengthening the national social protection system in India

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Acronyms

AAY	Antyodaya Anna Yojana
DFPD	Department of Food and Public Distribution
DMEO	Development Monitoring and Evaluation Office
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FITT	Foundation for Innovation and Technology Transfer
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Services
IDS	Institute of Development Studies
IIT	Indian Institute of Technology
MDM	midday meal
MoHFW	Ministry of Health and Family Welfare
NFSA	National Food Security Act 2013
PMU	Programme Monitoring Unit
POSHAN Abhiyaan	Prime Minister's Overarching Scheme for Holistic Nourishment
TPDS	Targeted Public Distribution System
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WFP	United Nations World Food Programme



World Food Programme



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1. Introduction

This case study reviews the World Food Programme's (WFP's) support to social protection in India, specifically the country's food and nutrition-focused social protection programmes, since 2014. It assesses how WFP has supported various building blocks of the national social protection system, focusing on strengthening service delivery for the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS). This is a light-touch exercise, undertaken through a rapid literature review and interviews with WFP staff. It is part of a suite of country case studies undertaken by researchers at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) for WFP, creating a portfolio of learning on WFP's work on supporting social protection around the world.

2. Context

India is one of the largest and fastest growing major economies in the world, boasting one of the highest levels of food production and standing as one of the most populous countries globally. Today, it is one of the leading producers of rice, wheat, and pulses (FAO 2023). Ensuring access to safe and improved nutrition, particularly for vulnerable populations such as mothers and children, has been a top priority for the government. As a result of efforts taken over years, India has transitioned from a food-deficit nation to one that is self-sufficient in food production. Since gaining independence, the country has also made significant strides in reducing maternal and under-5 mortality rates.

Despite these accomplishments, India continues to grapple with undernutrition, particularly among children under the age of five, and widespread micronutrient deficiencies such as anaemia affecting individuals across all age groups. Nearly one third of all malnourished children worldwide live in India (Global Nutrition Report 2022). As per the recent National Family Health Survey 5, India is home to 35.5 percent stunted children (chronically undernourished) and 19.3 percent wasted children (acutely undernourished) (MoHFW 2021). Moreover, 18.7 percent women of reproductive age (15-49 years) have low BMI (<18.5 kg/m²). The prevalence of anaemia is extremely alarming

across all age-groups, particularly among children between 6 and 59 months of age (67.1 percent anaemic) and women aged 15-49 years (57 percent of whom anaemic) (MoHFW 2021).

Operating under a federal system of government, the responsibility for both social services and social protection in India lies with state and union territories. However, the central government remains involved with setting agendas and allocating budgets as the country moves towards a model of cooperative federalism between the centre and states. India currently ranks 134 out of 193 countries on the Human Development Index (UNDP, 2024). Despite its collective score (0.644) that categorizes the country as having "medium human development", India has a lower score (0.444) on inequality (UNDP 2024). This manifests itself through a series of intersecting inequities around poverty, caste, gender, location and geographies, and rural-urban contexts. For instance, people from scheduled tribes and castes are among the most disadvantaged and marginalized groups in India and are often more vulnerable to malnutrition and lower educational attainment (Raghavendra 2020). Consequently, addressing poverty, food insecurity, and intersecting inequities lies at the core of the Indian government's efforts to improve nutrition and address hunger-related challenges.



Food security and nutrition-focused social protection: the context

India has a range of food security and nutrition-focused national social protection programs. These include the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS), targeted supplementation through the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme, midday meals (MDM) for school children, and the Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY). The National Food Security Act (NFSA) of 2013, also known as the Right to Food Act, legalized and enhanced entitlements under these schemes. In 2018, they were further strengthened with the launch of the national POSHAN Abhiyaan. Beyond these, India has a wide range of several nationally led social protection programmes that focus on poverty reduction, employment, health, and education.

India's social protection schemes centred around food security and nutrition, such as the TPDS, ICDS, and MDM, represent a significant portion of the government's social protection budget and coverage. Importantly, political will and leadership have played pivotal roles in enacting social protection legislation like the NFSA and ensuring the allocation and securing of resources for their effective implementation. Below is an informative list of India's food security and nutrition-focused social protection programmes and policies that WFP actively collaborates and engages with.

Table 1: An overview of India’s food security and nutrition-focused social protection programmes.

