



**WFP EVALUATION**



# Synthesis of evidence and lessons on WFP's cooperating partners from centralized and decentralized evaluations

Synthesis Report – Volume I  
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# Executive Summary

## INTRODUCTION

### Synthesis features

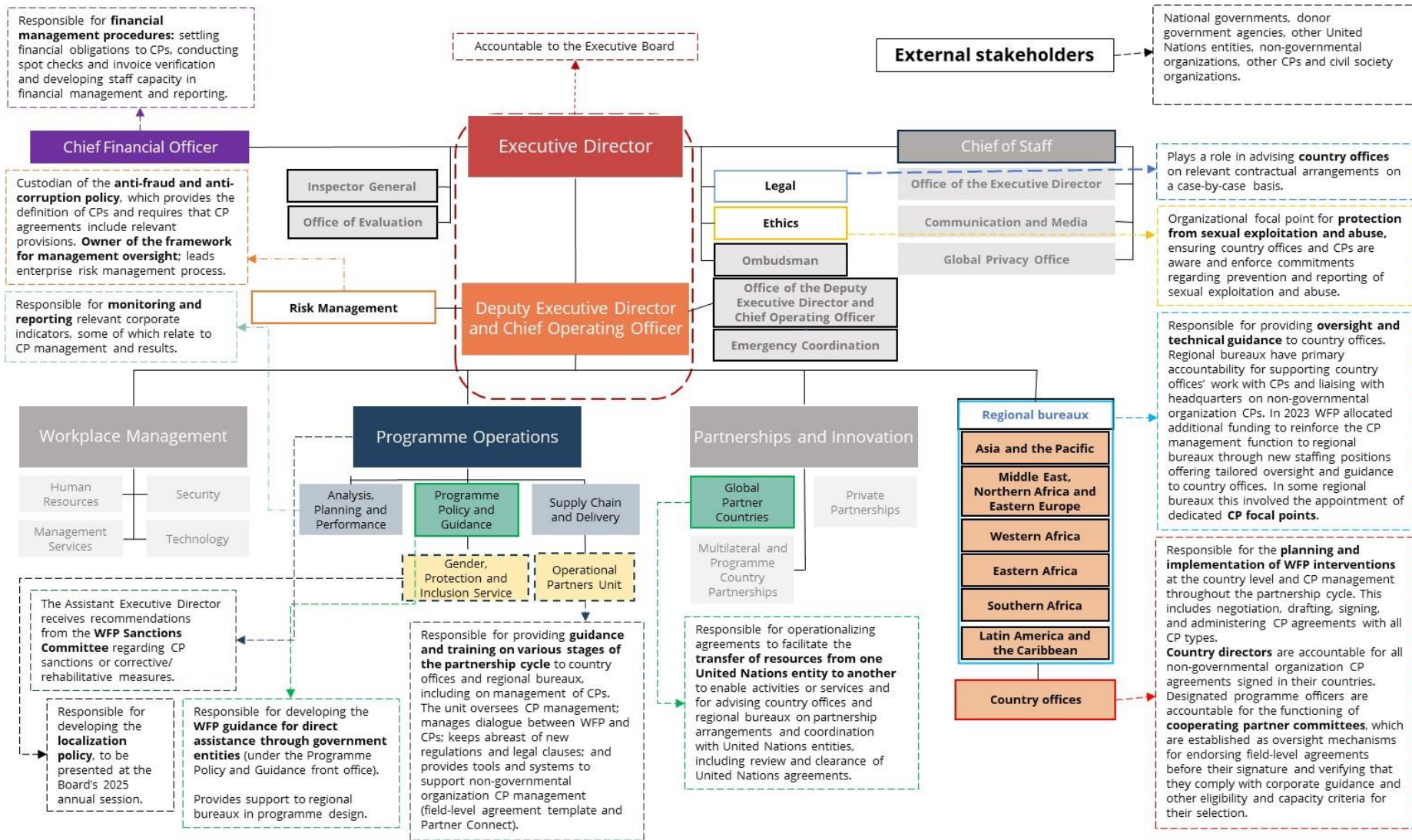
1. This synthesis of evaluation evidence and learning in relation to WFP's work with cooperating partners (CPs) was conducted in 2024. It drew on 47 centralized evaluations and decentralized evaluations published between 2020 and 2023. The purpose of the synthesis was to better understand the role of WFP in the management of and strategic engagement with CPs.
2. The synthesis sought to address five questions:
  - To what extent do evaluations show that WFP's partnerships with CPs contributed to the achievement of its aims at the country level?
  - In which activity areas do evaluations show that CPs made contributions to the achievement of WFP's aims? What worked well and what challenges arose?
  - What does the evidence show regarding WFP's and CPs' attention to cross-cutting priorities<sup>1</sup> and corporate commitments?
  - What factors do evaluations indicate contributed to or hindered the quality and performance of WFP's work with CPs?
  - To what extent do evaluations indicate that WFP's relationships with its CPs have changed over time?
3. The intended users of the synthesis include WFP's Operational Partners Unit;<sup>2</sup> the Programme Policy and Guidance Division; the Gender, Protection and Inclusion Service; programme and policy owners; regional bureaux; and country offices.
4. Figure 1 outlines the key stakeholders for this synthesis and their responsibilities concerning CPs. It also shows the cross-functional nature of cooperating partnership management and collaboration.

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<sup>1</sup> The current WFP strategic plan, covering 2022–2025, identifies nutrition integration as a key cross-cutting priority. However, since the evaluations covered by this synthesis sample reviewed programmes and country strategic plans designed before the current plan, which for the first time emphasized nutrition as a cross-cutting area, this synthesis does not assess the cooperating partners' attention to this priority.

<sup>2</sup> In February 2024 WFP introduced a new organizational structure. As part of this process, the NGO Partnerships Unit, formerly reporting directly to the Assistant Executive Director for Programme and Policy Development, was renamed the Operational Partners Unit and was relocated in the same department, now called Programme and Operations, within the Supply Chain and Delivery Division under the Delivery Assurance Service.

**Figure 1: Synthesis stakeholders and their role in relation to cooperating partners**

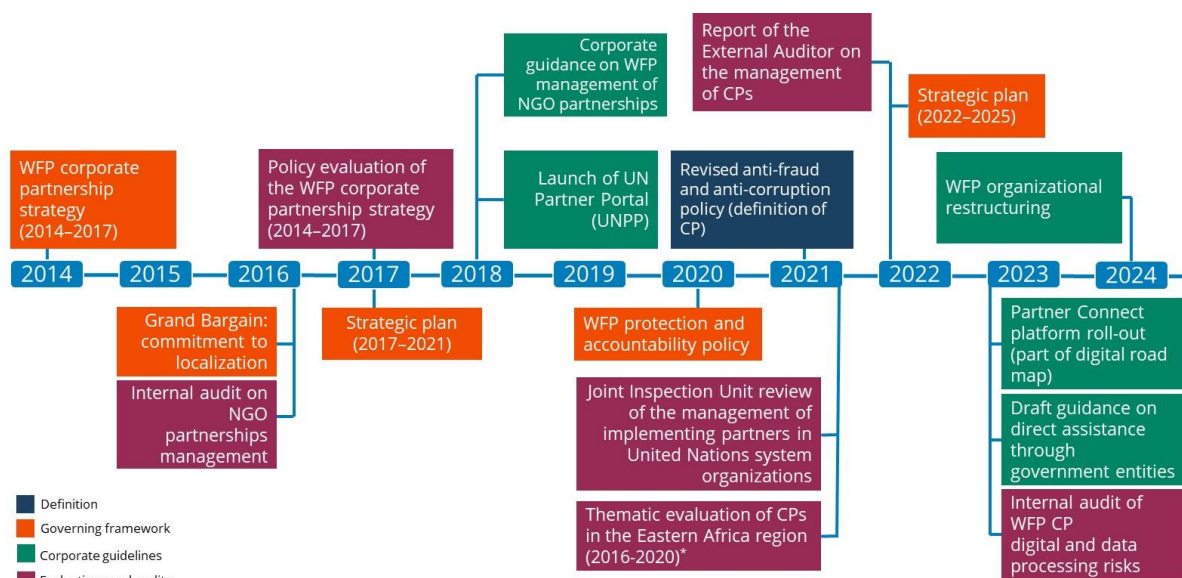


Source: Evaluation synthesis team.

## Context

- WFP defines a CP as “a non-profit entity that enters into a contractual relationship with WFP to assist in the performance of WFP’s work (including government entities, non-governmental organizations and United Nations organizations)”.<sup>3</sup>
- WFP’s work with CPs has evolved over time, as has the normative and operating environment (figure 2).

**Figure 2: Evolution of WFP’s work with cooperating partners and key documents**



Source: WFP corporate documents.<sup>4</sup>

- A significant proportion of WFP’s overall contributions are channelled through CPs. In 2022 WFP directed USD 3.9 billion through local and national CPs (21.2 percent of total contributions). In 2023, the proportion of funding channelled through CPs increased by 10 percent, reaching USD 3.5 billion (31 percent of total contributions).

<sup>3</sup> “Revised anti-fraud and anti-corruption policy” (WFP/EB.A/2021/5-B/1).

<sup>4</sup> WFP. 2023. [Internal Audit of WFP Cooperating Partners Digital and Data Processing Risks](#).

WFP. 2023. Draft guidance direct assistance through government entities (*not available online*).

WFP. 2022. [WFP and the Grand Bargain](#).

“Report of the External Auditor on the management of cooperating partners” (WFP/EB.A/2022/6-H/1).

“WFP strategic plan (2022–2025)” (WFP/EB.2/2021/4-A/1/Rev.2).

“Revised anti-fraud and anti-corruption policy.” (WFP/EB.A/2021/5-B/1).

WFP. 2021. [Thematic Evaluation of Cooperating Partnerships in the Eastern Africa Region 2016–2020](#).

Joint Inspection Unit. 2021. [Review of the management of implementing partners in United Nations system organizations](#).

“WFP protection and accountability policy” (WFP/EB.2/2020/4-A/1/Rev.2).

WFP. 2018. Corporate Guidance on WFP Management of NGO Partnerships (*internal document*).

“WFP Strategic Plan (2017–2021)” (WFP/EB.2/2016/4-A/1/Rev.2).

WFP. 2016. [Policy Evaluation: WFP Corporate Partnership Strategy \(2014–2017\) – Evaluation Report](#).

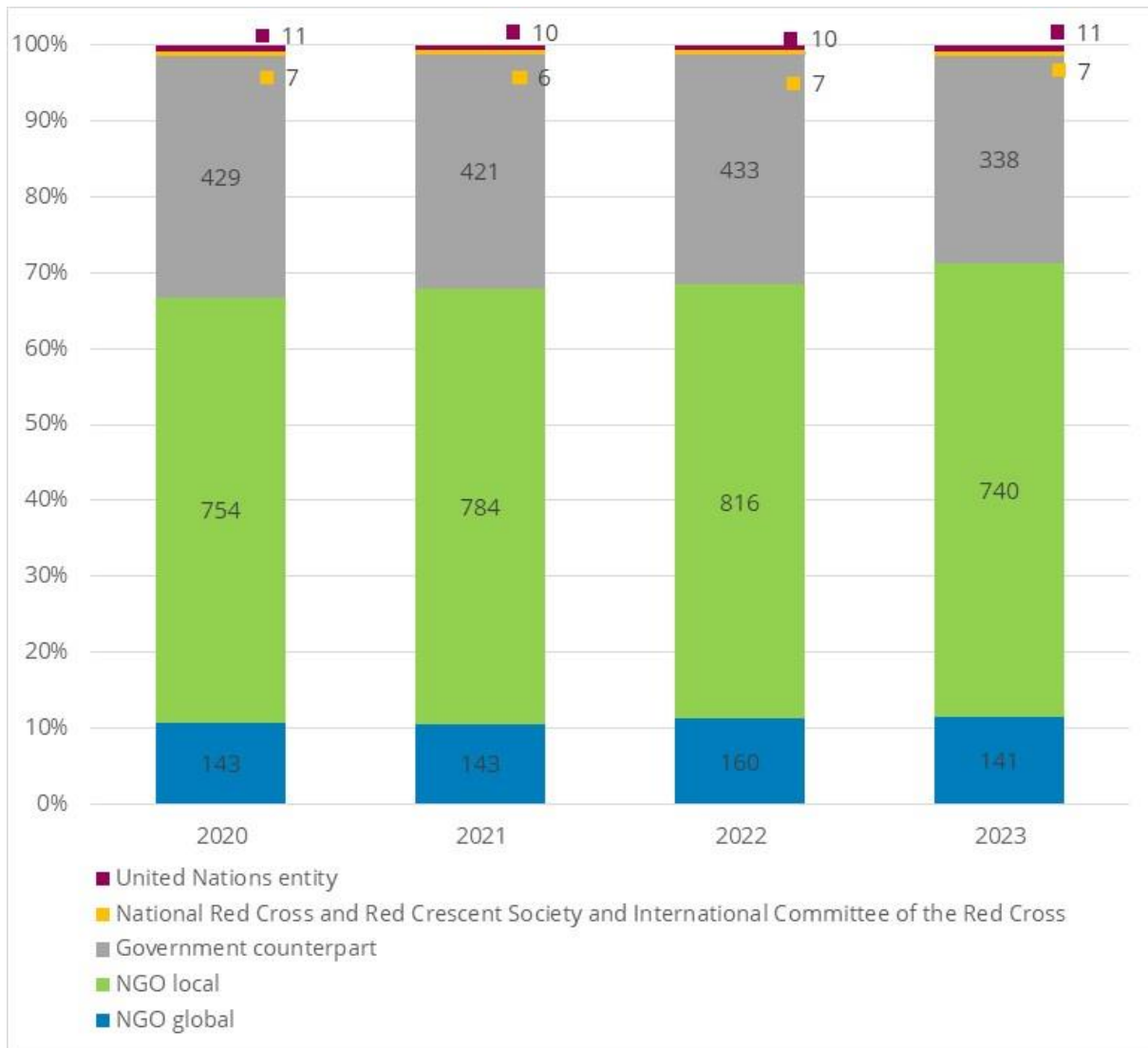
WFP. 2016. [Internal Audit of WFP’s Management of NGO Partnerships](#).

Inter-Agency Standing Committee. [About the Grand Bargain](#).

“WFP Corporate Partnership Strategy (2014–2017)” (WFP/EB.A/2014/5-B).

8. Between 2020 and 2023 over 80 percent of WFP's 1,343 CPs were local actors. This included an annual average of 774 local non-governmental organizations (NGOs)<sup>5</sup> and 405 government partners. The breakdown of cooperating partners by type is shown in figure 3.

**Figure 3: WFP cooperating partners 2020–2023, by type\***



Source: WFP field-level agreement tracker; as at 3 May 2024.

\* Numbers have been calculated based on partnerships that were signed through field-level agreements and memoranda of understanding or letters of understanding.

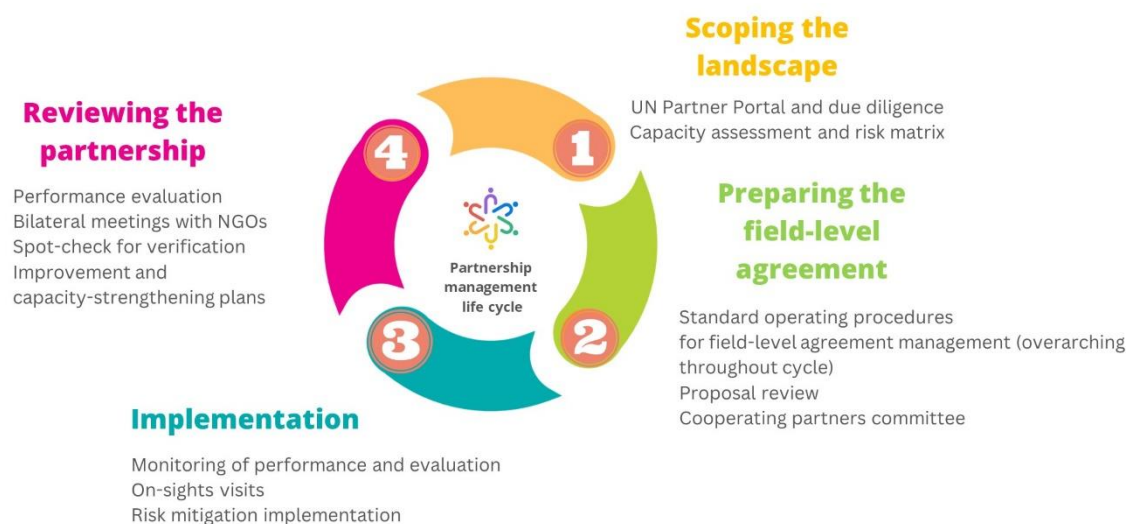
<sup>5</sup> Local NGOs are those that are headquartered and operating in their own aid recipient country and are not affiliated with an international NGO (Source: International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 2018. [Identified categories for tracking funding flows](#)).



9. The key tools and guidance for navigating work with CPs are as follows.

- i) **The cycle of cooperating partnership management** equips WFP staff to engage with CPs (figure 4).

**Figure 4: Figure 4: Cycle of cooperating partnership management**



Source: WFP Operational Partners Unit.

- ii) **Field-level agreements** are legal contracts for managing WFP resources and activities with NGOs.
- iii) The **UN Partner Portal** is a platform that supports due diligence and partner selection.
- iv) **Partner Connect** is a digital NGO cooperating partnership management process.<sup>6</sup>
- v) There is currently no template for engaging governments as CPs, but ad hoc solutions have been used to support WFP interventions. New **guidance on direct assistance through government entities** is being developed.
- vi) Relationships with United Nations CPs are supported through the *Guidance note on Transferring Contributions from One Agency to Another for Programmatic Activities* and the **UN-to-UN transfer agreement template**.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> As of April 2024, Partner Connect has been implemented in 23 country offices. Its rollout is still under way.

<sup>7</sup> United Nations Sustainable Development Group, 2021. [Guidance note on Transferring Contributions from One Agency to Another for Programmatic Activities](#).

## METHODOLOGY

10. The synthesis draws on 27 centralized evaluations<sup>8</sup> and 20 decentralized evaluations<sup>9</sup> conducted across WFP's six regions and published between 2020 and 2023. It includes evaluations that scored above the Office of Evaluation's independent quality assessment threshold of 60 percent.

**Table 1: Final synthesis sample by type and references used**

Centralized evaluations				Decentralized evaluations		Total
Country strategic plan (CSP)	Policy	Strategic	Corporate emergency response	Activity	Thematic	47 27 CE 20 DE
22	1	2	2	16	4	

*References and abbreviations used in the synthesis:*

- CSP evaluations – [country] CSPE [year] – e.g. Jordan CSPE 2022.
- Strategic evaluations – [description] SE [year] – e.g. Technology SE 2022.
- Decentralized evaluations – [country] DE [year] – e.g. Rwanda DE 2021.
- Corporate emergency response evaluations – [country] CEE [year] – e.g. Myanmar CEE 2023.

11. The synthesis team used an analytical framework and coding structure to guide data extraction and employed a qualitative data analysis tool (MAXQDA) for managing data. Desk analysis, interviews and a dedicated workshop with key stakeholders were conducted to discuss and validate the findings and situate conclusions and recommendations within the context of recent or ongoing changes at WFP.

12. **Limitations:** The evaluations primarily covered NGO CPs, with limited coverage of government CPs and almost no coverage of United Nations CP partners; they tended not to specify the type of CP being evaluated, which made it necessary to cross-check them with other documents and interviews. Also, the retrospective nature of evaluations means that they may not reflect recent changes in WFP's approach or circumstances.

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<sup>8</sup> Centralized evaluations are commissioned and managed by the Office of Evaluation and presented to the Executive Board for consideration. This synthesis does not cover evaluations that were under way at the time the synthesis was being prepared.

<sup>9</sup> Decentralized evaluations are commissioned and managed by country offices, regional bureaux or headquarters divisions other than the Office of Evaluation. They are not presented to the Board.

# Evaluation synthesis findings

## **TO WHAT EXTENT DO EVALUATIONS SHOW THAT WFP'S PARTNERSHIPS WITH COOPERATING PARTNERS CONTRIBUTED TO THE ACHIEVEMENT OF ITS AIMS AT THE COUNTRY LEVEL?**

### **Strategic outcome 1: People are better able to meet their urgent food and nutrition needs**

13. For strategic outcome 1, 26 evaluations reported on the contributions of CPs to WFP's work to save lives in emergencies. The evaluations found that CP partnerships were key to WFP's life-saving assistance, enhancing its ability to reach vulnerable people, access hard-to-reach areas and improve targeting.
14. CPs also played key roles in enabling WFP to refine the targeting of its assistance by conducting household targeting exercises and helped to mitigate the effects of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic by sustaining pipelines. The cost efficiency of WFP programmes was improved by CP action such as the provision of local transport. The work of CPs in ensuring information flows, for example to local governments, also helped to facilitate programme implementation. However, six evaluations identified CP capacity gaps, including in the areas of technology, and gender and protection, which impeded programme implementation under strategic outcome 1.

### **Strategic outcome 2: People have better nutrition, health and education outcomes**

15. For strategic outcome 2, evidence from 25 evaluations was available. This highlighted the central role of CPs in expanding WFP nutrition, health and education programmes at the community level and advocating on these issues at the national level.
16. CPs helped WFP to deliver results by, among other things, expanding food distribution in schools and providing direct nutrition assistance and training for community groups. CP communication and advocacy at the local and national levels also helped WFP to expand its reach to communities. CP engagement in beneficiary data collection and data management and programme monitoring and their provision of critical technical assistance for school feeding and nutrition programmes also helped WFP to achieve its results.

### **Strategic outcome 3: People have improved and sustainable livelihoods**

17. Fifteen evaluations provided evidence on CP contributions to livelihoods and resilience programming.
18. Specific contributions to this outcome included the provision of local knowledge that improved understanding of the root causes of food insecurity; the conduct of targeting and needs assessments to identify needs and vulnerable groups; and the management of community feedback mechanisms to channel beneficiaries' perspectives to country offices. Here, however, WFP did not always make maximum use of CP knowledge and understanding of community relationships to address root causes of food insecurity and build resilience.

### **Strategic outcome 4: National programmes and systems are strengthened**

19. Under strategic outcome 4, 12 evaluations assessing relevant evidence found that WFP's engagement with CPs – which were mostly government partners under this outcome – helped to build an enabling environment for programme implementation and contributed to institution strengthening.
20. Specific contributions included supporting advocacy on nutrition-sensitive agriculture and improved livelihoods and implementing pilot projects in support of system strengthening and the improvement of social protection programming. In Pakistan pilot projects to support the implementation of a Government-led social protection programme were developed with support from government CPs.

## IN WHICH ACTIVITY AREAS DO EVALUATIONS SHOW THAT COOPERATING PARTNERS MADE CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE ACHIEVEMENT OF WFP'S AIMS? WHAT WORKED WELL AND WHAT CHALLENGES AROSE?

21. Evaluations found that CPs played a significant role in helping WFP to undertake specific activities, with their contributions most evident, within this set of evaluations, in school-based programmes, community and household asset creation and unconditional resource transfer activities. Table 2 provides an overview of the roles that CPs played in supporting WFP in achieving results in each activity area.

**Table 2: Key roles played by cps identified in evaluations, by activity area**

Activity	CP roles highlighted	Examples of CP contributions
School feeding <sup>a</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enhancing hygiene and food safety</li> <li>Improving school infrastructure</li> <li>Enhancing distribution of food to children's homes</li> </ul>	<p><a href="#">Cambodia DE 2020</a>: Provided training on supplier selection and food safety</p> <p><a href="#">Bangladesh DE 2020</a>: Collected school enrolment lists to facilitate delivery of biscuits to children's homes</p>
Asset creation and livelihoods <sup>b</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Programme implementation</li> <li>Access to employment</li> <li>Rehabilitation of community assets</li> </ul>	<p><a href="#">Senegal CSPE 2023</a>: implemented food for assets activities that improved income and resilience</p> <p><a href="#">Jordan CSPE 2022</a>: Contributed to job and business creation</p>
General food assistance (in-kind and cash) <sup>c</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provision of food to vulnerable families during disasters</li> <li>Scaling up cash transfers</li> <li>Supporting beneficiaries in the receipt of bank transfers</li> </ul>	<p><a href="#">Cameroon CSPE 2020</a>: Provided emergency food and scaled up cash-based transfers</p> <p><a href="#">Tajikistan CSPE 2022</a>: Helped open bank accounts for cash transfers</p>
Smallholder agricultural market support <sup>d</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Connecting farmers with buyers</li> <li>Training farm-based organization leaders</li> </ul>	<p><a href="#">Ghana CSPE 2023</a>: Advocated better farming practices and post-harvest handling</p> <p><a href="#">Zimbabwe DE 2022</a>: Linked farmers with buyers at agricultural shows and seed fairs</p>
Climate adaptation and risk management <sup>e</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Climate adaptation practices in agriculture</li> <li>Support for climate change adaptation project</li> </ul>	<p><a href="#">Honduras CSPE 2022</a>: Taught climate adaptation practices, including agricultural insurance and meteorology</p> <p><a href="#">Sri Lanka DE 2021</a>: Supported implementation of the inclusion and climate change adaptation project</p>
Nutrition <sup>f</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communication and training</li> <li>Delivering nutrition to vulnerable groups in crisis response</li> </ul>	<p><a href="#">Nutrition and HIV/AIDS SE 2023</a>: Helped WFP to reach vulnerable groups, including people living with HIV</p> <p><a href="#">Cambodia food aid procurement DE 2023</a>: promotion of good nutrition practices</p>
Country capacity strengthening <sup>g</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Joint monitoring</li> <li>Building technical expertise</li> </ul>	<p><a href="#">Ghana CSPE 2023</a>: School feeding programme stakeholders trained in supervision and programme monitoring</p>

Source: Evaluation synthesis team.

<sup>a</sup> Type of CP and number of evaluations: NGO (9); government (6); NGO and government (17).

<sup>b</sup> Type of CP and number of evaluations: NGO (10); government (2); NGO and government (6).

<sup>c</sup> Type of CP and number of evaluations: NGO (16); NGO and government (1).

<sup>d</sup> Type of CP and number of evaluations: NGO (10); NGO and government (1).

<sup>e</sup> Type of CP and number of evaluations: NGO (3); government (2); United Nations (1).

<sup>f</sup> Type of CP and number of evaluations: NGO (8); NGO and government (4); government (3).

<sup>g</sup> Type of CP and number of evaluations: government (4).

22. CP implementation of activities was helped when WFP provided training to improve their skills in areas such as nutrition, resilience and accountability to affected populations. Evaluations found that regular coordination meetings with CPs convened by WFP, as documented in the [Myanmar CEE 2023](#), enhanced information exchange between WFP and CPs and among CPs, which supported programme adaptation. The [Tajikistan CSPE 2022](#) showed that WFP's collaboration with knowledgeable NGOs supported programme implementation.

23. Challenges included issues with field-level agreements such as delays in signing contracts, short-term contracting, delayed disbursement of funds from WFP to CPs (found in ten evaluations),<sup>10</sup> high staff turnover within CPs and targeting criteria that were not always clear to CPs. The main effect was delayed delivery to beneficiaries. For example, the [Benin DE 2022](#) reported that the late contracting and signing of field-level agreements with NGO CPs resulted in the late start of school feeding for children.

## WHAT DOES THE EVIDENCE SHOW REGARDING WFP'S AND COOPERATING PARTNERS' ATTENTION TO CROSS-CUTTING PRIORITIES AND CORPORATE COMMITMENTS?

24. *Gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE)*. Twenty-five evaluations provided evidence on the attention paid by CPs to gender equality and women's empowerment.

25. Despite WFP's prioritization of GEWE in guidance and field-level agreement conditions for CPs, evaluations found varied capacity to address GEWE, especially among NGO CPs. Specific issues highlighted in evaluations include the following:

- **Inadequate integration of gender requirements in field-level agreements and limited use of relevant tools.**<sup>11</sup> For example, the CPs evaluated in [Eastern Africa Region DE 2021](#) found that fewer than half of field-level agreements made a formal commitment to gender equality and reported that the application of GEWE tools and guidelines was inconsistent.
- **Need for enhanced capacity strengthening on gender.** Twelve evaluations<sup>12</sup> identified a need for CP capacity strengthening on GEWE, especially for conducting gender analysis and addressing gender-based violence. Five<sup>13</sup> evaluations, however, noted positive effects from GEWE guidance and training provided by WFP. The [Zimbabwe CSPE 2022](#) emphasized that training CPs on GEWE improved the extent to which food assistance was adapted to the needs of women.

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<sup>10</sup> Benin DE 2020, Benin DE 2022, Chad CSPE 2023, Central African Republic CSPE 2023, CPs in Eastern Africa Region DE 2021, Democratic Republic of Congo CSPE 2020, Guinea-Bissau DE 2021, Haiti CSPE 2023, Pakistan CSPE 2022, and South Sudan CSPE 2022.

<sup>11</sup> Field-level agreement general conditions commit cooperating partners to carrying out tasks in accordance with WFP's gender policy, and each budget template includes a section for gender equality activities. The draft guidance on direct assistance through government entities also emphasizes gender considerations. It is noted that the field-level agreement general conditions, annex 6 of the previous field-level agreement template, ensured commitment to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, gender and inclusion, protection and accountability to affected populations, and that this is now superseded by sections 9A, 2.1.c and 2.2 of the 2024 version of the field-level agreement.

<sup>12</sup> Bolivia CSPE 2022, Burkina Faso DE 2020, Central African Republic CSPE 2023, Chad CSPE 2023, CPs in Eastern Africa Region DE 2021, El Salvador CSPE 2022, Gambia DE 2021, Guinea DE 2022, Jordan CSPE 2022, Lebanon CSPE 2021, Nigeria CSPE 2023, and Syria DE 2020.

<sup>13</sup> Ghana CSPE 2023, Lebanon Resilience DE 2020, Nigeria CSPE 2023, South Sudan CSPE 2022, and Zimbabwe CSPE 2022.

- **Variable gender mainstreaming.** Evaluations found that CP mainstreaming of gender within programming varied. Eight evaluations<sup>14</sup> highlighted good practice here, with CPs providing specific expertise on gender, while twelve<sup>15</sup> found that CPs inadequately considered gender in analysis, design, targeting and inclusion criteria for programming. Two evaluations<sup>16</sup> highlighted a need for more progress on the adoption of gender-transformative approaches.
26. **Lack of gender parity in CP staffing.** This issue was highlighted in three evaluations<sup>17</sup> noting that CP staff were predominantly male. One evaluation<sup>18</sup> noted insufficient engagement with women-led organizations by WFP in the Eastern Africa region.
  27. **Protection and accountability to affected populations.**<sup>19</sup> Twenty-three evaluations<sup>20</sup> provided evidence on this issue, finding mixed results. In countries such as Tajikistan, Myanmar and Lebanon, CPs played a critical role in protection efforts while in others, CPs struggled to operationalize protection principles because of a lack of awareness of the principles or knowledge of how to apply them. Three evaluations<sup>21</sup> identified challenges related to data protection for CPs. For example, the [Technology SE 2022](#) reported limited communication on data protection issues by WFP to its CPs, and a lack of effort to identify cyber security and technology risks for CPs.
  28. Twenty evaluations<sup>22</sup> provided evidence on accountability to affected populations, showing mixed results. Nine evaluations<sup>23</sup> presented examples of CPs ensuring the effective use of complaint management systems, but three<sup>24</sup> identified challenges related to underreporting of complaints by CPs. The [Chad CSPE 2023](#) found that inadequate use of community feedback mechanisms and lack of communication on the claims received hindered the ability of CPs to understand beneficiaries' perspectives and intervention success.
  29. **Disability.** The six evaluations<sup>25</sup> providing evidence on consideration given by CPs to disability inclusion in programming found that these concerns were not adequately integrated into programmes, with

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<sup>14</sup> Benin DE 2022, Cambodia Food Aid Procurement DE 2023, Cameroon CSPE 2020, Guinea DE 2022, Lebanon Resilience DE 2020, South Sudan CSPE 2022, Sri Lanka DE 2021, and Tajikistan CSPE 2022.

<sup>15</sup> Benin DE 2020, Bangladesh DE 2020, Burkina Faso DE 2020, Cameroon CSPE 2020, Central African Republic CSPE 2023, Myanmar CEE 2023, Gambia DE 2021, Jordan CSPE 2022, Lebanon DE 2020, Lebanon CSPE 2021, Sri Lanka DE 2021, and Syria DE 2020.

<sup>16</sup> CPs in Eastern Africa Region DE 2021, and Jordan CSPE 2022.

<sup>17</sup> South Sudan CSPE 2022, Burkina Faso DE 2020, and Benin DE 2022.

<sup>18</sup> CPs in Eastern Africa Region DE 2021.

<sup>19</sup> Annex 6 of the field-level agreement general conditions template includes standard requirements for awareness among beneficiaries of the organization's community feedback mechanisms to provide a channel for accountability to affected populations. Guidance for government cooperating partners commits them to accountability to affected populations, and the interim guidance and assurance standards for cash-based transfers through governments provides that accountability to affected populations is an important part of WFP's programming, including when it is delivered through governments.

<sup>20</sup> Benin DE 2022, Chad CSPE 2023, Lebanon Resilience DE 2020, Sudan CSPE 2022, Zimbabwe CSPE 2022, Burkina Faso CSPE 2023, Burkina Faso DE 2020, El Salvador CSPE 2022, Myanmar CEE 2023, Ghana CSPE 2023, Jordan CSPE 2022, Lebanon CSPE 2021, Pakistan CSPE 2022, South Sudan CSPE 2022, Central African Republic CSPE 2023, Haiti CSPE 2023, Honduras CSPE 2022, Malawi CSPE 2023, Nigeria CSPE 2023, Peru CSPE 2022, Tajikistan CSPE 2022, Syria DE 2020, and Technology SE 2022.

<sup>21</sup> Technology SE 2022, Nigeria CSPE 2023, and Burkina Faso DE 2020.

<sup>22</sup> Benin DE 2022, Chad CSPE 2023, Lebanon Resilience DE 2020, Sudan CSPE 2022, Zimbabwe CSPE 2022, Burkina Faso CSPE 2023, El Salvador CSPE 2022, Myanmar CEE 2023, Ghana CSPE 2023, Jordan CSPE 2022, Lebanon CSPE 2021, Pakistan CSPE 2022, South Sudan CSPE 2022, Central African Republic CSPE 2023, Haiti CSPE 2023, Malawi CSPE 2023, Nigeria CSPE 2023, Peru CSPE 2022, Syria DE 2020, and Tajikistan CSPE 2022.

<sup>23</sup> Burkina Faso CSPE 2023, Central African Republic CSPE 2023, Myanmar CEE 2023, Haiti CSPE 2023, Honduras CSPE 2022, Malawi CSPE 2023, Nigeria CSPE 2023, South Sudan CSPE 2022, and Syria DE 2020.

<sup>24</sup> Lebanon SF DE 2020, Chad CSPE 2023, and South Sudan CSPE 2022.

<sup>25</sup> Democratic Republic of Congo CSPE 2020, Lebanon SF DE 2020, Myanmar CEE 2023, Sudan CSPE 2022, Syria DE 2020, and Tajikistan CSPE 2022.

people with disabilities not always sufficiently considered as a target group. An exception is reported in the [Myanmar CEE 2023](#), which found that CPs were required to consider disability in programme targeting and design and highlighted that CPs consulted people living with disabilities to increase the availability of data relevant to disability inclusion.

30. [PSEA](#).<sup>26</sup> **Eight evaluations**<sup>27</sup> addressed **codes of conduct and training for CPs on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA)**. These reported variable attention to the issue, with four emphasizing the use of codes of conduct and training and three<sup>28</sup> finding that CPs were not adequately briefed on PSEA standards and protocols.

### WHAT FACTORS DO EVALUATIONS INDICATE CONTRIBUTED TO OR HINDERED THE QUALITY AND PERFORMANCE OF WFP'S WORK WITH COOPERATING PARTNERS?

31. Factors affecting WFP's performance in working with CPs were mapped against WFP's cycle of cooperating partnership management for NGOs. Table 3 outlines the percentage of evaluations that detailed factors influencing the quality and performance of WFP's work with CPs.

**Table 3: TABLE 3: Percentage of evaluations covering factors influencing the quality and performance of wfp's work with cooperating partners\***

Stage of the CP management cycle	Contributing factor (percentage of evaluations)	Hindering factor (percentage of evaluations)
<i>Selection of CP</i>	15	6
<i>Preparation of the contract</i>	17	42
<i>Implementation</i>	19	47
<i>Review of the partnership</i>	2	4

\* Some evaluations provide evidence of both hindering and contributing factors, with regard to both government and NGO cooperating partners. In addition, since only one evaluation (Sri Lanka DE 2021) provides evidence on a United Nations entity acting as a cooperating partner during the implementation phase, it has not been included in the table.