Strategic Results (SRs)	Strategic Outcomes	Activities
2.1	Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS)	The TPDS is led by the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution. It reaches over 800 million beneficiaries and provides highly subsidized grains such as wheat, rice, and millet. It operates through a vast system with a complex supply chain from production and procurement to storage and transportation, and rice fortification and distribution through a network of more than 500,000 fair price shops located across the country. It is the world’s largest social protection scheme.
3.2	Antyodana Anna Yojana (AAY)	The AAY was launched to ensure the TPDS could specifically target and reduce hunger for the poorest section of the population. It involves identification of the poorest sections and provides them with a further subsidy on food grains.
4.3	Integrated Child Development Services scheme (ICDS)	The ICDS scheme aims to target and improve the health, nutrition, awareness and education of pregnant and lactating mothers, and children aged under 6 years. It is delivered through anganwadis (community nurseries in both urban and rural areas), with easy access for the community and managed by the anganwadi worker who is the key village or community contact.
5.4	Midday meals (MDM)	MDM is a nutritionally wholesome freshly cooked lunch served at government and government-aided schools. It aims to increase school enrolment and attendance, avoid hunger, and address chronic undernourishment.
6.5	National Food Security Act 2013 (NFSA)	India’s NFSA aims to ensure that everyone, at all times, has access to food. This characterized by “availability, access, utilization and stability” of food, making access to food and food security a legal right in India. ¹
7.5	POSHAN Abhiyaan 2018 (National Nutrition Mission)	POSHAN Abhiyaan aims to improve nutritional outcomes and reduce anaemia in children aged under 6 years, adolescent girls, pregnant women, and lactating mothers. It aims to use technology, build on the convergence of multiple schemes and use behaviour change communications. The newly launched POSHAN 2.0 in collaboration with anganwadi outreach services seeks to improve nutritional content, access and knowledge for sustained outcomes around disease prevention and immunity, undernourishment and wellbeing.

¹ <https://nfsa.gov.in/portal/nfsa-act>

Although India has a robust food safety net policy regime, it faces operational challenges that inhibit those policies from achieving their envisioned outcomes. India is a large country with a complex demographic and a population of more than 1.4 billion people, and food distribution often faces logistical and administrative challenges (Banerjee and Duflo 2011). The TPDS therefore is a vast system that needs to cater to a significant population in a large country and, as such, can suffer from leaks and errors which can make it administratively expensive. However, despite these challenges, evaluations and research have found that TPDS and other food-based social protection schemes

in India have had positive impact on food security outcomes and consist of significant potential for even greater outcomes if the said challenges are addressed (George and McKay 2019; Bhattacharya et al. 2017).

Since 2014, the partnership between the Government of India and WFP has been aimed at unlocking the full potential of the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) as well as other food and nutrition-based programs - by addressing operational gaps, improving nutrition effectiveness, and optimizing programme delivery.



3. WFP's objectives and role

WFP has been operational in India for over 50 years. In 2012, its portfolio of work underwent a strategic shift from food and grain distribution to providing technical support aimed at supporting and strengthening government service delivery. This realignment was in response to the government's demand for assistance in reforming its delivery mechanisms, and with the government funding and delivering its own food-based safety nets and social protection programmes, WFP unique added value had been recognized in supporting and strengthening government-led systems for improved efficiency and effectiveness (WFP 2019).

Over the long period of working in the country, WFP has developed and nurtured a strong relationship with national and state governments. Recognizing this connection as a "core strength" it has supported the government in meeting its strategic priorities, drawing on its own technical experience and knowledge in the sector. This partnership model has led to several instances of success, with WFP consistently providing support in response to the government's requests and building and strengthening its capacity.

In the last decade, WFP has supported the government to develop context-specific solutions to strengthen three large food-based social protection schemes – the TPDS, ICDS and POSHAN Abhiyaan. Since 2014, this included reforms for the digitalisation and automation of the TPDS, staple grain fortification for all three programmes, enabling better targeting and raising community awareness, addressing leakages, and initiating the optimization of supply chains and delivery systems (WFP 2019). Other activities also include encouraging and aiding the set-up of local production of nutritious food and contributing to strengthening the livelihoods of women-led self-help groups.