32. [Selection of cooperating partners](#). Evaluations found that WFP had strong processes for selecting NGO CPs with requisite expertise. Local knowledge and technical skills were crucial in partner selection, as illustrated in the [Guinea-Bissau CSPE 2023](#), which noted that local NGOs had identified and worked with those most in need. However, delays and suboptimal partner selection were reported in cases where a limited number of [suitable](#) CPs or WFP's financial constraints prevented it from contracting skilled CPs.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> The WFP Executive Director's circular on special measures for PSEA highlights WFP's approach of "zero-tolerance for inaction on all forms" of sexual exploitation and abuse. One of its stated objectives is to strengthen partners' capacity to identify, prevent and respond to PSEA. Through the circular WFP managers are obligated to ensure that cooperating partners understand and comply with PSEA obligations. The updated field-level agreement template includes a clause on PSEA.

<sup>27</sup> Burkina Faso CSPE 2023, Cameroon CSPE 2020, CPs in Eastern Africa Region DE 2021, Myanmar CEE 2023, Haiti CSPE 2023, Honduras CSPE 2022, Jordan CSPE 2022, and Lebanon CSPE 2021.

<sup>28</sup> Burkina Faso CSPE 2023, Myanmar CEE 2023, and Cameroon CSPE 2020.

<sup>29</sup> DRC CSPE 2020 and Cameroon CSPE 2020.

33. *Negotiation and preparation of the contract.* Eight evaluations<sup>30</sup> found that longer duration field-level agreements enhanced partnership quality. Conversely, nine evaluations<sup>31</sup> found that short-term agreements – which frequently arose as a result of unpredictable funding to WFP – impeded staff retention and budgeting for local CPs. Recommendations from thirteen evaluations<sup>32</sup> suggest adopting longer multimodal agreements to improve planning and stability and reduce administrative burden.
34. Evaluations that discuss contract negotiation and management of government CPs highlight the need for a clear strategic framework for engagement. For instance, the [Benin DE 2022](#) noted that a lack of formal coordination with government CPs impeded programme implementation.
35. Eleven evaluations<sup>33</sup> found that administrative delays at the contracting stage, such as the late signing of contracts and a lack of transparency about programme budgets, created inefficiency, as did the existence of multiple CP agreements applicable to the same geographic area. The [Pakistan CSPE 2022](#) reported that this hindered the ability of CPs to deliver timely assistance to beneficiaries.
36. *Implementation phase.* Nine evaluations<sup>34</sup> found that WFP was recognized for its flexibility and responsiveness, adapting programmes to local needs and feedback from CPs and noted that this adaptive capacity was key to successful partnerships. However, evaluations also found that difficulties in identifying CPs with the skills to engage in resilience, gender equality and vulnerability analysis, along with staff turnover, hindered programme implementation.
37. Technology reduced administrative difficulties, improved invoice processing and contributed to timely delivery of aid by CPs through the use of biometric registration systems, as noted in the [South Sudan CSPE 2022](#). However, evaluations found that data held by CPs were often fragmented and inconsistent. The [Technology SE 2022](#), for example, recommended that the automation of CP management processes and digital literacy be enhanced.
38. *Reviewing the partnership.* Evaluations reported continued challenges related to weak NGO monitoring systems. However, the [CPs in Eastern Africa Region DE 2021](#) notes that WFP used its partner performance evaluation tool to increase periodic monitoring and feedback processes with the aim of documenting CP performance.
39. Evaluations showed that WFP's capacity strengthening activities largely met CP needs and helped to improve practice but lacked a strategic approach and consistent monitoring. Inadequate planning and resource allocation made it difficult to monitor the effects of capacity strengthening on CP performance.
40. *Fiduciary risk.* Evaluations highlight WFP's challenge in balancing a “risk hungry” approach to strategic risk with its risk-averse approach to fiduciary risk in serving the vulnerable and maintaining a duty of care to CPs. The [Myanmar CEE 2023](#) notes this tension, highlighting the need for more planning around the duty of care of WFP towards CPs.
41. Four evaluations<sup>35</sup> noted that WFP standardized its risk management approach and took measures to ensure CP compliance and reduce fraud. They found that WFP had robust control mechanisms,

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<sup>30</sup> CPs in Eastern Africa Region DE 2021, COVID-19 CEE 2022, Democratic Republic of Congo CSPE 2020, Lebanon DE 2020, Malawi CSPE 2023, Nutrition and HIV/AIDS SE 2023, Sudan CSPE 2022, and Zimbabwe CSPE 2022.

<sup>31</sup> Chad CSPE 2023, CPs in Eastern Africa Region DE 2021, Democratic Republic of Congo CSPE 2020, Guinea-Bissau DE 2021, Lebanon DE 2020, Malawi CSPE 2023, Sudan CSPE 2022, Zimbabwe CSPE 2022, and Zimbabwe DE 2022.

<sup>32</sup> Algeria CSPE 2023, Benin DE 2020, Burkina Faso DE 2020, Cameroon CSPE 2020, CPs in Eastern Africa Region DE 2021, Democratic Republic of Congo CSPE 2020, Myanmar CEE 2023, Guinea DE 2022, Guinea-Bissau DE 2021, Lebanon Resilience DE 2020, Sudan CSPE 2022, Syria DE 2020, and Zimbabwe CSPE 2022.

<sup>33</sup> Algeria CSPE 2023, Cameroon CSPE 2020, South Sudan CSPE 2022, Benin DE 2022, Zimbabwe CSPE 2022, Chad CSPE 2023, Central African Republic CSPE 2023, COVID-19 CEE 2022, Democratic Republic of Congo CSPE 2020, Lebanon DE 2020, and Pakistan CSPE 2022.

<sup>34</sup> Benin DE 2020, Benin DE 2022, COVID-19 CEE 2022, Myanmar CEE 2023, Honduras CSPE 2022, Rwanda DE 2021, South Sudan CSPE 2022, Syria DE 2020, and Tajikistan CSPE 2022.

<sup>35</sup> CPs in Eastern Africa Region DE 2021, Haiti CSPE 2023, Malawi CSPE 2023, and Peacebuilding PE 2023.



monitoring and due diligence, including checks against the United Nations sanctions list and the United Nations global marketplace ineligible vendor list and codes of conduct.<sup>36</sup>

42. Three evaluations found gaps in WFP's control measures, citing cases of fraud in which food or cash did not reach beneficiaries, including discrepancies in Chad,<sup>37</sup> retaliation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo<sup>38</sup> and extortion in Malawi.<sup>39</sup>

## **TO WHAT EXTENT DO EVALUATIONS INDICATE THAT WFP'S RELATIONSHIPS WITH ITS COOPERATING PARTNERS HAVE CHANGED OVER TIME?**

43. Evidence shows that over time there was a shift from purely transactional relationships between WFP and CPs, in which CPs were seen primarily as implementers of WFP activities, to more collaborative relationships involving greater consultation and more equitable power dynamics, although there is room for further progress.
44. Eight evaluations<sup>40</sup> characterized relationships as primarily transactional, noting that CPs were often viewed merely as delivery contractors, with limited acknowledgment or use of their skills. For example, the [Pakistan CSPE 2022](#) noted that CPs were regarded largely as service providers rather than as experienced partners. Three evaluations<sup>41</sup> cited a lack of strategic planning for CP partnerships by WFP, with missed opportunities for deeper collaboration.
45. Conversely, 13 evaluations<sup>42</sup> described relationships as transparent, equitable and mutually beneficial, marked by shared responsibilities. Notable examples include those evaluated in the [COVID-19 CEE 2022](#) and the [Peru CSPE 2022](#), which reported shifts in power dynamics as a marker of a more collaborative relationship between WFP and NGO CPs.
46. Three evaluations<sup>43</sup> documented instances of WFP engaging CPs in planning processes, in particular where long-term relationships existed.
47. WFP is currently working to develop a definition of and policy on localization.<sup>44</sup> While there is evidence of CP participation and representation in collaborative efforts, the evaluations did not show evidence of WFP supporting CP leadership in certain areas such as technical matters. However, the evaluations did highlight the value of local CP knowledge and relationships, as seen in those pertaining to Côte d'Ivoire and El Salvador, where local NGOs effectively engaged with women's production groups.

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<sup>36</sup> The WFP procedure for sanctioning cooperating partners is guided by the [WFP Framework for Vendor Sanctions](#) (Executive Director's circular OED 2020/005).

<sup>37</sup> Chad CSPE 2023.

<sup>38</sup> Democratic Republic of Congo CSPE 2020.

<sup>39</sup> Malawi CSPE 2023.

<sup>40</sup> Algeria CSPE 2023, Bolivia CSPE 2022, CPs in Eastern Africa Region DE 2021, Democratic Republic of Congo CSPE 2020, Myanmar CEE 2023, Jordan CSPE 2022, Pakistan CSPE 2022, and Sudan CSPE 2022.

<sup>41</sup> Bolivia CSPE 2022, Democratic Republic of Congo CSPE 2020, and Sudan CSPE 2022.

<sup>42</sup> Algeria CSPE 2023, COVID-19 CEE 2022, El Salvador CSPE 2022, Myanmar CEE 2023, Honduras CSPE 2022, Jordan CSPE 2022, Malawi CSPE 2023, Nigeria CSPE 2023, Peru CSPE 2022, Rwanda DE 2021, Syria DE 2020, Zimbabwe DE 2022, and Zimbabwe CSPE 2022.

<sup>43</sup> Rwanda DE 2021, Syria DE 2020, and Zimbabwe CSPE 2022.

<sup>44</sup> Inter-Agency Standing Committee. 2021. [Strengthening Participation, Representation and Leadership of Local and National Actors in IASC Humanitarian Coordination Mechanisms](#) provides guidance on the participation, representation and leadership of local and national humanitarian actors aimed at supporting communities working to address the challenges they face.

# Conclusions

48. The evidence highlights the essential role of CPs in supporting WFP in delivering on its mandate. While noting robust processes for WFP engagement with its CPs, the synthesis highlights opportunities to enhance CP value and improve WFP's management approach.
49. **CPs play a major role in supporting WFP in delivering assistance.** Evaluations highlight the central role of CPs in providing life-saving assistance; contributing to nutrition, health and education programming; and supporting livelihoods and resilience programming. The involvement of government CPs enhanced national enabling environments for food security and nutrition. In the evaluations CP contributions were most prominently noted in relation to school-based programmes, community and household asset creation and unconditional resource transfers.
50. **Variable attention to cross-cutting issues in CP work.** While NGO CPs were actively involved in promoting gender equality and accountability to affected populations, inconsistencies in capacity and attention to those areas were evident. In addition, attention to disability inclusion and PSEA needs enhancement.
51. **While CPs have valuable assets like local knowledge and technical expertise, there are notable capacity gaps.** Issues include a lack of familiarity with WFP's targeting criteria and specific skills, compounded by sometimes high staff turnover. Some evaluations indicate that WFP has not fully leveraged the skills and expertise that CPs do possess, particularly in the case of NGO CPs.
52. The efficiency of NGO CP management requires improvement and processes for the management of government CPs should be developed. Challenges include delays in contract signing and payments, which have adversely affected delivery of assistance. Field-level agreements often lack flexibility to adjust to changing conditions, and high concentrations of CPs in some areas have led to increased transaction costs. Processes for managing government CPs are not consistently available.
53. **WFP is advancing towards more collaborative relationships with CPs, although this transition is still ongoing.** There is greater consultation and more equitable power dynamics between WFP and CPs. However, WFP has not yet fully integrated a localization framework into its cooperation with CPs. Evaluations suggest the need for more strategic frameworks for working with government partners and medium-term approaches to CP relationships.
54. **Key aspects of CP engagement supported the achievement of results.** These included long-term contracts that supported strategic planning, flexible field-level agreements that allowed real-time adjustments and an ethos of trust. These practices helped WFP to build strong long-term relationships with CPs. In addition, clear codes of conduct and whistleblower reporting channels helped to clarify expectations and build trust.

# Recommendations

#	Recommendation	Responsibility (one lead office/entity)	Other contributing entities (if applicable)	Priority: High/ medium	By when
<b>1</b>	<b>PRIORITIZE SUSTAINABLE PARTNERSHIPS: Aim for long-term, sustainable partnerships, grounded in appreciation of CPs and an ethos of shared interests, mutual respect and trust.</b>	Operational Partners Unit			
1.1	To promote partnerships with cooperating partners that are sustainable beyond the funding cycle, where relevant (e.g. based upon fund availability), encourage the use of multi-year field-level agreements (within the approved duration of the relevant CSP, interim CSP or limited emergency operation) and the application of guidance on developing strategic and risk-informed approaches to engaging with CPs.	Operational Partners Unit	Programme Policy and Guidance Division; regional bureaux CP management advisers; country office programme officers and CP managers	Medium	November 2025
1.2	Where government CPs play a key role in CSP implementation, develop clear operational guidance for partnerships supporting CSPs, based on an ethos of shared interests. This should consider the wide range of operating contexts within which governments act as a CP or WFP transfers resources through government systems.  Contract templates for engagement with government CPs should be developed and regularly reviewed.	Programme Policy and Guidance Division	Legal Office; regional bureaux CP management advisers; country office programme officers and CP managers	Medium	November 2025
<b>2</b>	<b>ADOPT STRATEGIC AND TAILORED APPROACHES TO CAPACITY STRENGTHENING: Build upon strengths in areas of joint priority for WFP and partners, applying a localization lens.</b>	Operational Partners Unit			
2.1	Enhance existing CP management guidance to support country offices in conducting, in a spirit of partnership, analysis and mapping of partners' capacities from a localization perspective, to better identify the assets and comparative advantages that CPs bring to partnerships.	Operational Partners Unit	Programme Policy and Guidance Division; regional bureaux CP management advisers; country office programme officers and CP managers	Medium	January 2026

#	Recommendation	Responsibility (one lead office/entity)	Other contributing entities (if applicable)	Priority: High/medium	By when
2.2	Enhance the clarity and quality of communication to CPs on key aspects of the WFP approach to programme delivery by developing and monitoring the implementation of an induction programme for CPs to familiarize them with WFP programmatic approaches (e.g. targeting criteria, priority groups) and cross-cutting concerns.	Operational Partners Unit	Programme Policy and Guidance Division; Analysis, Planning and Performance Division; country office programme officers and CP managers	Medium	June 2026
2.3	Following approval of the localization policy, develop tools for assessing, developing and/or enhancing CP leadership in relevant areas, in line with Grand Bargain and Inter-Agency Standing Committee commitments on leadership by local partners.	Gender, Protection and Inclusion Service	Operational Partners Unit	Medium	June 2026
<b>3</b>	<b>INCORPORATE PLAN FOR ENGAGEMENT THROUGHOUT CSP: Facilitate CP engagement at all stages of the CSP programme cycle design, implementation through to performance assessment.</b>	Programme Cycle and Quality Unit			
3.1	To formulate programmes that better respond to local context and community needs at the country strategic plan design stage, country offices should be supported in conducting comprehensive mapping and analysis of government and NGO cooperating partnerships and engaging cooperating partners in the programme design process, including engaging in needs analysis and the development of a country strategic plan theory of change and intended aims.	Programme Cycle and Quality Unit	Operational Partners Unit; Gender, Protection and Inclusion Service; Analysis, Planning and Performance Division; regional bureaux CP management advisers; country office programme officers and CP managers	Medium	November 2025
3.2	Embed mechanisms for consultation, joint planning and feedback from government and NGO CPs on programme quality throughout CSP implementation.	Programme Cycle and Quality Unit	Operational Partners Unit; Programme Policy and Guidance Division; Analysis, Planning and Performance Division; country office	Medium	November 2025

#	Recommendation	Responsibility (one lead office/entity)	Other contributing entities (if applicable)	Priority: High/medium	By when
			programme officers and CP managers		
<b>4</b>	<b>STRENGTHEN ALIGNMENT WITH CROSS-CUTTING PRIORITIES: To ensure CP alignment with cross-cutting priorities and reduce risk, match clear contractual requirements with capacity-strengthening opportunities.</b>	Operational Partners Unit			
4.1	Following the design of WFP's next strategic plan (which will cover 2026–2030), conduct regular reviews of the field-level agreement template to ensure that CP contracting is aligned with any new corporate priorities and policies (including cyber security and, following its approval, the policy on localization).	Operational Partners Unit	Delivery Assurance Service; Legal Office; Risk Management Division; Technology Division	High	November 2026
4.2	Provide clear guidance and capacity support – in collaboration with (or upon request from) regional bureau and country office counterparts where specialist resources are available – to NGO and government CPs on current WFP commitments on gender equality and inclusion, including with regard to the adoption of gender-transformative approaches in their organizations and programme work.	Gender, Protection and Inclusion Service	Operational Partnerships Unit, Ethics Office; regional bureaux CP management advisers; country office CP managers; PSEA focal points in country offices	High	November 2025
4.3	Noting that disability inclusion is now a contractual obligation within the field-level agreement template, provide capacity strengthening for CPs, country offices and regional bureaux to enable them to adopt and support a disability-inclusive approach to WFP programming in accordance with WFP standards. Compliance should be monitored by country offices, with support from regional bureaux and headquarters as required, to ensure adherence to these standards.	Gender, Protection and Inclusion Service	Operational Partners Unit; Ethics Office; regional bureaux CP management advisers; country office CP managers	High	June 2025
4.4	In accordance with the strategic evaluation on PSEA (2024), conduct an assessment and prioritization of the risks facing and the capacity needs of CPs in respect of meeting PSEA commitments, including specific analysis of government CP capacity needs.	Ethics Office	Operational Partners Unit; regional bureaux CP management advisers; country Office CP managers	High	November 2025

#	Recommendation	Responsibility (one lead office/entity)	Other contributing entities (if applicable)	Priority: High/medium	By when
<b>5</b>	<b>IMPROVE CP MANAGEMENT: Enhance the efficiency of, and learning from, CP management and administration.</b>	Operational Partners Unit			
5.1	Clarify, share and promote existing guidance on the scope for flexibility to adjust contracting and payment processes in response to changes in the operating environment, and train staff responsible for CP management on implementing the revised guidance.	Operational Partners Unit	Delivery Assurance Service; Legal Office; Financial Operations and Insurance Service; regional bureaux CP management advisers; country office CP managers	High	June 2025
5.2	Establish targets and performance indicators for the timeliness of signing contracts with – and the processing and delivery of payments to – CPs. These should be integrated into a shared responsibility framework and take into account the ongoing implementation of Partner Connect.	Operational Partners Unit	Delivery Assurance Service; Financial Operations and Insurance Service; Analysis, Planning and Performance Division	High	December 2025
5.3	Complementing the tools available, establish a space for exchanging knowledge and good practices on NGO CP management across WFP.	Operational Partners Unit	Delivery Assurance Service; Research and Knowledge Management Service; regional bureaux CP management advisers; country office CP managers	High	June 2025

# 1. Introduction

1. The evaluation synthesis of WFP Cooperating Partners (CPs) (2020-2023) was included in the WFP Office of Evaluation (OEV) Work Plan (2023-2025) presented to the Executive Board (EB) at the Second Regular Session in November 2022.<sup>45</sup> It was conducted by an external synthesis team contracted by IOD PARC working between December 2023 and July 2024, with planned submission to the Executive Board for consideration in November 2024.

## 1.1. SYNTHESIS FEATURES

2. This synthesis aggregates and analyses evidence related to WFP cooperating partners from a total of 47 centralized evaluations (CEs) and decentralized evaluations (DEs) completed between 2020 and 2023.
3. The Office of Evaluation defines evaluation synthesis as “a combination and integration of findings from quality-assessed evaluations to develop higher-level or more comprehensive knowledge and inform policy and strategic decisions.”<sup>46</sup>
4. The overarching purpose of the synthesis is to better understand the role of WFP in the management of, and strategic engagement with, cooperating partners. As well as evaluative evidence generated to date, this synthesis also considered some of the most recent or ongoing changes in WFP policies, frameworks and guidance, to help target and better situate the synthesis results.
5. The evidence and learning generated by the synthesis aimed to serve the following purposes:
  - Enhance and contribute to the WFP global and regional evidence base, providing learning on what has worked and not worked in key areas of the WFP corporate management of cooperating partners.
  - Identify recurrent findings and evidence useful to derive lessons on the collaboration between WFP and its cooperating partners, particularly as WFP moves to the third generation country strategic plan (CSP) design phases.
  - Provide evidence to inform WFP on the implementation of its guidance and tools available for cooperating partners management, particularly for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and government.
6. The synthesis addresses five main synthesis questions (SQ), which formed the basis of the analytical framework presented in detail in Annex V:
  - **SQ1.** To what extent do evaluations show that WFP’s partnerships with cooperating partners contributed to the achievement of WFP’s aims<sup>47</sup> at the country level?
  - **SQ2.** In which specific activity areas do evaluations show that cooperating partners have made contributions to the achievement of WFP’s aims, and what has worked well? What challenges have arisen?
  - **SQ3.** What does the evidence show regarding WFP’s and cooperating partners’ attention to cross-cutting priorities and related corporate commitments?
  - **SQ4.** What factors do evaluations indicate contributed to or hindered the quality and performance of WFP’s work with cooperating partners?
  - **SQ5.** To what extent do evaluations indicate that WFP’s relationships with its cooperating partners have changed over time?<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> WFP. 2023. Management Plan (2023–2025). WFP/EB.2/2022/5-A/1/Rev.1.

<sup>46</sup> WFP. 2021. Evaluation Synthesis, Guidance for Process and Content, WFP Office of Evaluation.

<sup>47</sup> Aims as defined by SOs in WFP.2022. WFP Corporate Results Framework (2022-2025). WFP/EB.1/2022/4-A/Rev.1.

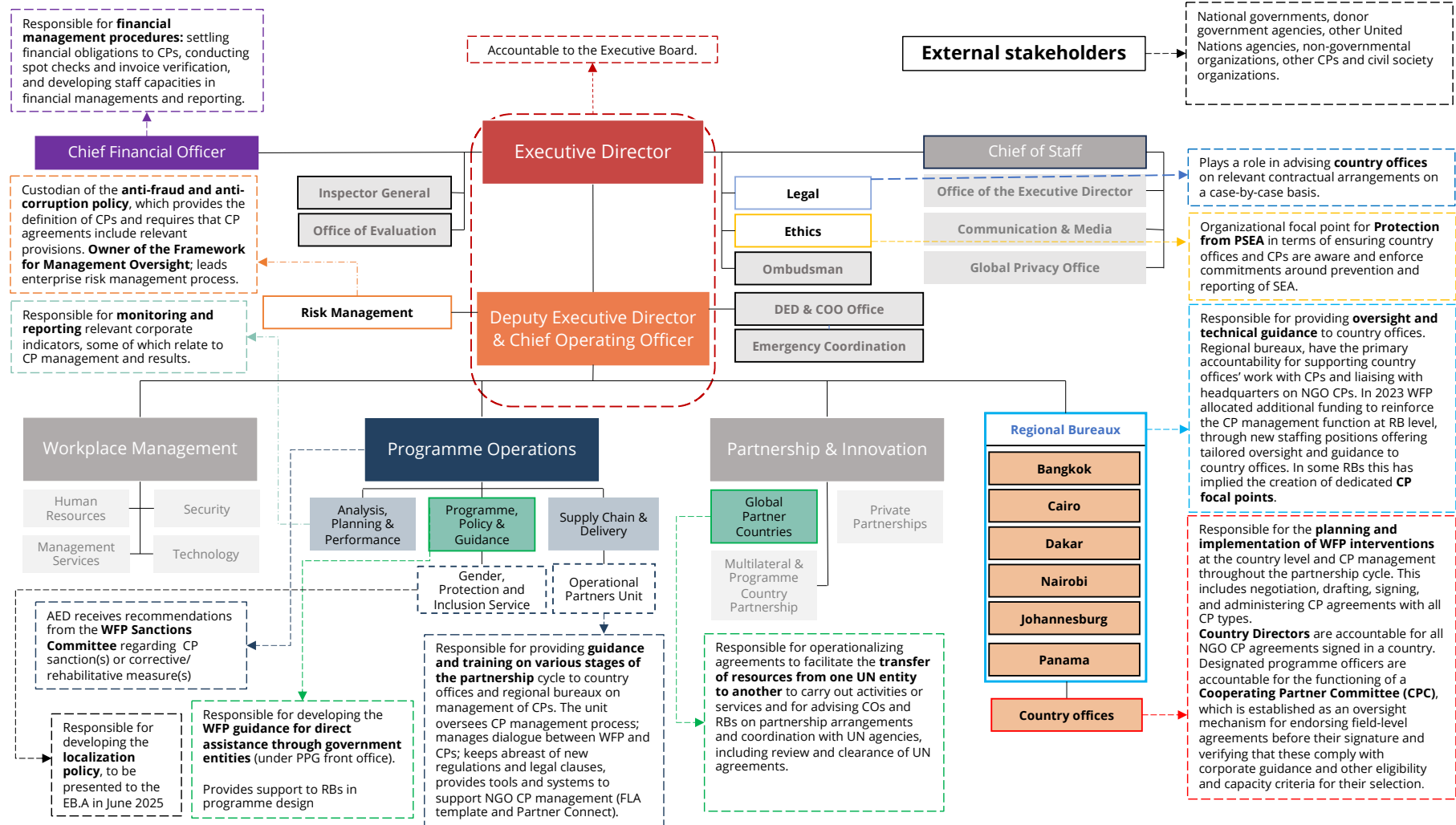
<sup>48</sup> Definitions based on 2018 ED Circular: Corporate Guidance on WFP Management of NGO Partnerships. WFP/OED2018/004.

## **Stakeholders and intended users of the synthesis**

7. In February 2024, WFP introduced a new organizational structure. As part of this process, the NGO Partnership Unit, formerly reporting directly to the Assistant Executive Director for Programme & Policy Development, was renamed the Operational Partners Unit, and was relocated in the same department now called Programme and Operations within the Supply Chain and Delivery Division, under the Delivery Assurance Service.
8. Figure 1 outlines the key stakeholders and users for this synthesis and their functional responsibilities concerning cooperating partners. Additionally, it shows the cross-functional nature of cooperating partnership management and collaboration.



**Figure 1 - Synthesis stakeholders and their role in relation to cooperating partners**



Source: Evaluation synthesis team

## 1.2. CONTEXT

### 1.2.1 Definition of cooperating partners

9. The meaning of “cooperating partner”<sup>49</sup> (CP) has various interpretations in WFP.<sup>50</sup> However, the 2021 Anti-Fraud and Anti-Corruption Policy<sup>51</sup> offers the following definition:

“A cooperating partner is a non-profit entity that enters into a contractual relationship with WFP to assist in the performance of WFP’s work (including government entities, non-governmental organizations and United Nations organizations).”<sup>52</sup>

10. For the purpose of this evaluation synthesis, where information was available, the specific type of cooperating partner (i.e. NGO, government entity or UN agency) is referenced.

### 1.2.2 Normative frameworks governing WFP work with cooperating partners

11. The WFP approach to working with cooperating partners is guided by several external and internal frameworks:

- I. Localization is a key priority of the Grand Bargain 2.0, which calls for greater support for the leadership, delivery and capacity of local responders and the participation of affected communities in addressing humanitarian needs.<sup>53</sup>
- II. Internally, WFP commitment to localization is reflected in the WFP Strategic Plan (2022-2025),<sup>54</sup> which acknowledges partnerships with local and national organizations as key to reaching vulnerable groups and commits to a continued prioritization of these partnerships. The WFP Corporate Results Framework (2022-2025)<sup>55</sup> operationalizes these commitments through a series of indicators.<sup>56</sup>
- III. Relevant WFP policies include the 2016 Policy on Country Strategic Plans (CSPs),<sup>57</sup> the 2022 Country Capacity Strengthening Policy,<sup>58</sup> the 2021 Anti-Fraud and Anti-Corruption Policy,<sup>59</sup> the 2022 Gender Policy<sup>60</sup> and the 2020 WFP Protection and Accountability Policy.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Formerly referred to as an “implementing partner” in WFP.

<sup>50</sup> WFP. 2022. Report of the External Auditor on the Management of Cooperating Partners. WFP/EB.A/2022/6-H/1.

<sup>51</sup> WFP. 2021. Revised Anti-Fraud and Anti-Corruption Policy. WFP/EB.A/2021/5-B/1.

<sup>52</sup> As defined by the UN, civil society represents the third sector of society alongside the state and the market. This includes local and national (NGOs), National Societies of Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, community groups and faith-based organizations. Civil society organizations are not explicitly included in the WFP definition of CPs. However, civil society organizations may be contracted through field-level agreements (FLAs). Therefore, the evaluation synthesis may include civil society organizations that are not NGOs as part of the analysis, as these two terms were used interchangeably in some reports.

<sup>53</sup> WFP. 2022. WFP and the Grand Bargain.

<sup>54</sup> WFP. 2021. WFP Strategic Plan (2022-2025). WFP/EB.2/2021/4-A/1/Rev.2.

<sup>55</sup> WFP. 2022. WFP Corporate Results Framework (2022-2025). WFP/EB.1/2022/4-A/Rev.1

<sup>56</sup> The 4 indicators included in the CRF that include reference to CPs are: i) percentage of WFP funding to cooperating partners, awarded as directly as possible to local and national responders; ii) number of WFP country offices adopting the United Nations Partner Portal (UNPP) to harmonize United Nations processes for engaging civil society organizations (CSOs) and non-governmental organizations and reduce duplicate information reviews and requests of partners; iii) percentage of country offices which have implemented corporate sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) prevention and outreach tools aimed at employees, cooperating partners, and front-line workers; iv) proportion of field-level agreements (FLAs) or memorandums of understanding (MoUs) or construction contracts (CCs) for CSP activities screened for environmental and social risks.

<sup>57</sup> WFP. 2016. Policy on Country Strategic Plans. WFP/EB.2/2016/4-C/1/Rev.1\*.

<sup>58</sup> WFP. 2022. Country Capacity Strengthening Policy Update. WFP/EB.A/2022/5-A.

<sup>59</sup> WFP. 2021. Revised Anti-Fraud and Anti-Corruption Policy. WFP/EB. A/2021/5-B/1.

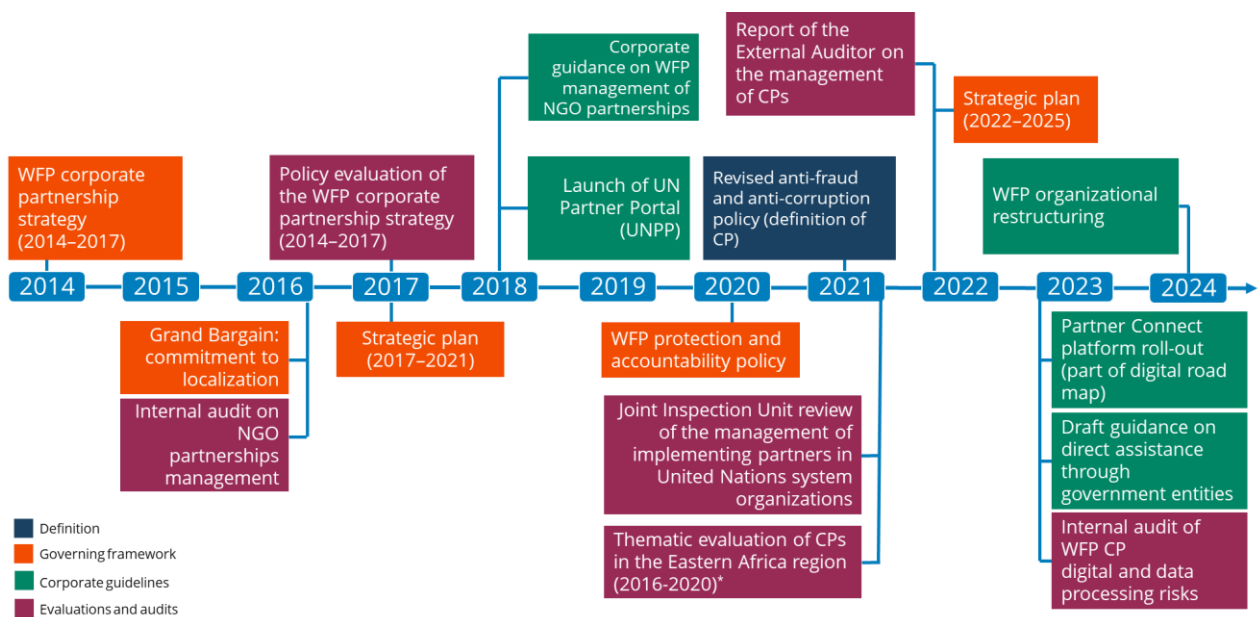
<sup>60</sup> WFP. 2022. Gender Policy. WFP/EB.1/2022/4-B/Rev.1.

<sup>61</sup> WFP. 2020. WFP Protection and Accountability Policy. WFP/EB.2/2020/4-A/1/Rev.2.

- IV. WFP Corporate Partnership Strategy (2014-2017)<sup>62</sup> provides the overarching vision and approach for WFP work in partnership with NGOs, governments, the private sector, United Nations agencies, international and regional organizations, as well as academia and other knowledge generating institutions.
- V. The Executive Director (ED) Circular on Corporate Guidance on WFP Management of NGO Partnerships<sup>63</sup> constitutes the main guidance to support country offices in the management of NGOs as cooperating partners. Actions and obligations relating to the management of cooperating partners are set out in the 2021 Circular on Environmental and Social Sustainability Framework<sup>64</sup> and the 2023 Circular on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (PSEA).<sup>65</sup>

12. Figure 2 illustrates the evolution of WFP work with cooperating partners since 2014.

**Figure 2: Evolution of WFP work with cooperating partners, and key documents**



\* Evaluation included due to its focus on cooperating partners.

Source: WFP corporate documents

### 1.2.3 Scope of WFP work with cooperating partners

13. Between 2020 and 2023 over 80 percent of cooperating partners working with WFP were local actors. This included an annual average of 774 local NGOs and 405 government partners out of 1,343 cooperating partners, across the 2020-2023 period (Figure 3). Other partners included global NGOs, UN agencies, and the Red Cross, Red Crescent and International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

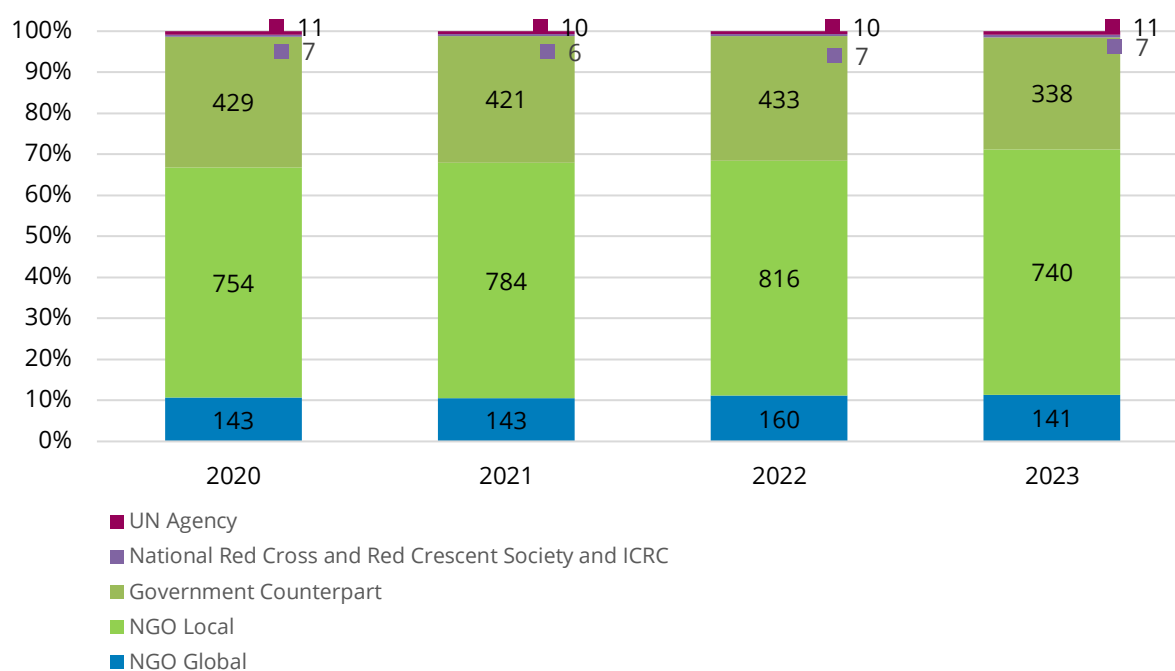
<sup>62</sup> WFP. 2014. Corporate Partnership Strategy (2014-2017). WFP/EB.A/2014/5-B.

<sup>63</sup> WFP. 2018. Executive Director's Circular on Corporate Guidance on WFP Management of NGO Partnership. OED2018/004.

<sup>64</sup> WFP. 2021. Executive Director's Circular on the Establishment of the WFP Environmental and Social Sustainability Framework. OED2021/018.

<sup>65</sup> WFP. 2023. Executive Director's Circular on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (PSEA). OED2023/011.