WFP partners with a vast range of organizations at national and state levels that includes government counterparts, academia, local and national civil society organizations, and other UN bodies, aiding WFP's research, advocacy and capacity strengthening efforts. WFP's modality to support national objectives as an enabler of the national system has allowed into achieve impact at much larger scale, now reaching over 150 million people indirectly through its work as a result of this strategic shift (WFP 2019). India's federal model and ability for states to modify and innovate around existing national schemes has also aligned with and fed into WFP's ability to deliver and adapt to state specific contexts.

WFP began supporting government systems in 2012 with an initial Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the central Government of India to support the centre with scaling up good practices in public distribution system reforms. This MoU also led to partnerships with the state governments of Odisha and Kerala to support the state-wide transformation of the TPDS and implementation of the National Food Security Act'2013 in 2013 and 2014 respectively, which included a range of activities for both technical and operational support.

In Odisha, efforts included creating detailed project plans for TPDS components, establishing a state-wide technical team, and providing support for developing a ration card management system, conducting beneficiary identification, and piloting fair price automation. Additionally, steps were taken to enhance the TPDS grievance redressal mechanism and revamp the supply chain management system with an integrated approach, with the Government of Odisha incorporating WFP recommendations throughout. In Kerala, on the other hand, WFP supported the state government with a logistics assessment, prompting supply chain reforms in the public distribution system and the implementation of door-to-door delivery.

Since 2017, WFP has provided technical guidance to the Government of Uttar Pradesh, assisting with the automation of fair price shops, enhanced supply chain management, and implementing biometric authentication in these shops, along with digitizing the TPDS. More recently, WFP has extended its partnership to the State Government of Uttarakhand since 2020, offering technical support for TPDS reforms, and is also assisting states in the northeast, such as Meghalaya.

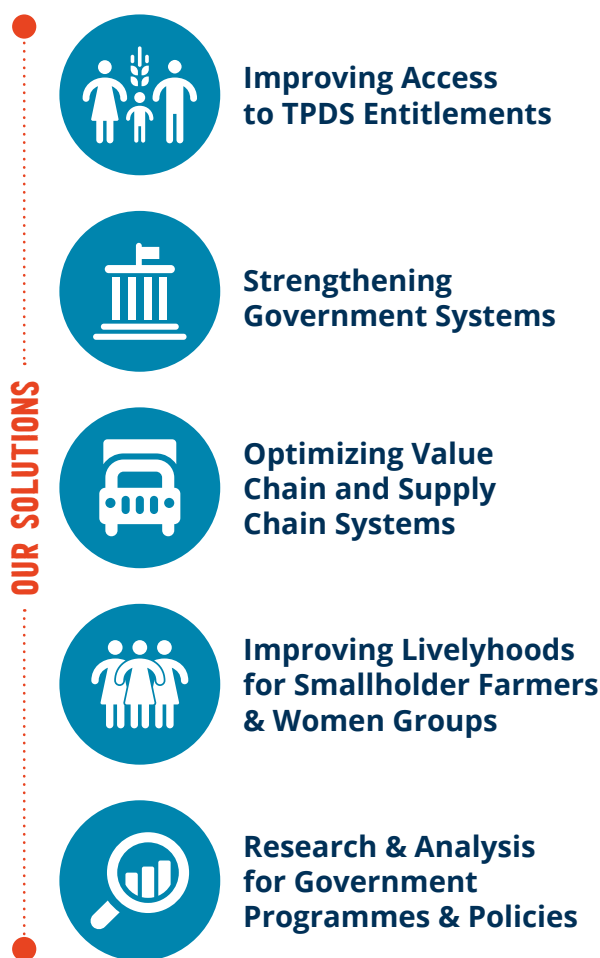
Throughout this time, WFP has supported the Department of Food and Public Distribution (DFPD), Government of India through various initiatives and innovations and by leveraging good practices from different Indian states and through WFP’s global expertise. As the government progressed steadily in implementing WFP’s best practice recommendations, WFP advocated several measures to promote the sustainability and institutionalization of reforms through national policies. For example, initiatives by WFP, such as conducting data analytics of TPDS operations in selected states and developing sample dashboards, were adopted by DFPD in 2017, which put forward the necessity for nationwide data analytics-based decision support systems. Similar support had also been provided for the PDS awareness campaigns on entitlements. Furthermore, WFP played a crucial role in advocating for the operationalization of national portability in the Public Distribution System (PDS) and provided valuable design inputs that informed the introduction of the One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC) program.