**Figure 3: WFP cooperating partners 2020-2023, by type<sup>66,67</sup>**



Note: Numbers have been calculated based on partnerships that were signed through field-level agreements (FLAs) and memorandums of understanding (MoU) or letters of understanding (LoU)

Source: FLA tracker, data extracted on 3 May 2024

14. In terms of resources, WFP directed a significant portion of its funding through local and national cooperating partners in 2023, amounting to USD 3.5 billion, which constitutes 31 percent of all confirmed contributions for the year.<sup>68</sup> The total amount channeled through cooperating partners has declined from 3.9 billion in 2022 to 3.5 billion in 2023.<sup>69</sup> However, this reflects an overall increase in the proportion of total WFP funding channelled through cooperating partners, from 21.2 percent in 2022 to 31 percent in 2023.
15. At a regional level, during the period 2020-2023, the highest number of cooperating partners occurred in the West and Central Africa region (25 percent on average of all cooperating partnerships globally), followed by the Regional Bureau for Eastern Africa (RBN) (22 percent) and the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific (RBB) (17 percent) (Figure 4). Annex VIII provides further details.

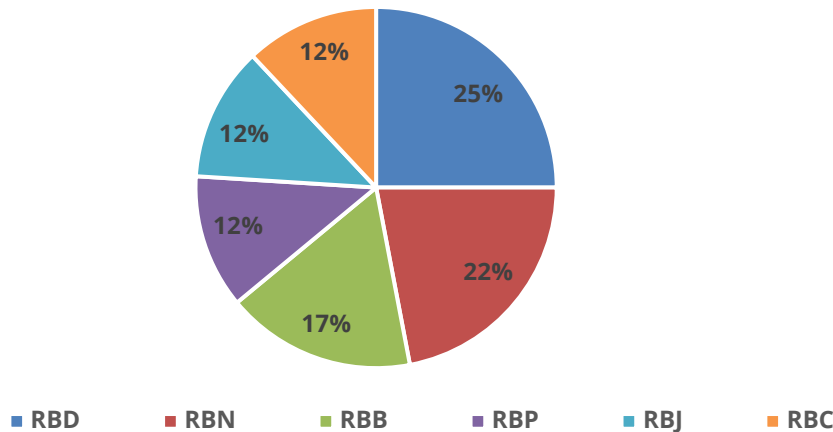
<sup>66</sup> Categories presented follow the definition presented in footnote 52. Although National Red Cross and Red Crescent Society and ICRC agreements can be signed through FLA on an ad-hoc basis, with a specific agreement template.

<sup>67</sup> Local NGOs are those that are headquartered and operating in their own aid recipient country and that are not affiliated to an international NGO (Source: IFRC. [Identified categories for tracking funding flows](#)).

<sup>68</sup>WFP Annual Performance Report 2022, WFP/EB.A/2023/4-A/Rev.1 and WFP Annual Performance Report 2023, WFP/EB.A/2024/4-A/Rev.1

<sup>69</sup> Ibidem.

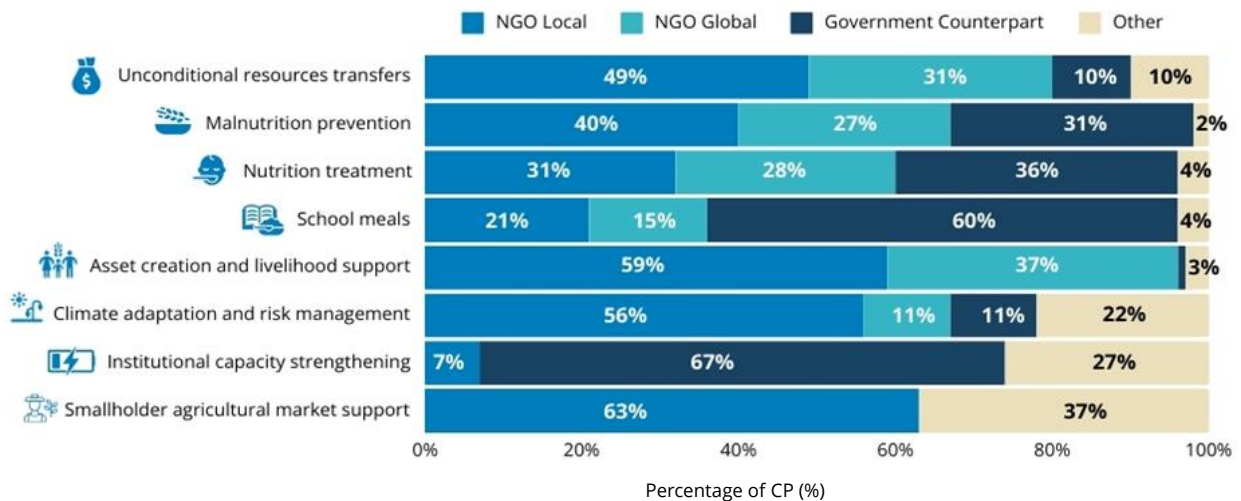
**Figure 4: Percentage of all cooperating partners by regional bureau (2020-2023)<sup>70</sup>**



Source: Synthesis team.

16. Based on data provided in the WFP Annual Performance Report (2023), cooperating partners are involved in a diverse range of WFP activities, spanning across eight programme areas. In 2023, NGOs were the primary cooperating partner implementing unconditional resources transfer activities in partnership with WFP, accounting for 80 percent of all cooperating partners. Meanwhile, host governments continue to significantly support WFP initiatives in school feeding and strengthening of institutional capacity. This is illustrated in Figure 5.

**Figure 5: Percentage of cooperating partners by programme area and entity type, in 2023<sup>71</sup>**



Source: WFP Annual Performance Report 2023

<sup>70</sup> The regional bureaux (RB) are as follows: RBD – Western Africa (Dakar), RBN – Eastern Africa (Nairobi), RBB – Asia and the Pacific (Bangkok), RBP – Latin America and the Caribbean (Panama), RBJ – Southern Africa (Johannesburg) and RBC – Middle East and Northern Africa (Cairo)

<sup>71</sup> The term “government counterparts” refers to various types of government entities in a country where WFP operates and encompasses any entity at the national, regional, provincial, district, municipal or lower level that is duly authorized to enter into agreements with WFP, including national agencies or institutions.

## 1.2.4 Guidance and tools for management of, and engagement with, cooperating partners

17. The management of, and engagement with, cooperating partners is operationalized through various guidance documents and tools. Overall, WFP has relied primarily on the Corporate Guidance on NGO Partnerships to support country offices in managing cooperating partners. With some adaptation, the guidance has also been applied for government and UN entities, on an ad-hoc basis and in consultation with the WFP Legal Office and the Operational Partners Unit.

- i. The “cycle of cooperating partnership management”, provided in the above-mentioned guidance, equips WFP staff with the elements for engagement with NGO and other cooperating partners (Figure 6).<sup>72</sup>

**Figure 6: Cycle of cooperating partnership management.**



Source: WFP Operational Partners Unit

- ii. For NGOs, field-level agreements (FLAs) are used in all circumstances where NGOs handle WFP resources or implement activities on behalf of WFP. The FLA is a legal contract that governs the agreement between WFP and the partner organization, setting out the purpose and duration of the agreement, the obligations of the cooperating partner and of WFP, payment details and provisions for reporting, among other elements.<sup>73</sup>
- iii. Additionally, WFP employs two digital solutions for management of NGO cooperating partners, which are used by both staff and cooperating partners:
  - The first, the United Nations Partner Portal (UNPP), launched in 2018 as a shared open-source platform to encourage and simplify processes for partnerships between UN agencies and civil society organizations (CSO).<sup>74</sup> It aims to help UN agencies to identify relevant and available NGOs and civil society organizations.<sup>75</sup> In August 2023, a Programme and Policy Development Department directive was issued for all WFP country offices to use the UNPP as an essential tool for due diligence and selection of partners.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>72</sup> The application of the cycle of partnership to other CPs (e.g. government/UN) is made analogously until such time that tailored guidance is developed and rolled out.

<sup>73</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>74</sup> WFP, 2023 NGO Partnership Unit Digital Solutions, PowerPoint presentation.

<sup>75</sup> UNPP Fact Sheet.

<sup>76</sup> WFP. 2023. Mandatory use of UN Partner Portal under the Corporate Guidance on WFP Management of NGO Partnerships. Directive No. PD2023/001.

- The second, “Partner Connect”, was rolled out in 2023<sup>77</sup> aiming to digitalize key steps of NGO cooperating partner management: FLA management, distribution reporting and finance and invoicing.<sup>78</sup> It aims to provide WFP staff and partners with visibility, traceability and increased transparency on administrative stages of the cooperating partner management process. Partner Connect has been rolled out to 23 high-risk countries and aims to achieve global scale-up by the end of 2024.
- iv. For engaging governments as cooperating partners, recent audits noted an absence of guidelines for engaging with government partners.<sup>79</sup> Currently, there is no template, but ad hoc solutions have been used to support WFP interventions.<sup>80</sup> However, there is now (draft) guidance on direct assistance through government entities,<sup>81</sup> developed by the Programme Policy and Guidance Division,<sup>82</sup> which aims to support WFP country offices in this respect.<sup>83</sup> The guidance includes a government partnership cycle framework.<sup>84</sup>
- v. For UN agencies, WFP uses the Guidance Note on Transferring Contributions from One Agency to Another for Programmatic Activities<sup>85</sup> to support partner relationships between WFP and sister UN agencies. The UN-to-UN Transfer Agreement template provided within the guidance is used when one UN agency transfers resources to another UN agency for the purpose of programmatic activities in the framework of one programme or project.<sup>86</sup>

### 1.3. EVIDENCE AND METHODOLOGY

#### 1.3.1 Evidence base

18. The primary data sources for this synthesis are WFP evaluation reports. Evidence gathered from these sources was validated through key informant interviews (KIIs), a stakeholder meeting and a review of supplementary documents, including strategies, audits and guidance.
19. A preliminary list of 60 evaluations was identified by the Office of Evaluation, applying the following criteria:

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<sup>77</sup> As of April 2024, Partner Connect has been implemented in 23 country offices. Roll-out is still ongoing.

<sup>78</sup> WFP Partner Connect Fact Sheet (2023).

<sup>79</sup> WFP. 2022. Report of the External Auditor on the Management of Cooperating Partners; WFP. 2020. Internal Audit on Operations in Ethiopia; WFP. 2022. Internal Audit on Operations in Djibouti.

<sup>80</sup> Typically, transfer of resources to the Government entity acting as CP, for implementation of CSP is carried out under the umbrella agreement Letter of Understanding (WFP Legal Office. Letter of Understanding). When the implementation of activities by the Government are beneficiary facing, country offices may have relied on a precedent non-technical assistance agreement (colloquially referred to as Government FLA). In addition, country offices have developed other ad hoc arrangements, including MoUs, to address the lack of template for those instances when the government acts as a cooperating partner.

<sup>81</sup> WFP. 2023. Guidance on direct assistance through government entities (draft).

<sup>82</sup> In this context, the Office of Internal Audit Branch will provide comments to the guidance on direct assistance through government entities, in its advisory capacity for management's consideration.

<sup>83</sup> The guidance addresses engagement with government entities that meet all three of the following criteria: i) the engagement with a government entity must be part of a WFP-initiated programme, where the government entity intervenes in the delivery of assistance; or, government entity-led programme, where WFP complements or adds on to the national programme. ii) WFP must transfer resources (either food or cash-based transfers) to a government entity. iii) the government entity must be the one responsible for onward distribution of resources to programme beneficiaries.

<sup>84</sup> The government partnership cycle used in this guidance mirrors other cycles used within WFP such as the programme cycle or the NGO partnership cycle to facilitate understanding by WFP staff and has some necessary adaptations for government entities. Previously, the NGO Partnership Unit undertook ad hoc initiatives on guiding the management of government CP relationship

<sup>85</sup> 2021. United Nations Sustainable Development Group. Transferring Contributions from One Agency to Another for Programmatic Activities.

<sup>86</sup> WFP. 2022. UN Pooled Funds and Joint Programmes Frequently Asked Questions.

- **Evaluation types:** Centralized evaluations (CE) - policy evaluations (PEs), strategic evaluations (SEs), country strategic plan evaluations (CSPEs) and corporate emergency response evaluations (CEEs),<sup>87</sup> as well as decentralized evaluations (DEs) covering, activity and thematic evaluations.<sup>88</sup>
- **Time period:** Evaluations completed between 2020-2023.
- **Quality of evaluation:** Evaluations assessed by the Office of Evaluation's post-hoc quality assessment (PHQA) system above the 60 percent threshold (satisfactory).<sup>89</sup>
- **Subject matter:** Evaluations determined to provide a body of evidence on cooperating partners based upon: a) a word search for findings relevant to cooperating partners; and b) a rapid review to determine sufficiency of evidence on cooperating partners in the findings.

20. During the inception phase, the synthesis team reviewed all reports meeting those criteria, and refined the sample to 47 evaluations, detailed by type in Table 1 and listed in Annex VI. A description of the screening process is described in Annex IV.

**Table 1: Final synthesis sample by type and references used**

Centralized evaluations				Decentralized evaluations		Total
Country strategic plan	Policy	Strategic	Corporate emergency response	Activity	Thematic	
22	1	2	2	16	4	47 27 CE 20 DE
Shorthand references used: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Country Strategic Plan Evaluations- [Country] CSPE [year] – for example Jordan CSPE 2022</li> <li>• Policy evaluations – [Descriptive words] PE [year] – for example Peacebuilding PE 2022</li> <li>• Strategy evaluations – [Descriptive words] SE [year] – for example Technology SE 2022</li> <li>• Decentralized evaluations – [Country] DE [year] – for example Rwanda DE 2020</li> </ul>						

Source: Evaluation synthesis team

21. A challenge faced by this synthesis was to identify the type of cooperating partner referred to in evaluations, which was not always explicit. Where the category of cooperating partner was clear, this is stated in the report.
22. The geographic coverage and type of evaluation (centralized or decentralized) included in the synthesis across the six WFP regional bureaux is presented in Figure 7 below.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Centralized evaluations are commissioned and managed by OEV and presented to the Executive Board.

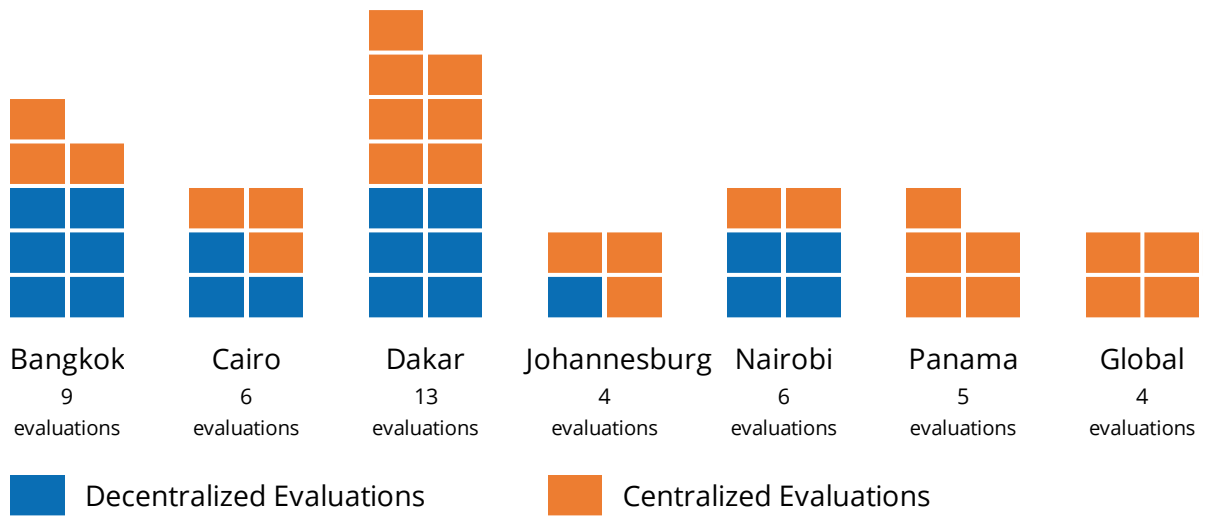
<sup>88</sup> Decentralized Evaluations are commissioned and managed by country offices, regional bureaux or headquarters-based divisions other than OEV. They are not presented to the Board.

<sup>89</sup> Since 2016, OEV has used an outsourced PHQA mechanism, through which independent assessors rate the quality of all completed WFP evaluations against WFP's own evaluation quality standards.

<sup>90</sup> The evaluation of the Corporate Emergency Response in Myanmar (2018-2022) was allocated to the Bangkok regional bureau.



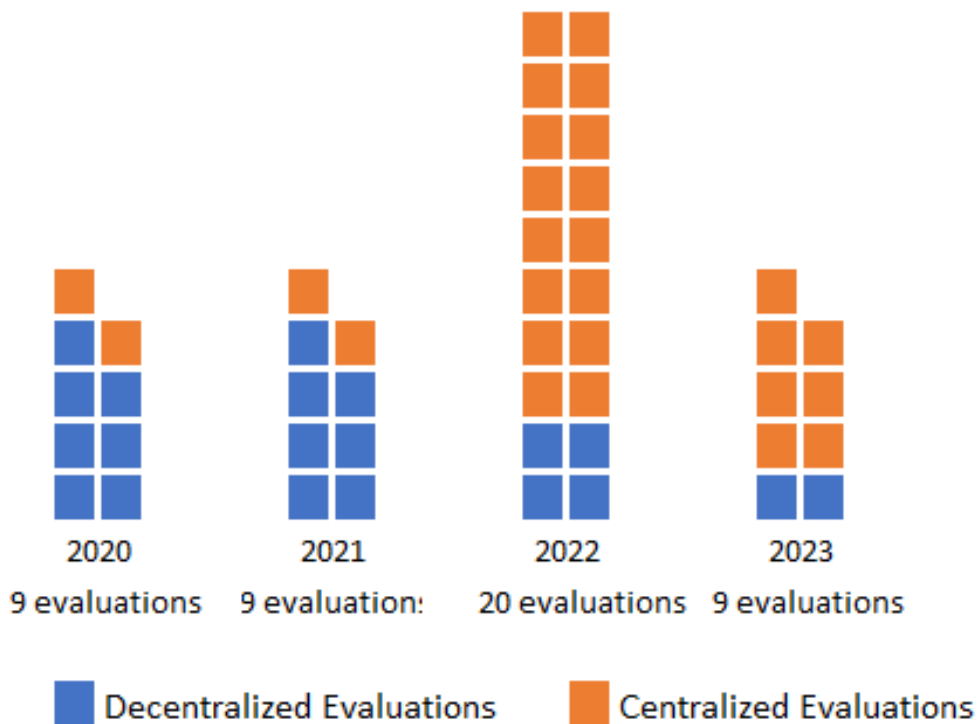
**Figure 7: Geographic distribution of the synthesis evaluation universe<sup>91</sup>**



Source: OEV management information system

23. The distribution of the evaluations included in the synthesis by year of completion is outlined in Figure 8. The evidence base relies on fewer evaluations from the first two years of the synthesis temporal scope (9 in 2020 and 9 in 2021) compared to the last two years (20 in 2022 and 9 in 2023).

**Figure 8: Synthesis evaluation universe by year of completion**



Source: OEV management information system

<sup>91</sup> The four global evaluations include: WFP. 2022. WFP's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic. OEV/2020/062; WFP. 2023. WFP's Role in Peacebuilding in Transition Settings. OEV/2021/001; WFP. 2022. Use of Technology in Constrained Environments. OEV/2022/002; WFP. 2022. WFP's Work on Nutrition and HIV/AIDS. OEV/2023/002.

### **1.3.2 Methodology and limitations**

#### **Data collection and analysis**

24. The methodology is described in detail in Annex III. In summary: Following an initial review of WFP documentation and evaluations during inception phase, the synthesis team developed an analytical framework and coding structure to guide data extraction. Both software and manual methods were used to extract data against a set of analytical fields, with qualitative analysis then used to generate the findings, which informed the synthesis conclusions and recommendations.
25. To validate findings and provide organizational context, the synthesis team conducted a series of interviews with the evaluation internal reference group (IRG) and other relevant stakeholders, including representatives from regional bureaux (RBs) and country offices (COs) as detailed in Annex IX. A validation workshop was also held in July 2024, attended by the range of stakeholders consulted by the synthesis exercise.

#### **Limitations**

26. The following limitations arose:
  - Reference to cooperating partner type in evaluations: The evaluations did not always specify which type of cooperating partner (NGO, government, or United Nations) was involved in delivery. Therefore, the synthesis team triangulated evaluation evidence with supporting documents and key informant interviews to clarify which types of cooperating partners were working in different country contexts.
  - Emphasis on NGO cooperating partners: Fewer evaluations explicitly discussed government cooperating partners, compared to NGO cooperating partners and only one evaluation discussed the relationship of WFP with a UN cooperating partner. Accordingly, the emphasis of this synthesis is on WFP work with NGO cooperating partners.
  - Changing context: The evidence presented is retrospective and therefore may not reflect the latest developments in WFP approaches to cooperating partner engagement or changes in the operating context. This has been mitigated, in part, through close engagement with WFP staff to understand recent changes, and ongoing development of strategies, guidance and tools and systematic reference to the date that evaluations were produced, to clarify the timing of the evidence cited.
  - Limited universe: The evidence, while global, does not represent the full range of WFP engagement with its cooperating partners. Nonetheless, the breadth of evidence, and its independent nature, provides valuable insights into WFP approaches.

## 2. Synthesis findings

### 2.1 SYNTHESIS QUESTION 1 - TO WHAT EXTENT DO EVALUATIONS SHOW THAT WFP'S PARTNERSHIPS WITH COOPERATING PARTNERS CONTRIBUTED TO THE ACHIEVEMENT OF WFP'S AIMS AT THE COUNTRY LEVEL?

27. All 47 of the evaluations analyzed discuss the role of cooperating partners within WFP work, but the contribution of cooperating partners to the achievement of WFP strategic outcomes (SOs) at the country level was explicit in only 26 evaluations (55 percent).
28. Overall, evaluations found that cooperating partners played a major role in helping WFP deliver across its strategic outcomes, but particularly SOs 1 and 2, where many programmes are implemented directly by cooperating partners. Strengths demonstrated by cooperating partners were: their knowledge of local contexts; relationships with communities; and their technical expertise. A common challenge cited across evaluations was cooperating partner capacity constraints, which sometimes impeded the achievement of results.

#### 2.1.1 SO1: People are better able to meet their urgent food and nutrition needs

29. Finding 1: Evaluations found that partnerships with cooperating partners played a major role in helping WFP deliver its life-saving assistance under SO1. Specific contributions included enhancing the reach of WFP to the most vulnerable, facilitating access to hard-to-reach places, and helping improve targeting to better focus on those most in need.
30. In 2023, under SO1, WFP reached 103 million people with life-saving support through food and cash transfers.<sup>92</sup> Between 2021 and 2023, distribution of food under SO1 accounted for an average of 88 percent of all food distributed and 88 percent of all cash. Contributions to SO1 averaged 80 percent of total WFP expenditure during the period (Table 2).

**Table 2: People assisted directly through the provision of food, cash-based transfers, commodity vouchers and capacity strengthening**

Year	2021	2022	2023 <sup>93</sup>	Average
<b>Number of people provided with unconditional resource transfers (food or cash) to support access to food toward strategic objective 1</b>	91m	113m	103m	102m
<b>Food distributed under strategic objective 1 (metric tons in millions and percentage)</b>	4.1 (85%)	4.5 (94%)	3.1 (85%)	3.6 (88%)
<b>Cash distributed under strategic objective 1 (USD billion and percentage)</b>	2.2 billion (83%)	3.1 billion (94%)	2.4 billion (86%)	2.6 billion (88%)
<b>Direct operational expenditures for strategic objective 1 (in USD millions and percentage)</b>	7,034 (77%)	9,525 (86%)	7,910 (79%)	8,156 (83%)

Source: Annual performance reports 2021-2023.

<sup>92</sup> WFP. 2024. Annual Performance Report 2023. (WFP/EB.A/2024/4-A). SO1 specific data is not available for the metric tons of food or cash distributed for 2023.

<sup>93</sup> In 2021, CBTs and commodity vouchers were split into two separate transfer modalities. 2021 cannot be compared with previous years; the 2023 APR does not aggregate by strategic objective in a way that is comparable with previous years.

31. Twenty-six evaluations<sup>94</sup> (55 percent) reported on the contributions of cooperating partner partnerships in WFP work to save lives in emergencies (SO1), with specific roles as detailed in the paragraphs below.
32. **Improving access in challenging environments:** Six evaluations<sup>95</sup> (13 percent) found that partnerships with cooperating partners helped WFP access people in remote, conflict-affected, or otherwise insecure regions where political or security restrictions limited the ability of WFP to deliver directly under SO1. For example, the [Burkina Faso CSPE 2023](#) found that cooperating partners succeeded in maintaining or improving their physical access to most areas of the country at the time, which also helped to ensure that assistance was relevant to needs. Security constraints remained challenging, however, as for examples in the [South Sudan CSPE 2022](#) and the [Senegal CSPE 2022](#) where, despite efforts, security restrictions prevented WFP and its cooperating partners from reaching all those in need.
33. **Enabling WFP to reach vulnerable groups:** Twenty evaluations<sup>96</sup> (43 percent) highlighted the role of cooperating partners in helping WFP meet the food and nutrition needs of vulnerable groups within SO1. Specific groups highlighted included women, youth, the urban poor, rural farmers and people living with HIV. For example, the [Myanmar CEE 2023](#) found that cooperating partners helped to identify and reach children and persons with HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis (TB). It noted specific difficulties in identifying persons with disabilities who may be isolated at home, or reluctant to self-identify because they were injured in a conflict. The [Senegal CSPE 2023](#) found that while cooperating partners received training to help them reach the most vulnerable, cooperating partners lacked tailored approaches to assist specific groups, such as people with disabilities or victims of violence.
34. **Helping WFP refine its targeting:** Twelve evaluations<sup>97</sup> (26 percent) noted cooperating partners' work to support assessment and targeting of vulnerable households receiving emergency assistance under SO1.<sup>98</sup> The ability of cooperating partners to conduct household assessments, or their understanding of local insights helped them identify priority households. For example, the [Myanmar CEE 2023](#) found that WFP was able to rely on its network of cooperating partners to assist with geographical targeting and track internally displaced persons (IDPs), despite challenges posed by their mobility, with these efforts supplemented by providing information from direct observations. The [Burkina Faso CSPE 2023](#) highlighted challenges in targeting conducted by cooperating partners regarding inclusion errors (for example, maintaining children over 23 months among the people receiving support), even when not part of the intended beneficiary group. These inclusion errors affected the overall coverage.
35. **Mitigating the effects of COVID-19:** The evaluations covered the time period of the outbreak and subsequent response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Nine evaluations<sup>99</sup> (19 percent), including the [COVID-19 CEE 2022](#), specifically highlight the contributions of government and NGO cooperating partners in

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<sup>94</sup> COVID-19 CEE 2022, Myanmar CEE 2023, South Sudan CSPE 2022, Ghana CSPE 2023, Peru CSPE 2022, Central African Republic CSPE 2022, Algeria CSPE 2023, El Salvador CSPE 2022, Jordan CSPE 2022, Sudan CSPE 2022, Haiti CSPE 2023, Chad CSPE 2022, Burkina Faso CSPE 2023, Cameroon CSPE 2020, the Democratic Republic of the Congo CSPE 2020, Malawi CSPE 2023, Sri Lanka CSPE 2022, Pakistan CSPE 2022, Bolivia CSPE 2021, Honduras CSPE 2022, Zimbabwe CSPE 2022, Lebanon CSPE 2021, Peacebuilding PE 2022, Lebanon DE 2020, Syria DE 2020 and The Gambia DE 2021.

<sup>95</sup> El Salvador CSPE 2022, Cameroon CSPE 2020, Zimbabwe CSPE 2022, Thematic DE 2022, Myanmar CEE 2023, and Syria DE 2020.

<sup>96</sup> COVID-19 CEE 2022, Myanmar CEE 2023, South Sudan CSPE 2022, Senegal CSPE 2023, Ghana CSPE 2023, El Salvador CSPE 2022, Tajikistan CSPE 2023, Jordan CSPE 2022, Nigeria CSPE 2022, Burkina Faso CSPE 2023, Cameroon CSPE 2020, Malawi CSPE 2023, Pakistan CSPE 2022, Bolivia CSPE 2021, Honduras CSPE 2022, Lebanon CSPE 2021, Lebanon DE 2020, Technology SE 2022, Syria DE 2020, and CPs in Eastern Africa Region DE 2021.

<sup>97</sup> Ghana CSPE 2023, Algeria CSPE 2023, Tajikistan CSPE 2023, Jordan CSPE 2022, Sudan CSPE 2022, Nigeria CSPE 2022, Cameroon CSPE 2020, the Democratic Republic of the Congo CSPE 2020, Honduras CSPE 2022, Zimbabwe CSPE 2022, Lebanon DE 2020, and CPs in Eastern Africa Region DE 2021.

<sup>98</sup> Ghana CSPE 2023, Algeria CSPE 2023, Tajikistan CSPE 2023, Jordan CSPE 2022, Sudan CSPE 2022, Nigeria CSPE 2022, Cameroon CSPE 2020, the Democratic Republic of the Congo CSPE 2020, Honduras CSPE 2022, Zimbabwe CSPE 2022, Lebanon DE 2020, and CPs in Eastern Africa Region DE 2021.

<sup>99</sup> COVID-19 CEE 2022, Ghana CSPE 2023, Peru CSPE 2022, Algeria CSPE 2023, Malawi CSPE 2023, Bolivia CSPE 2021, Honduras CSPE 2021, Zimbabwe CSPE 2022, and Nutrition and HIV/AIDS SE 2022.

supporting WFP to maintain its pipeline of assistance under SO1, adjusting rapidly to the changing context, to respond to the crisis and mitigate the socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on vulnerable populations.

#### **Good practice: Example of adaptive management**

The **COVID-19 CEE 2022** found that during the pandemic, “WFP was able to flex swiftly and decisively, building on existing relationships with national authorities, deploying its network of cooperating partners and acting responsibly to changing conditions”.

The **South Sudan CSPE 2022** found that following major flooding, cooperating partners engaged with WFP to agree an extension to contracts to meet the needs of beneficiaries, as well as jointly agree on resource reallocation to meet the challenges posed by COVID-19.

36. **Supporting cost efficiency:** In six evaluations<sup>100</sup> (13 percent) it was found that by working with cooperating partners, WFP was able to reduce costs of delivery and improve programme cost efficiency for SO1. The **Zimbabwe CSPE 2022** identified significant cost-control measures through establishing FLAs with tight budget limits and the **Democratic Republic of the Congo CSPE 2020** found that transport costs and transport-related losses were reduced where transport risks were borne by the cooperating partners, which allowed interventions to be implemented more rapidly and at lower cost. However, the **Myanmar CEE 2023** noted the challenges and potential costs (for example, legal or security costs) where risks are transferred to cooperating partners.
37. **Provision of information:** Cooperating partners’ contribution of programme-related information regarding SO1 to WFP sub-offices and directly to communities was highlighted in five evaluations<sup>101</sup> (11 percent). This contribution in turn facilitated delivery of assistance and coordination at different levels. For example, cooperating partners’ information provision and engagement with local government helped facilitate delivery of emergency school feeding under SO1. The **Myanmar CEE 2023** found that cooperating partners supported the flow of programme-related information to sub-offices, helping to ensure that WFP planning and programming were informed by strong contextual knowledge.
38. **Capacity gaps:** cooperating partner capacity gaps were specifically identified as impeding WFP work on SO1 in six evaluations<sup>102</sup> (13 percent). This included weak technological capacity (as found in the **Chad CSPE**), and lack of capacity on gender and protection (see Section 2.3.1) (as found in the **Central African Republic CSPE 2022**, and in the **Pakistan CSPE 2022**). The **Bolivia CSPE 2021**, noted that partnerships were related to specific interventions, without identifying capacities of each cooperating partner that could be complementary to WFP. As a result, no partnerships were established that could contribute to sustainable development or gender issues. The **Pakistan CSPE 2022** found that cooperating partners have benefited from orientation sessions, but those were insufficient to provide them with the skills required to effectively address cross-cutting issues.

### **2.1.2 SO2: People have better nutrition, health and education outcomes**

39. Finding 2: Evaluations highlight the key role that cooperating partners play in expanding and translating WFP nutrition, health and education programming and related priorities to the community level, and contributing to advocacy at the national level.
40. Under SO2, WFP supports efforts to end undernutrition and malnutrition, for example by supporting national safety nets and social assistance programmes. In 2023, WFP provided 48.4 million children with access to improved health, nutrition and education services.<sup>103</sup> Similarly, it reached 27 million women and children through malnutrition prevention programmes in 53 countries and treatment

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<sup>100</sup> COVID-19 CEE 2022, the Democratic Republic of the Congo CSPE 2020, Honduras CSPE 2021, Zimbabwe CSPE 2022, Lebanon CSPE 2021, Technology SE 2022.

<sup>101</sup> Myanmar CEE 2023, Peru CSPE 2022, Sudan CSPE 2022, Honduras CSPE 2021, and Zimbabwe CSPE 2022.

<sup>102</sup> Ghana CSPE 2023, Central African Republic CSPE 2022, Chad CSPE 2023, Burkina Faso CSPE 2023, Bolivia CSPE 2022, and Pakistan CSPE 2022.

<sup>103</sup> WFP. 2024. Annual Performance Report 2023. (WFP/EB.A/2024/4-A).

programmes in 34 countries.<sup>104</sup> For the delivery of SO2, WFP works with and through both government and NGO cooperating partners to ensure that children receive nutritious school meals. WFP also provides food directly to children and their households, often with the support of cooperating partners. In 2023, 107 million children received school meals through programmes implemented by government or NGO cooperating partners with technical support from WFP.<sup>105</sup>

41. Twenty-five evaluations<sup>106</sup> (53 percent) provide evidence of cooperating partners' contributions from both NGO cooperating partners (20 evaluations) and government cooperating partners (18 evaluations) to support the delivery of nutrition, health and education outcomes.
42. **Expansion of programming:** Eighteen evaluations<sup>107</sup> (38 percent) found that work with cooperating partners enabled WFP to expand its food distribution in schools, enhance dietary diversity and improve nutrition outcomes through providing direct or in-kind assistance. The main mechanisms for these improvements were direct programmatic delivery, technical assistance and communication and advocacy. For example, in the **Gambia DE 2021**, cooperating partners supported training on malnutrition, dietary diversity, electronic data collection and ration distribution techniques and modalities to expand the coverage and effectiveness of programming.
43. **Supporting direct delivery:** In many countries, WFP cooperating partners played a key role in the direct delivery of nutrition, school feeding and other social assistance or social protection programmes. For example, the **Guinea-Bissau DE 2021** found that local NGOs also played a crucial role in supporting women farming groups in their production efforts.
44. **Communication and advocacy:** In six evaluations<sup>108</sup> (13 percent), cooperating partners were found to have an important role, through outreach, in information sharing and wider advocacy in delivering nutrition and health outcomes. Efforts ranged from encouraging community members to register for social protection schemes, educating community members on nutrition outcomes, to engagement at the national level on addressing malnutrition issues. The **Bangladesh DE 2020** offers an example where NGO cooperating partners, in coordination with teachers' groups, used social media to share teaching materials, with instructions to parents, to further literacy programmes in support of education outcomes.
45. **Technical assistance:** Nine evaluations<sup>109</sup> (19 percent) highlighted the importance of cooperating partners' technical assistance to the delivery of programmes under SO2, in particular school meals and nutrition interventions. Cooperating partners' technical assistance contributions to health, nutrition and education programming ranged from support to beneficiary data collection, data management and programme monitoring, as well as the provision of specific expertise in technical areas of nutrition and education. For example, the **Cambodia Food Aid Procurement DE 2023** records how cooperating partners built capacities of local people, so that they could confidently manage school programming.

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<sup>104</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>105</sup> WFP.2024. Annual Performance Report 2024.

<sup>106</sup> South Sudan CSPE 2022, Senegal CSPE 2022, Ghana CSPE 2023, Peru CSPE 2022, Jordan CSPE 2022, the Democratic Republic of the Congo CSPE 2020, Sri Lanka CSPE 2022, Lebanon CSPE 2021, Nutrition and HIV/AIDS SE 2022, Cambodia Food Aid Procurement DE 2023, Sri Lanka DE 2021, Lebanon DE 2020, Syria DE 2020, Benin DE 2022, Guinea-Bissau DE 2021, Rwanda DE 2021, Lebanon DE 2020, The Gambia DE 2021, Benin DE 2020, Bangladesh DE 2020, Cambodia McGovern Dole Grants Midline DE 2023, Cambodia McGovern Dole Endline DE 2020, Côte d'Ivoire DE 2022, Guinea DE 2022, Mauritania DE 2021

<sup>107</sup> Myanmar CEE 2023, South Sudan CSPE 2022, Senegal CSPE 2022, Ghana CSPE 2023, Peru CSPE 2022, El Salvador CSPE 2022, Nigeria CSPE 2022, Burkina Faso CSPE 2023, Bolivia CSPE 2021, Honduras CSPE 2022, Zimbabwe CSPE 2022, Technology SE 2022, Sri Lanka DE 2021, Lebanon SF DE 2020, Syria DE 2020, Benin DE 2021, Guinea Bissau DE 2021, and CPs in Eastern Africa Region DE 2021.