WFP is currently addressing calls for further enhancement of the efficiency of the TPDS and the extension of similar reforms to other food-based safety nets. This involves improving access to entitlements, reducing losses, optimizing supply chains for cost-effectiveness and environmental sustainability, enhancing transparency and accountability in service delivery, implementing user-friendly digital solutions, and exploring

the inclusion of nutritionally diverse grains. Additionally, WFP is focusing on building monitoring and evaluation capacity and localized Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) monitoring through partnerships with the Development Monitoring and Evaluation Office (DMEO) of NITI Aayog² as well as collaborating with national entities like the National Institute of Disaster Management to address disaster preparedness and climate adaptation (WFP 2023). Furthermore, WFP intends to continue advocating for gender equity and social inclusion in food access and consumption within households and marginalized populations.

Figure 1: WFP India’s approach to supporting food-based social protection






















Source: WFP



² NITI Aayog is the Government of India’s public policy think tank and the nodal agency tasked with knowledge production and aiding cooperative federalism between states and the national government.

Table 2 outlines WFP’s various activities across all country strategic plan outcomes. The following sections provide a deeper exploration and analysis of WFP India’s interventions and approaches towards achieving Country Strategic Plan Outcome 1.

Table 2: Mapping WFP India’s strategic outcomes with social protection building blocks.

Strategic outcomes	Key activities	WFP social protection building blocks
<p>Root causes: Country Strategic Plan Outcome 1: By 2030, the Government of India’s food-based social protection systems reach their target beneficiaries more effectively and efficiently</p>	<p>1. Provide capacity strengthening, technical support and innovative solutions to government and other stakeholders supporting food-based social protection systems</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">  Policy and Legislation  Governance, capacity and coordination  Platform and infrastructure  Assessments and analysis  Advocacy  Monitoring, evaluation and learning  Design of programme analysis  Benefit delivery
<p>Root causes: Country Strategic Plan Outcome 2: By 2030, beneficiaries of the Government of India’s food-based social protection systems have increased consumption of diverse, nutritious, and fortified foods</p>	<p>2. Provide capacity strengthening and social and behaviour change communication on grain fortification and local production of supplementary foods to government and other stakeholders working in and benefiting from food-based social protection programmes.</p> <p>3. Provide capacity strengthening and social and behaviour change communication to government and other stakeholders to promote the increased availability and use of diverse nutritious foods in school-based programmes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">  Policy and Legislation  Governance, capacity and coordination  Advocacy  Engagement and communications  Benefit delivery  Accountability, protection and assurance
<p>Root causes: Country Strategic Plan Outcome 3: By 2030, women enrolled in the Government of India’s self-help group collectives in targeted states have increased social and financial mobility</p>	<p>4. Provide capacity strengthening, technical assistance and innovative solutions to women’s self-help groups</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">  Governance, capacity and coordination  Advocacy  Engagement and communications  Design of programme analysis
<p>Resilience building: Country Strategic Plan Outcome 4: By 2030, the Government, civil society groups and communities in India have strengthened their adaptive capacity for climate-resilient livelihoods and food systems</p>	<p>5. Provide technical assistance on integrated risk management and climate resilience building to national and state governments and communities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">  Policy and Legislation  Governance, capacity and coordination  Assessments and analysis

4. Activities and Results

Strategic Outcome 1 of WFP’s previous Country Strategic Plan states that “By 2030, the Government of India’s food-based social protection systems reach their target beneficiaries more effectively and efficiently”, while **Strategic Outcome 2** states that “By 2030, beneficiaries of the Government of India’s food-based social protection systems have increased consumption of diverse, nutritious and fortified foods.”

Under these outcomes, WFP India has undertaken a series of interventions to identify, envision and optimize a more efficient and accessible TPDS. Its technical support for improving access to food comprised of “improved targeting, policy inputs, advocacy, strengthened community awareness, supply chain optimization, digitalisation and automation, individual training and warehouse management innovations along with initial work to support smallholder farmers, especially women, to double their incomes” (WFP 2021). Some of these interventions are explored below in this section.