<sup>108</sup> Bangladesh DE 2020, Peru CSPE 2022, Nigeria CSPE 2022, Bolivia CSPE 2022, Zimbabwe CSPE 2022, Guinea Bissau DE 2021.

<sup>109</sup> Myanmar CEE 2023, South Sudan CSPE 2022, Ghana CSPE 2023, El Salvador CSPE 2022, the Democratic Republic of the Congo CSPE 2020, Technology SE 2022, Lebanon DE 2020, Guinea Bissau DE 2021 and Cambodia McGovern Dole Grants Midline DE 2023.

### 2.1.3 SO3: People have improved and sustainable livelihoods

46. Finding 3: cooperating partners' knowledge and community engagement supported effective, appropriately tailored livelihoods and resilience programming under SO3.
47. Under SO3, WFP works to achieve food security by facilitating access of farmers to markets, strengthening food systems, and supporting people to benefit from resilience building initiatives and livelihoods programming. In 2023, WFP assisted 19.9 million people in developing more resilient livelihoods.<sup>110</sup>
48. Fifteen evaluations<sup>111</sup> (32 percent) addressed the role of cooperating partners in contributing to SO3. Ten of these<sup>112</sup> concerned NGO cooperating partners and five concerned government cooperating partners.<sup>113</sup> The main contributory roles identified for cooperating partners were: sharing and using local knowledge; informing targeting choices; and managing community feedback mechanisms.
49. **Sharing and using local knowledge:** Nine evaluations<sup>114</sup> (19 percent) found that leveraging cooperating partners' local knowledge and experience helped WFP build and strengthen livelihoods outcomes under SO3. The main contributory factor here was cooperating partners' local knowledge, experience, ability to speak the local language and sensitivity to local contextual dynamics. The [Sudan CSPE 2022](#), for example, emphasized the "paramount" importance of drawing upon cooperating partners' knowledge and understanding of community relationships to address the root causes of food insecurity and build resilience, though noting that in some case WFP overlooked the potential of cooperating partners here.
50. **Targeting and needs assessment:** Seven evaluations<sup>115</sup> (15 percent) highlight the role of cooperating partners in helping WFP achieve SO3 results by supporting WFP targeting in livelihoods and resilience programming, working closely with communities to identify needs and vulnerable groups. However, evaluations report variability in success; for instance, the [Jordan CSPE 2022](#) found that the success and rigor of targeting for livelihoods programming was inconsistent, with those cooperating partners undertaking closer contact with beneficiaries generating more robust vulnerability data.
51. **Managing community feedback mechanisms (CFM):** Seven evaluations<sup>116</sup> (15 percent) mention the role of cooperating partners in managing community-based helpdesks or community feedback mechanisms, where they receive complaints about protection concerns and rations. For example, the [Nigeria CSPE 2022](#) noted that several cooperating partners manage the hotlines and processes to channel complaints to WFP so that views and messages from beneficiaries reach the country office. However, the [Lebanon DE 2020](#) noted the challenge of cooperating partners receiving complaints about targeting decisions on whose rationale they were unclear, having not been involved in their development.

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<sup>110</sup> WFP. 2024. Annual Performance Report 2023. (WFP/EB.A/2024/4-A).

<sup>111</sup> Algeria CSPE 2023, Côte d'Ivoire DE 2022, El Salvador CSPE 2022, Myanmar CEE 2023, Ghana CSPE 2023, Guinea-Bissau DE 2021, Guinea DE 2022, Honduras CSPE 2022, Jordan CSPE 2022, Mauritania DE 2021, Senegal CSPE 2022, South Sudan CSPE 2022, Sri Lanka CSPE 2022, Tajikistan CSPE 2022, Zimbabwe DE 2022.

<sup>112</sup> Algeria CSPE 2023, Côte d'Ivoire DE 2022, El Salvador CSPE 2022, Myanmar CEE 2023, Ghana CSPE 2023, Guinea-Bissau DE 2021, Guinea DE 2022, Senegal CSPE 2022, South Sudan CSPE 2022, Tajikistan CSPE 2022,

<sup>113</sup> One of which also provide evidence of government CPs: Ghana CSPE 2023.

<sup>114</sup> Myanmar CEE 2023, South Sudan CSPE 2022, Senegal CSPE 2022, Peru CSPE 2022, Algeria CSPE 2023, Sudan CSPE 2022, Nigeria CSPE 2022, Nutrition and HIV/AIDS SE 2022, Zimbabwe DE 2022.

<sup>115</sup> Tajikistan CSPE 2022, Jordan CSPE 2022, Nutrition and HIV/AIDS SE 2022, Lebanon DE 2019, Cambodia McGovern Dole Grants Midline DE 2023, Cambodia McGovern Dole Endline DE 2020, and Thematic DE 2022.

<sup>116</sup> Senegal CSPE 2023, Central African Republic CSPE 2022, Jordan CSPE 2022, Nigeria CSPE 2022, Cameroon CSPE 2020, the Democratic Republic of the Congo CSPE 2020, and Lebanon DE 2019.

#### 2.1.4 SO4: National programmes and systems are strengthened.

52. Finding 4: Evaluations found that WFP engagement with cooperating partners, which were mostly government partners, helped build the enabling environment and contributed to institutional strengthening in support of SO4.
53. Under SO4, WFP seeks to enable national and local institutions to build planning and systems to realize food security and nutrition aims. In 2023, programmes and systems were strengthened with WFP support in 69 countries.<sup>117</sup> Of these: 58 countries were assisted in becoming better prepared for, and more able to respond to, emergencies through national emergency preparedness and response systems; 55 countries were supported in their national social protection systems; and 47 countries were helped to make their systems more sustainable and resilient.<sup>118</sup>
54. Under SO4, much work is conducted by WFP directly. Twelve evaluations<sup>119</sup> (26 percent), however, reported on WFP partnerships with government cooperating partners contributing to the realization of SO4.
55. **Institutional strengthening:** Eight evaluations<sup>120</sup> (17 percent) contain evidence on WFP engagement with government cooperating partners to build long-term institutional strengthening – with positive results delivered. For example, the [Ghana CSPE 2023](#) found that coordinated planning between government cooperating partners and WFP was likely to contribute to sustainability of food security and nutrition gains through improving the enabling environment for policy delivery. The [Cambodia McGovern Dole Endline DE 2020](#) found that work with government cooperating partners contributed to progress toward the sustainability of school feeding programming but that more time was needed to ensure sustainability in the transition of systems to the Government. The [Malawi CSPE 2023](#) found that the WFP partnership with subnational structures and processes in integrated resilience building interventions helped foster the sustainability of community-level benefits.
56. **Advocacy work:** The positive contribution of government cooperating partners to systems strengthening through advocacy efforts was identified in four evaluations.<sup>121</sup> For example, the [Ghana CSPE 2023](#) found that WFP worked with government cooperating partners to support advocacy on nutrition-sensitive agriculture and improved livelihoods as well as integrating food security and nutrition needs into social protection programmes.
57. **Pilot projects:** Evaluations offer examples of WFP collaboration with government cooperating partners to pilot projects prior to scale-up, in support of systems strengthening and the improvement of social protection programming. For example, the [Pakistan CSPE 2022](#) found that several pilot projects were developed with support from government cooperating partners to support the implementation of a large government-led social protection programme.

#### 2.2 SYNTHESIS QUESTION 2 - In which specific activity areas do evaluations show that cooperating partners have made contributions to the achievement of WFP's aims, and what has worked well? What challenges have arisen?

58. Finding 5: Evaluations found that while cooperating partners played a significant role across WFP activities, with their contributions most prominently noted in school-based programme activities, community and household asset creation, and in unconditional resource transfer activities, they were

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<sup>117</sup> WFP. 2024. Annual Performance Report 2023. (WFP/EB.A/2024/4-A).

<sup>118</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>119</sup> Bolivia CSPE 2021, Burkina Faso CSPE 2023, Cambodia Food Aid Procurement DE 2023, Cambodia McGovern Dole Grants Midline DE 2023, Cameroon CSPE 2020, Ghana CSPE 2023, Guinea-Bissau DE 2021, Guinea DE 2022, Lebanon CSPE 2021, Mauritania DE 2021, Sri Lanka CSPE 2022, and The Gambia DE 2021.

<sup>120</sup> Ghana CSPE 2023, McGovern Dole Grants Midline DE 2023, South Sudan CSPE 2022, Nutrition and HIV/AIDS SE 2022, Sri Lanka CSPE 2022, Nigeria CSPE 2022, Cambodia McGovern Dole Grants Midline DE 2023, Malawi CSPE 2023.

<sup>121</sup> Ghana CSPE 2023, Peru CSPE 2022, El Salvador CSPE 2022, Jordan CSPE 2022.



also confronted with challenges. These include a lack of clarity in targeting criteria, delayed disbursement of funds by WFP, high staff turnover in cooperating partners and FLA-related problems.

59. Table 3 provides an overview of the key WFP achievements in terms of beneficiaries reached per activity area as presented in evaluations, over the years 2021-2023.

**Table 3: Overview of key WFP achievements per activity areas<sup>122</sup>**

Overview	2021	2022	2023	Average
<b>Unconditional resource transfers to support access to food</b>				
Number of people provided with unconditional food assistance through the distribution of food, cash-based transfers or commodity vouchers (in millions)	91.0	113.4	106.5	<b>103.6</b>
<b>School feeding</b>				
Number of schoolchildren to receive school meals and/or take-home rations (in millions)	15.5	20.0	21.4	<b>19.0</b>
<b>Smallholder agricultural market support</b>				
Number of smallholder farmers participating in capacity building activities that improved value chains and strengthened market services (in millions)	0.4	0.8	1.3	<b>0.9</b>
<b>Asset creation and livelihood support activities</b>				
Number of people to receive WFP food assistance to cover immediate food shortfalls while they received training and constructed assets that build their resilience to shocks and strengthen their livelihoods (in millions)	8.7	9.9	9.0	<b>9.2</b>
<b>Prevention and treatment of malnutrition</b>				
Number of persons targeted through nutrition-specific interventions (in millions)	23.5	28.5	27.9	<b>26.6</b>
<b>Climate adaptation and risk management activities</b>				
Number of people to benefit from food and cash-based transfers through climate risk insurance and anticipatory actions (in millions)	2.0	3.8	2.8	<b>2.9</b>
<b>Country capacity strengthening</b>				
Capacity strengthening transfers (USD million)	379.0	454.0	563.0	<b>465.3</b>

Source: WFP annual performance reports 2021-2023.

<sup>122</sup> Activity areas are adjusted based on the evidence available. In the revised CRF 2017-2021, Annex II, these are: 1. Unconditional resource transfers to support access to food; 2. Asset creation and livelihood support activities; 3. Climate adaptation and risk management activities; 4. School meal activities; 5. Nutrition treatment activities; 6. Malnutrition prevention activities; 7. Smallholder agricultural market support activities; 8. Individual capacity strengthening activities; 9. Institutional capacity strengthening activities; 10. Service provision and platforms activities; 11. Emergency preparedness activities; 12. Analysis, assessment and monitoring activities; 13. Other.

60. School-based programming was the most frequently identified activity, with 32 evaluations<sup>123</sup> containing relevant information on the role of cooperating partners. Nineteen evaluations<sup>124</sup> contained evidence on cooperating partners' involvement in asset creation and livelihoods, 16 evaluations<sup>125</sup> on general food assistance and 15 evaluations<sup>126</sup> on nutrition. Less information was available on cooperating partners' involvement in smallholder agricultural market support (11 evaluations),<sup>127</sup> climate adaptation and risk management (six evaluations),<sup>128</sup> and country capacity strengthening (four evaluations).<sup>129</sup>

61. Table 4 provides an overview of the roles cooperating partners have played in supporting WFP to achieve results per activity area, as presented in evaluations, over the years 2020-2023.

**Table 4: Key roles played by cooperating partners identified in evaluations, per activity area**

Activity	Type of CP	CP Roles highlighted	Examples
School feeding	NGO (9) Government (6) NGO and government CPs (17)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enhancing hygiene and food safety</li> <li>Improving school infrastructure to grow and store food</li> <li>Enhancing the distribution of food to children's homes</li> </ul>	<p><b>Cambodia McGovern Dole Endline DE 2020:</b> CPs provided trainings on the selection of suppliers for the new school year, as well as on programme implementation including stock management and food safety.</p> <p><b>Bangladesh DE 2020:</b> To ensure each child received biscuits at home, the implementing partner and other NGOs collected school enrolment lists to identify the location of each child.</p>
Asset creation and livelihoods	NGO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Programme implementation</li> <li>Access to employment</li> </ul>	<p><b>Senegal CSPE 2023:</b> Food assistance for assets (FFA) activities were implemented by CPs and</p>

<sup>123</sup> NGO CPs and government CPs: Benin DE 2020, Bolivia CSPE 2021, Cambodia McGovern Dole Grants Endline DE 2020, Cambodia Food Aid Procurement DE 2023, Cambodia McGovern Dole Grants Midline DE 2023, Chad CSPE 2022, Côte d'Ivoire DE 2022, Guinea-Bissau DE 2021, Guinea DE 2022, Honduras CSPE 2022, Jordan CSPE 2022, Lebanon SF DE 2020, Malawi CSPE 2023, Sudan CSPE 2022, Syria DE 2020, Tajikistan CSPE 2022, The Gambia DE 2021. NGO CPs: Algeria CSPE 2023, Bangladesh DE 2020, Benin DE 2022, Cameroon CSPE 2020, Haiti CSPE 2023, Lebanon CSPE 2021, South Sudan CSPE 2022, Zimbabwe CSPE 2022. Government CPs: Central African Republic CSPE 2022, El Salvador CSPE 2022, Nigeria CSPE 2022, Rwanda DE 2021, Senegal CSPE 2022, and Sri Lanka CSPE 2022.

<sup>124</sup> Bolivia CSPE 2021, Cameroon CSPE 2020, Chad CSPE 2022, El Salvador CSPE 2022, Myanmar CEE 2023, Ghana CSPE 2023, Haiti CSPE 2023, Lebanon CSPE 2021, Malawi CSPE 2023, Nigeria CSPE 2022, Pakistan CSPE 2022, Peru CSPE 2022, Senegal CSPE 2022, South Sudan CSPE 2022, Sri Lanka CSPE 2022, Sri Lanka DE 2021, Sudan CSPE 2022, Zimbabwe CSPE 2022, and Zimbabwe DE 2022.

<sup>125</sup> Myanmar CEE 2023, Central African Republic CSPE 2022, Algeria CSPE 2023, Tajikistan CSPE 2023, Sudan CSPE 2022, Haiti CSPE 2023, Chad CSPE 2022, Burkina Faso CSPE 2023, the Democratic Republic of the Congo CSPE 2020, Bolivia CSPE 2021, Honduras CSPE 2022, Zimbabwe CSPE 2022, Lebanon CSPE 2021, Technology SE 2022, The Gambia DE 2021, and Benin DE 2019.

<sup>126</sup> Cameroon CSPE 2020, Chad CSPE 2022, Myanmar CEE 2023, Haiti CSPE 2023, Pakistan CSPE 2022, Senegal CSPE 2022, South Sudan CSPE 2022, Zimbabwe CSPE 2022, Ghana CSPE 2023, Malawi CSPE 2023, Sri Lanka CSPE 2022, Sudan CSPE 2022, Bolivia CSPE 2021, Nigeria CSPE 2022, The Gambia DE 2021.

<sup>127</sup> Ghana CSPE 2023, Malawi CSPE 2023, Nigeria CSPE 2022, South Sudan CSPE 2022, Sri Lanka CSPE 2022, Sri Lanka DE 2021, Sudan CSPE 2022, Zimbabwe CSPE 2022, and Zimbabwe DE 2022, Cameroon CSPE 2020, Senegal CSPE 2023.

<sup>128</sup> Senegal CSPE 2023, Zimbabwe CSPE 2020, Jordan CSPE 2022, Sri Lanka CSPE 2022, Sri Lanka DE 2020, Honduras CSPE 2021.

<sup>129</sup> Ghana CSPE 2023, Peru CSPE 2022, El Salvador CSPE 2022 and Jordan CSPE 2022.

Activity	Type of CP	CP Roles highlighted	Examples
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rehabilitation of community assets</li> </ul>	<p>found to improve income and resilience to shock.</p> <p><b>Jordan CSPE 2022:</b> CPs supported initiatives aimed at increasing access to employment or business support, which contributed to the creation of jobs and small businesses.</p>
General food assistance (in-kind and cash)	NGO (16) NGO and government (1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provision of food to vulnerable families during natural disasters</li> <li>Scaling up cash-based transfer interventions</li> <li>Supporting beneficiaries to receive bank transfers</li> </ul>	<p><b>Cameroon CSPE 2020:</b> CPs provided emergency general food distributions in the northwest and southwest regions and scaled up cash-based transfer interventions.</p> <p><b>Tajikistan CSPE 2023:</b> Local NGO partners supported beneficiaries in opening bank accounts to receive cash-based transfers.</p>
Smallholder agricultural market support	NGO (10) NGO and government (1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Brokering relationships between farmers and buyers</li> <li>Education and training of smallholder farmers including on production</li> <li>Training and supporting farm-based organization leaders</li> </ul>	<p><b>Ghana CSPE 2023:</b> CPs were involved in the advocacy and education of smallholder farmers on good agricultural practices, post-harvest handling and adoption of standard weights and measurements.</p> <p><b>Zimbabwe DE 2022:</b> CPs linked farmers up with prospective buyers through agricultural shows and seed fairs.</p>
Climate adaptation and risk management	NGOs (3) Government (2) UN (1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Knowledge transfer in climate adaptation practices in agriculture</li> <li>Project implementation support (Inclusion Climate Change Adaptation Project)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Honduras CSPE 2022:</b> CPs were involved in transfer of practices to beneficiaries of climate change adaptation activities, in topics such as agricultural insurance and meteorological practices.</p> <p><b>Sri Lanka DE 2021:</b> a UN CP supported the implementation of the Inclusion Climate Change Adaptation Project</p>
Nutrition	NGO (8) NGO and government (4) Government (3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communication and training</li> <li>Support for vulnerable groups e.g. people living with HIV and AIDS</li> <li>Delivering nutrition activities during crisis response</li> </ul>	<p><b>Nutrition and HIV/AIDS SE 2022:</b> CPs supported WFP in reaching vulnerable groups and addressing specific issues, such as working with groups representing people living with HIV in the Dominican Republic.</p> <p><b>Cambodia Food Aid Procurement DE 2023:</b> CPs played an important role in the implementation and promotion of good nutrition practices, pursued by both WFP and the Government.</p>

Activity	Type of CP	CP Roles highlighted	Examples
Country capacity strengthening	Government (4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Joint monitoring</li> <li>Building technical expertise</li> </ul>	<b>Ghana CSPE 2023:</b> The school feeding programme stakeholders from the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection and the Ghana Health Service, regional teams, district assemblies and school feeding desk officers were trained in supervision and monitoring of the programme.