Figure 2: Key results for Country Strategic Plan Outcome 1 (WFP 2023)

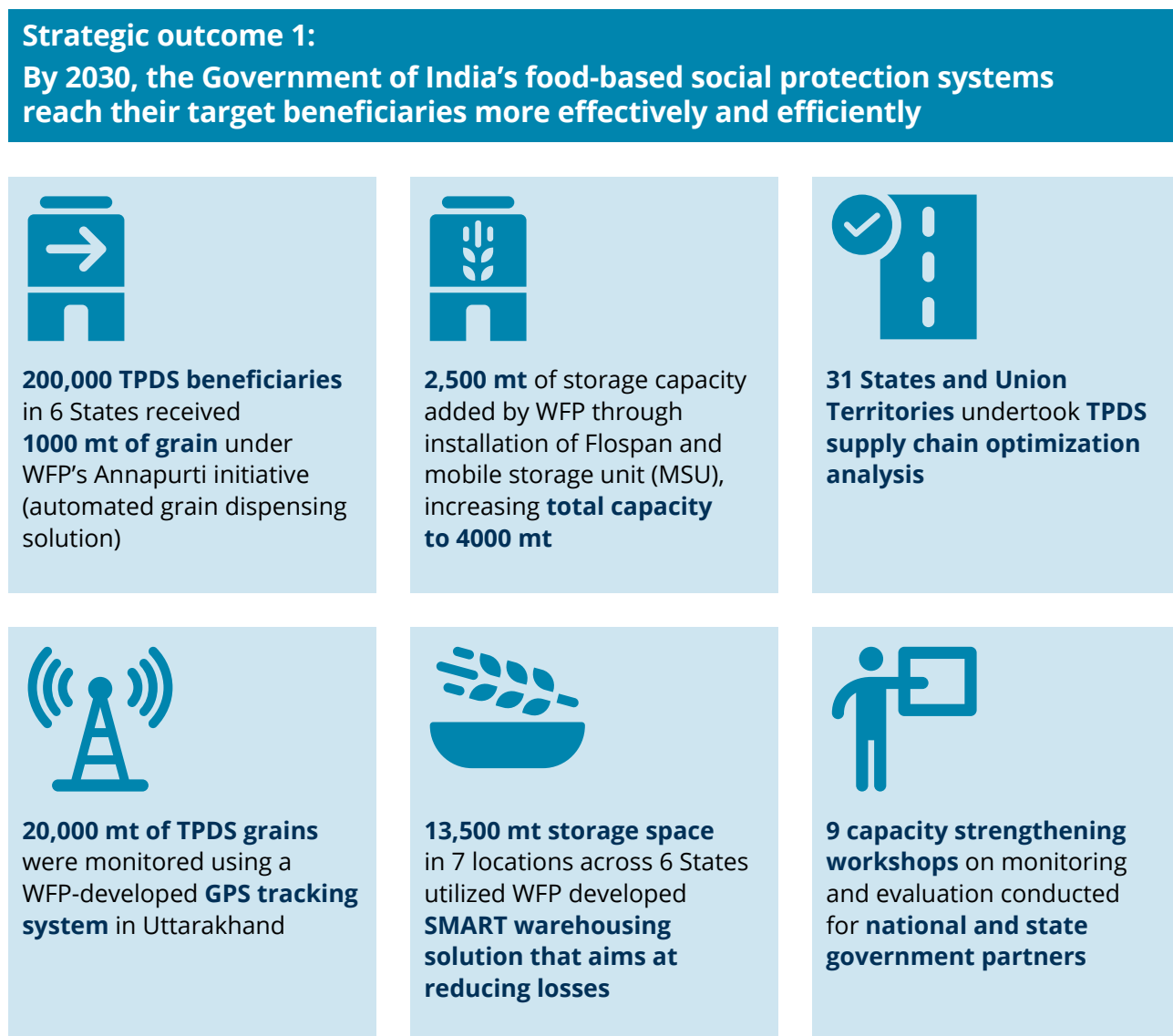






Figure 3: Key results for Country Strategic Plan Outcome 2 (WFP 2023)

**Strategic outcome 2:
By 2030, beneficiaries of the Government of India’s food-based social protection systems hav increased consumption of diverse, nutritious and fortified foods.**



WFP supported the Government to scale up **fortified rice distributions**, reaching **406 million people across 7 states**



WFP sensitized and trained **7,741 government staff and 2,885 rice millers on fortified rice**




WFP provided technical support to deliver information on **good feeding practices, diets, nutrition and fortified rice to 21.8 million people**



Through WFP technical assistance, **12 million children and pregnant and breastfeeding women** received **nutritious and quality assured take-home-rations**



1,780 school kitchen gardens set up and **6,662 school cooks** trained on **food safety and kitchen hygiene**



WFP conducted strategic assessments in **2 states** on the effect of fortified rice in **reducing anemia**

Optimizing TPDS value chain and supply chain systems

In 2017, at the request of the Government of Odisha, WFP assessed the entire PDS value chain, spanning from farmers to beneficiaries. The assessment involved WFP supply chain experts from its headquarters, Regional Bureau Bangkok, and the India country office. It revealed that the current supply chain setup of the TPDS in Odisha was inefficient and largely based on administrative boundaries.

Building on the aforementioned assessment, WFP collaborated with the Government of Odisha in 2018 on a pilot project aimed at enhancing the cost-effectiveness and efficiency of the grain supply chain within the TPDS. The initiative focused on understanding operational processes in the Dhenkanal district, evaluating data availability for optimizing TPDS delivery supply chains, and formulating an implementation roadmap. The findings highlighted clear areas for improvement along the supply chain, with the potential for significant cost reduction of up to 30 percent through shortened delivery distances and the establishment of an “alternative supply chain” network (WFP 2022). This approach had been estimated to potentially save up to USD 8 million annually in transportation costs within the existing infrastructure, while maintaining the outcomes

for farmers and beneficiaries. Subsequent endline monitoring by WFP in 2019 indicated that the steps outlined in the proposed roadmap were already underway, with further support now needed for broader state-wide adoption and implementation of supply chain optimization strategies.

The results of the pilot in Odisha to optimize TPDS supply chains led to an increased demand from the State governments to identify the potential impact of optimization at a state-wide scale, as well as its adaptable for states with more challenging geographic conditions such as hilly terrains and those that are prone to landslides (for example, Uttarakhand). When the results revealed that the Government of Uttarakhand could potentially save up to 53 percent in transportation costs, the success prompted the Government of India to mandate this initiative for all states, allocating over USD 2 million for TPDS optimization (WFP, 2022). WFP subsequently collaborated with the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi (IIT-Delhi) to lead the scale-up assistance for all state governments across India.

Additionally, WFP also initiated efforts to enhance the flexibility, transparency, and efficiency of storage and grain provision. Mobile storage units and SMART warehouses were trialed in seven states to minimize post-harvest losses within state-led procurement systems under the TPDS (WFP 2022). Additionally, an automated grain dispensing system known as the Annapurta Grain ATM was introduced and piloted in six states (WFP 2023).

Figure 4: WFP India’s timeline towards optimizing TPDS supply chains.



These initiatives create opportunities for cost savings through enhanced efficiency, enabling reinvestment in the program and potentially yielding greater benefits. The Government of India values and recognizes WFP as its “longstanding

partner in PDS reforms”, in particular for its support that enabled the Government to reform and strengthen several components of the TPDS architecture (DFPD, 2021). These include the following:

Social Protection Building blocks (TPDS)	Results
Registration and enrolment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital beneficiary database of TPDS consisting of 800 million people. • State level Beneficiary Management systems to handle NFSA enrolment and beneficiary management. • Deduplication of beneficiaries through the utilisation of Aadhaar (national biometric system) • Analysis and dashboard for inclusion and exclusion criteria to review and improve beneficiary targeting.
Benefit delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supply chain automation of all end-to-end components of PDS • A high share of digital and biometric authenticated transactions (94%) with the ability of online monitoring by Government functionaries at various levels. • Ability for beneficiary to purchase ration from any FPS (portability). 1.2 billion portability transactions allowing migrants and other beneficiaries to access benefits on the move.
Accountability, protection, and assurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easily accessible and effective grievance redressal • Dashboards, MIS for operations management, system implementation and transparency
Policy advocacy and Programme design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutionalisation of Data Analytics and national Portability in PDS through a new scheme on Integrated Management of Public Distribution System (IMPDS) formulated in 2018.

In 2022, the Government estimated cumulative cost savings (up to March 2022) of Rs. 1,351 billion, which roughly amounts to USD 16.7 billion, on account of the deletion of duplicate and fake/non-existent Ration Cards and efficiency gains of the Public Distribution System (DBT, 2022). The states

of Odisha and Uttar Pradesh, which had initially played the catalytic role through the testing and scaling-up of various components recommended by WFP, achieved the top two rankings in PDS reforms and NFSA implementation in the country as per an assessment by the central government.

Providing capacity strengthening and technical support to government staff

Recognizing the imperative for capacity building of functionaries within the Department of Food across India, particularly in light of the introduction of multiple new food security policies, programs, and solutions, WFP embarked on a series of capacity strengthening initiatives for government personnel. These efforts included the development, compilation, and launch of an e-learning system for the DFPD. Through this Learning Management System (LMS), stakeholders at both central and state government levels now have immediate access to information, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), guidelines, demonstrations of applications, and lessons on various aspects of TPDS operations (WFP 2022). Additionally, the platform enables learners to study at their own pace, personalize their learning paths based on individual needs, and ensures uniformity of content delivery across the country in a cost-efficient manner.

Furthermore, the platform serves as a dashboard for state-level authorities to monitor the progress of training activities undertaken by department functionaries and track their advancement. Eight e-learning modules were delivered through this online platform to enhance the capacity of central and state government staff on WFP supported initiatives such as supply chain optimization and management, with an additional three modules developed for Mission Shakti³ to provide capacity strengthening support for women's self-help groups.

More than 12,000 government staff have access to the LMS, with 40,000 modules of online training completed so far. Building on ongoing capacity strengthening engagements, WFP has also been planning to contribute towards strengthening the government's monitoring and evaluation capacity for the TPDS and other food-based social protection programmes (such as POSHAN Abhiyaan, ICDS and MDM). This will be undertaken with national government and select state governments (WFP 2023).

While WFP hit its own target for technical assistance activities, the activities involved in supporting these processes – such as developing trainings and tools – had exceeded the initial plan to respond to government demand. WFP tool on these activities regardless further augment state ownership of interventions, as outlined previously.

³ Mission Shakti is a women's empowerment program initiated by the Government of Odisha in India. Launched in 2001, it aims to empower women socially, politically, and economically by promoting their participation in decision-making processes and providing them with opportunities for self-employment and entrepreneurship. One of the key components of Mission Shakti is the formation and support of women's Self-Help Groups (SHGs) to facilitate access to credit, training, and livelihood opportunities. (Department of Mission Shakti, n.d.)

Setting up strategic partnerships

One of WFP's key government partner entities has been the Department of Food and Public Distribution (DFPD), with whom WFP has collaborated extensively to enact significant reforms within TPDS operations, while partnerships with state-level departments of women and child development and education have facilitated capacity strengthening for suggested reforms and modifications. For example, through a partnership with Mission Shakti, WFP aimed to bolster support for women's self-help groups and smallholders, enabling the allocation of funds for hiring technical experts to support the program (WFP 2021).

Additionally, WFP has established a Public Systems Lab (PSL) in collaboration with the Foundation for Innovation and Technology Transfer (FITT) at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) in Delhi,

fostering joint efforts to develop innovative solutions addressing public sector challenges - such as the reduction of logistics cost and GHG emissions through supply chain optimization. Nationwide scale-up initiatives for optimizing TPDS value chain and supply chain systems have also been undertaken in partnership with DFPD and state departments of food in Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, Uttarakhand, and Rajasthan. With the state governments of Uttarakhand and Meghalaya, partnerships had been developed through a unique model that ensured financial commitments from state governments themselves toward their own capacity strengthening efforts.

For sustained outcomes and context-informed supply chain optimization, WFP, FITT and IIT-Delhi partnership was able to leverage funding from the national government to co-fund the modelling of supply chain optimization for several states in India (WFP 2021).



5. Lessons Learned

BUILDING AND NURTURING LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIPS WITH GOVERNMENT COUNTERPARTS

WFP's long-standing relationship with the government at both the national and state levels has been recognized as a significant enabling factor for its effective support to the national social protection system. A key element of this process included WFP contributing secondment to the Programme Monitoring Unit (PMU) within the government. This helped build trust and long-term partnership, allowing WFP the opportunity to work closer with the government and later introduce several new reform agendas, such as on data analytics, rice fortification and supply chain optimization. A closer more direct line for WFP officers with national- and state-level counterparts provided opportunities to advocate for more efficient systems, showcase pilot successes, and share their learning with the government regularly for implementation and service provision.

TRANSFORMING TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE MODELS BY BUILDING ON THE MOMENTUM OF EARLY SUCCESSES

The relevance, timeliness, and actionability of WFP's contributions served as the basis for building a strong relationship with the national government. In 2012, WFP responded to demands for technical support from the government and effectively transformed its assistance model from grain provision to strengthening the government system, optimizing service delivery, and ensuring that its advocacy is evidence driven. For instance, in meeting the demand for digitalisation and automation from the national government, WFP as a first step worked towards compiling and showcasing evidence of how it could be undertaken, to then eventually supporting the government as a technical partner in improving the efficacy and food protection of national systems.

After having supported the government in its priority areas, this partnership with government moved to the next stage, where WFP was better placed to introduce new agendas to the table. WFP's contributions as a result of this partnership include the introduction of multiple innovations such as supply chain optimization, Internet of Things (IoT) and AI enabled SMART warehousing, mobile storage units and grain ATMs (Annapurta).

SHOWCASING GOOD PRACTICE AND GENERATING EVIDENCE THROUGH CONTAINED PILOTS

WFP, in collaboration with the government, has undertaken a series of pilots to test the viability of ideas and generate evidence of what works, along with the drivers for potential success. Once the pilot has been undertaken, emerging learning is captured and shared with multiple stakeholders and across different levels of government to ensure ownership and eventual scaling up, to be led by state- or national-level government staff. Supply chain optimization, grain ATMs and SMART warehouse are all successful initiatives that had begun as pilots. The partnership with the government from the start and throughout the pilot stage has been a key factor in enabling the government to lead the next phases and processes of scale-up, with WFP now providing support with capacity and service delivery.

ENHANCING CAPACITY THROUGH INNOVATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Private sector partnerships have been a key strategy for funding pilot interventions at the state level, which in turn helped to catalyse the reform agenda nationally. For instance, to undertake the second pilot on optimizing supply chains, WFP partnered with IIT- Delhi and FITT to draw on their analytical expertise with modelling to complement WFP's own knowledge of where TPDS supply chains could be optimized. This led to a longer-term partnership based on a model that utilizes Indian technical expertise and recognizes and bridges the strengths of the different entities, leading to scaling up the work around optimization and enabling in-country expertise to be the main support to state governments throughout the process.



INVESTING IN SYSTEM STRENGTHENING: LONG-TERM EFFICIENCY OVER SHORT-TERM COSTS

Strengthening systems take time but can be less expensive than service provision over time. Clearly aligning support with the priorities and needs of the government has served as a crucial and significant factor. The need for technical support to strengthen TPDS systems was a gap that WFP duly identified in consultation with the government, and thereby stepped in to address through various interventions. This was done with the recognition that strengthening systems and improving efficiency is time intensive and less likely to be as straightforward to monitor and evaluate, in comparison to, for instance, with grain provision. WFP India's experience indicates that such processes can take a minimum of five years to ensure substantial changes and results, and that activities need to be finite, measurable, and oriented directly towards systems transformation and strengthening.

This has also led to a re-alignment in resources needed for WFP India's operations. Transforming their model towards technical support for systems strengthening has meant lower input costs by WFP comprising mainly of personnel and human resource time, rather than being directed to buying, storing, and distributing food or providing monetary support. Shifting to this model of investment has meant that an improved, more efficient TPDS can target and reach more people than it had previously and provide the opportunity for more equitable, flexible access to grains. This shift also promises more sustained outcomes.

ENABLING NATIONAL OWNERSHIP WHEN SUPPORTING SOCIAL PROTECTION REFORM

WFP's experience also shows that sustainable outcomes for social protection need to be operated, owned, and invested in by national and subnational governments. While civil society, with its limited resources, are sometimes better positioned to support by identifying and advocating for the improvement of different elements within the system, national or relevant state counterparts need to be involved in improvement from the initial problem and idea conception stage to ensure that successful pilots are invested in, contextualized, and scaled up and out when the conditions allow. WFP's flexibility and ability to take on roles which included advocating for budgetary allocations during the transition from the pilot stage to scaling up have also enabled this process. The organization, throughout the process, has relied on its experience and knowledge of government systems and mechanisms, along with a fervent belief in the state capacity and technical expertise required for these successes.

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Annex: Key Informant Interviews

1. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) 1, 2 members of WFP India Staff (2023). Interview by Ruhil Iyer conducted on 5th July 2023. Case Study on WFP's Support to the National Social Protection in India.
2. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) 2, 2 members of WFP India Staff (2023). Interview by Ruhil Iyer conducted on 12th October 2023. Case Study on WFP's Support to the National Social Protection in India.



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