Source: Evaluation synthesis team

62. WFP support to cooperating partners that worked well in particular activity areas included:

- **Training and technical capacity strengthening** delivered by WFP, was highly valued by cooperating partners. Evaluations found that this led to improved cooperating partner skillsets in nutrition and resilience activities, as well as in accountability to affected populations (AAP) and protection. The **Ghana CSPE 2023** highlights that cooperating partners, jointly with WFP, successfully trained and supported farm-based organization leaders and smallholder farmers in the production of orange-flesh sweet potatoes and other nutritious foods.
- **Regular coordination meetings**, held by WFP helped cooperating partners to share information and learn from partners implementing similar activities, for example in school feeding or nutrition, were found to support the effectiveness of activities. In the **Myanmar CEE 2023**, WFP had fortnightly logistics coordination meetings with all cooperating partners. When the circumstances changed, WFP convened additional meetings to share information and plan jointly, which supported active sharing of information on risks to anticipate the effects of the military takeover on operations.
- **Solid programme management** helped ensure successful programme implementation and monitoring. The **Tajikistan CSPE 2023** found that WFP partnered with credible local and international NGOs with good knowledge and sensitivity to local contexts, which facilitated the delivery of assistance in the country. The evaluation highlights a specific cooperating partner that supported a food assistance for assets programme by leveraging their regional experience and engaging effectively with the local population.

63. Challenges identified included the following:

- **Lack of clarity on targeting criteria** in asset creation, emergency preparedness, livelihoods and climate programming activities, constrained cooperating partners' communication with beneficiaries and impeded delivery. This issue was particularly important considering the key role that cooperating partners have in supporting targeting and household assessments. The **Jordan CSPE 2022** highlighted that WFP reviewed its targeting system regularly. However, there were shortcomings in that some beneficiaries did not understand the targeting criteria. The evaluation notes that the use of cooperating partners to implement CSP activities does not always increase efficiency and effectiveness. At times they require more quality control, engagement and capacity strengthening.
- **Delayed disbursement of funds or in-kind resources** affected the ability of cooperating partners to deliver malnutrition, emergency preparedness and agricultural market support activities. The **Haiti CSPE 2023** noted that delayed payments occurred more frequently than in other WFP countries, with some cooperating partners noting that delays in receiving funds meant that they were not able to support beneficiaries as intended.
- **High staff turnover in cooperating partners** led to delays in school-based programmes. The **Syria DE 2020** noted that there was high staff turnover in the Ministry of Education, the main WFP cooperating partner for school-based programmes. Consequently, WFP had to restart advocacy

and awareness efforts with each change. Evaluations also identify challenges with staff turnover in NGO cooperating partners, which is discussed in Section 2.4.3.

- **FLA-related issues**, including delays in signing contracts, and short-term contracting, impacted on activity delivery for school-based programmes and smallholder market support. For example, the **Benin DE 2022** reported that the late contracting and signing of FLAs with NGO cooperating partners occurred during both the first and second school year, resulting in late starts of school feeding for children.

### **2.3. SYNTHESIS QUESTION 3 - What does the evidence show regarding WFP's and cooperating partners' attention to cross-cutting priorities and corporate commitments?<sup>130</sup>**

64. WFP has established clear standards and contractual requirements for cooperating partners on cross-cutting concerns. These are set out in normative and policy commitments, for example: the Gender Policy of 2022; the Protection and Accountability Policy (2020), the 2016 Data Protection and Privacy Policy<sup>131</sup> the Executive Director Circular on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) (2023) and the Disability Inclusion Roadmap (2020).
65. Twenty-five evaluations<sup>132</sup> (53 percent) provided evidence on cooperating partners' attention to gender equality, concerning both NGO and government cooperating partners. Twenty-three evaluations<sup>133</sup> (49 percent) addressed cooperating partner engagement in protection (including data protection as it relates to cooperating partners) and accountability to affected populations; eight evaluations<sup>134</sup> (17 percent) addressed the role of cooperating partners in PSEA. Only five evaluations<sup>135</sup> (11 percent) contained evidence on disability inclusion, and four evaluations<sup>136</sup> reported on cooperating partners' engagement in environmental sustainability.

#### **2.3.1. Gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE)**

66. Finding 6: Although GEWE is prioritized in WFP engagement with cooperating partners, evaluations indicate that attention to the issue and capacity levels are variable, particularly among NGO cooperating partners.

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<sup>130</sup> The WFP Strategic Plan (2022-2025) identifies nutrition integration as a key cross-cutting priority. However, since the evaluations in the synthesis sample reviewed programmes and CSPs designed before this plan, which for the first time emphasized nutrition as a cross-cutting area, this synthesis does not assess the CPs' attention to this priority and WFP's commitment.

<sup>131</sup> WFP, 2016, WFP's Guide to Personal Data Protection and Privacy Policy.

<sup>132</sup> Bangladesh DE 2020, Benin DE 2020, Benin DE 2022, Bolivia CSPE 2021, Burkina Faso DE 2020, Cambodia Food Aid Procurement DE 2023, Cameroon CSPE 2020, Central African Republic CSPE 2022, Chad CSPE 2022, CPs in Eastern Africa Region. DE 2021, El Salvador CSPE 2022, Myanmar CEE 2023, The Gambia DE 2021, Ghana CSPE 2023, Guinea DE 2022, Jordan CSPE 2022, Lebanon CSPE 2021, Lebanon Resilience DE 2020, Malawi CSPE 2023, Nigeria CSPE 2022, Senegal CSPE 2022, South Sudan CSPE 2022, Sri Lanka DE 2021, Syria DE 2020, Zimbabwe CSPE 2022.

<sup>133</sup> Benin DE 2022, Chad CSPE 2022, Lebanon Resilience DE 2020, Sudan CSPE 2022, Zimbabwe CSPE 2022, Burkina Faso DE 2020, Burkina Faso CSPE 2023, El Salvador CSPE 2022, Myanmar CEE 2023, Ghana CSPE 2023, Jordan CSPE 2022, Lebanon CSPE 2021, Pakistan CSPE 2022, South Sudan CSPE 2022, Central African Republic CSPE 2022, Haiti CSPE 2023, Honduras CSPE 2022, Malawi CSPE 2023, Nigeria CSPE 2022, Peru CSPE 2022, Syria DE 2020, Technology SE 2022, Tajikistan CSPE 2022.

<sup>134</sup> Burkina Faso CSPE 2023, Cameroon CSPE 2020, CPs in Eastern Africa Region DE 2021, Myanmar CEE 2023, Haiti CSPE 2023, Honduras CSPE 2022, Jordan CSPE 2022, Lebanon CSPE 2021.

<sup>135</sup> The Democratic Republic of the Congo CSPE 2020, Lebanon SF DE 2020, Sudan CSPE 2022, Syria DE 2020, Tajikistan CSPE 2022.

<sup>136</sup> Myanmar CEE 2023, Senegal CSPE 2022, South Sudan CSPE 2022. Government CPs: Sri Lanka DE 2021.

67. WFP has clear requirements to improve the GEWE practice of cooperating partners. Its Gender Equality Toolkit<sup>137</sup> and the Corporate Guidance on WFP Management of NGO Partnerships<sup>138</sup> set out the principle and tools for country offices to integrate GEWE into cooperating partner management. Field-level agreement general conditions commit cooperating partners to carrying out tasks in accordance with the WFP Gender Policy,<sup>139</sup> and budget templates include a section for gender equality activities. The draft guidance on direct assistance through government entities<sup>140</sup> also emphasizes gender considerations.
68. **Gender and contractual commitments:** Despite gender being a contractual requirement in FLAs, three evaluations<sup>141</sup> (6 percent) reported that WFP GEWE requirements were not sufficiently communicated or reflected in contracts. For example, the **CPs in Eastern Africa Region DE 2021** found that under half of FLAs reviewed included Annex 6,<sup>142</sup> which makes formal commitment to the issue and overall reported an inconsistent application of tools and guidelines related to GEWE. Additionally, a low proportion of FLAs included budget lines for GEWE interventions or capacity strengthening.<sup>143</sup>
69. Evaluations found overall that there was more emphasis on GEWE in the first stages of the partnership life cycle (selecting and contracting) and less during implementation and performance management, and in reporting from cooperating partners (with the exception of the requirement for gender-disaggregated data from beneficiaries). However, three evaluations<sup>144</sup> noted the inclusion of specific requests in FLAs for compliance with gender policies, gender parity and gender expertise, while the evaluation of **CPs in Eastern Africa Region 2021** noted specific requests in FLAs related to capacity strengthening in gender transformation programming.
70. **Gender parity in cooperating partners:** A lack of gender parity was noted in four evaluations<sup>145</sup> (9 percent). Three reported that cooperating partners had predominantly men staff. The fourth, **CPs in Eastern Africa Region 2021**, highlighted that there did not appear to be an intentional approach and efforts had been made to engage women-led organizations as cooperating partners.
71. **GEWE capacity:** WFP is expected to assess the gender equality commitment and competence of NGO cooperating partners by using a capacity assessment for new partners or performance evaluation for current partners. When the gender capacity of an NGO cooperating partner needs strengthening, the country office should provide the partner with opportunities to develop gender-related capacity.<sup>146</sup>
72. Twelve evaluations<sup>147</sup> (26 percent) registered a need for gender capacity strengthening of NGO cooperating partners. Evaluations identified a need for expertise in conducting gender analysis<sup>148</sup> and tackling gender-based violence.<sup>149</sup> An additional nine evaluations<sup>150</sup> (19 percent) provided specific

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<sup>137</sup> WFP. Programme Guidance Manual: Gender Equality Toolkit.

<sup>138</sup> Corporate Guidance on WFP Management of NGO Partnerships, OED2018/004.

<sup>139</sup> WFP. 2022. WFP Gender Policy (2022-2026) WFP/EB.1/2022/4-B/Rev.1.

<sup>140</sup> WFP. 2023. Guidance on direct assistance through government entities (draft).

<sup>141</sup> CPs in Eastern Africa Region DE 2021, Burkina Faso DE 2020, Senegal CSPE 2022.

<sup>142</sup> The CPs in Eastern Africa Region DE 2021 noted that Annex 6 ensures a formal commitment to gender equality. It is noted that the generic FLA general conditions Annex 6 ensures commitment to PSEA; gender and inclusion, and protection and accountability to affected populations and that this is now superseded by Section 9A, 2.1.c and 2.2 in the 2024 version of the FLA.

<sup>143</sup> CPs in Eastern Africa Region DE 2021. 2023 WFP Guidance note FLA budget template.

<sup>144</sup> Benin DE 2022, CPs in Eastern Africa Region DE 2021, Malawi CSPE 2023.

<sup>145</sup> South Sudan CSPE 2022, Burkina Faso DE 2020, Benin DE 2022, The CPs Evaluation in Eastern Africa Region 2021.

<sup>146</sup> Corporate Guidance on WFP Management of NGO Partnerships, OED2018/004.

<sup>147</sup> Bolivia CSPE 2021, Burkina Faso DE 2020, Central African Republic CSPE 2022, Chad CSPE 2022, CPs in Eastern Africa Region DE 2021, El Salvador CSPE 2022, The Gambia DE 2021, Guinea DE 2022, Jordan CSPE 2022, Lebanon CSPE 2021, Nigeria CSPE 2022, Syria DE 2020.

<sup>148</sup> CPs in Eastern Africa Region DE 2021.

<sup>149</sup> Burkina Faso DE 2020.

<sup>150</sup> Bolivia CSPE 2021, Burkina Faso DE 2020, Chad CSPE 2022, CPs in Eastern Africa Region DE 2021, El Salvador CSPE 2022, Guinea DE 2022, Lebanon CSPE 2021, Nigeria CSPE 2022, Syria DE 2020.

recommendations to improve the cooperating partners' capacity on GEWE. A further five evaluations<sup>151</sup> (11 percent) highlighted that WFP had provided guidance or capacity strengthening on GEWE-related activities, to positive effect. For example, in the [Zimbabwe CSPE 2022](#), training cooperating partners on gender was found to positively influence the extent that food assistance was adapted to the needs of women. Regarding performance assessment, the [CPs in Eastern Africa Region 2021](#) found that despite including a Gender Toolkit as part of guidance, this did not appear to be integrated with the NGO capacity assessment tool that had been used by some country offices in the region.

73. **Gender mainstreaming:** Eight evaluations<sup>152</sup> (17 percent) noted good practice in cooperating partner mainstreaming of GEWE, with three of these<sup>153</sup> (6 percent) highlighting the role of NGO cooperating partners in providing specific gender expertise. For example, the [Cameroon CSPE 2020](#) noted that WFP relied on NGO cooperating partners for targeting vulnerable populations, including women and girls, and integrating gender and protection concerns. This reliance was due to security issues that made it challenging for WFP staff to visit distribution sites and ensure that distributions reached those most in need.
74. In contrast, 12 evaluations<sup>154</sup> (26 percent) found inadequate consideration of gender mainstreaming (in terms of analysis, design, targeting and inclusion of men) by cooperating partners. These shortcomings affected both NGO and government cooperating partners. The [Lebanon CSPE 2021](#) found that cooperating partners had not conducted gender analysis before the design of projects, which may have limited the capacity of the cooperating partners to empower women, address root causes of gender inequality or support gender-transformative changes. The [Benin DE 2020](#) found that the absence of mainstreaming resulted in minimal monitoring of women and girls' participation or representation. It also noted that the WFP "getting things done" approach had a negative effect as NGO cooperating partners were not sufficiently demanding in terms of equal participation for men and women.
75. **Gender-transformative approaches:** Only two evaluations<sup>155</sup> (4 percent) reported on gender-transformative approaches, indicating that cooperating partners still have progress to make in adopting these approaches. The [CPs in Eastern Africa Region 2021](#) noted that although the FLA template commits cooperating partners to ensuring sufficient understanding and competency in gender-transformative programming, it does not provide any indication of what this means in practice nor does it provide budgetary resources to help meet the requirements. The evaluation reports that current tools and practices do not encourage cooperating partners to go beyond a focus on "numeric" gender equality towards more gender-transformative programming such as, for example, working with more women-led organizations and organizations with a clear GEWE mandate. The [Jordan CSPE 2022](#) noted that gender-transformative approaches in WFP operations were not fully understood or implemented by partners.

### 2.3.2 Protection and accountability to affected populations

76. Finding 7: The role of cooperating partners in protection was central, but not always consistent, with some cooperating partners lacking awareness and capacity to implement protection principles. While cooperating partners play a major role in supporting community feedback mechanisms, capacity gaps persist.
77. Beyond the WFP 2020 Protection and Accountability Policy,<sup>156</sup> the Community Engagement Strategy for Accountability to Affected Populations (2021-2026) emphasizes partnerships that enhance mutual

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<sup>151</sup> Ghana CSPE 2023, Lebanon Resilience DE 2020, Nigeria CSPE 2022, South Sudan CSPE 2022, Zimbabwe CSPE 2022.

<sup>152</sup> Benin DE 2022, Cambodia Food Aid Procurement DE 2023, Cameroon CSPE 2020, Guinea DE 2022, Lebanon Resilience DE 2020, South Sudan CSPE 2022, Sri Lanka DE 2021, Tajikistan CSPE 2022.

<sup>153</sup> Cambodia Food Aid Procurement DE 2023, Benin DE 2022, Cameroon CSPE 2020.

<sup>154</sup> Benin DE 2020, Bangladesh DE 2020, Burkina Faso DE 2020, Cameroon CSPE 2020, Central African Republic CSPE 2022, Myanmar CEE 2023, The Gambia DE 2021, Jordan CSPE 2022, Lebanon DE 2020, Lebanon CSPE 2021, Sri Lanka DE 2021, Syria DE 2020.

<sup>155</sup> CPs in Eastern Africa Region DE 2021, Jordan CSPE 2022.

<sup>156</sup> WFP Protection and Accountability Policy. 2020 WFP/EB.2/2020/4-A/1/Rev.2

accountability. Guidance for government cooperating partners (draft) commits to accountability to affected populations, and the Interim Guidance and Assurance Standards for Cash-Based Transfers through Governments states that accountability to affected populations, where it is delivered through government, is also an important part of WFP programming. Annex 6 of the FLA general conditions template includes standard requirements for awareness among beneficiaries of the organization's community feedback mechanisms to provide a channel for accountability to affected populations.<sup>157</sup>

78. Twenty-three evaluations<sup>158</sup> (49 percent) reported on the role that cooperating partners play in contributing to the commitment of WFP to protection. This included work on protection risk analysis and implementing safeguarding mechanisms. Overall, the evidence reflects a mixed picture, where in some countries cooperating partners played a critical role in protection efforts, while in others they struggled to operationalize protection principles because of a lack of awareness of the principles or knowledge of how to apply them.
79. For example, the **Myanmar CEE 2023** found that sub-offices had implemented capacity strengthening interventions for cooperating partners aimed at enhancing their use of participatory methods, and their understanding of the risks faced by people and communities affected by crises. The **Tajikistan CSPE 2023** found that cooperating partners strongly integrated protection principles across implementation in activities and interactions with local communities, in particular when it came to the most vulnerable communities. The **Lebanon CSPE 2021** reported that protection principles have been understood by cooperating partners as safeguarding issues. In practical terms, this is translated into resolving beneficiary complaints and addressing security and safety issues linked to e-cards.
80. Only three evaluations<sup>159</sup> (6 percent) address data protection-related issues. All highlight challenges and risks for cooperating partners. For example, the **Technology SE 2022** reported limited communication on data protection issues by WFP to its cooperating partners, and a lack of effort to identify cyber security and technology risks for cooperating partners.
81. Data protection and privacy are important elements of protection, and the 2024 FLA general conditions<sup>160</sup> ensure confidentiality of beneficiary information. However, according to the 2020 Office of Internal Audit Branch (OIGA) Advisory Assurance Report on Beneficiary Data Mapping Audit, WFP partnering choices and support systems have not kept pace with its evolving business model, increasing potential misuse of beneficiary data and raising concerns about data protection in practice. The challenges regarding the capacity of cooperating partners to implement data protection policies and practice is noted as a limiting factor.
82. Twenty evaluations<sup>161</sup> (43 percent) provided evidence relating to accountability to affected populations. Of these, two<sup>162</sup> reported that accountability had been integrated into cooperating partner FLAs, while six<sup>163</sup> (13 percent) highlighted that WFP had provided capacity strengthening for cooperating partners in accountability to affected populations. For example, the **Nigeria CSPE 2022** noted that cooperating partners manage the accountability hotline and processes have been put in place to channel complaints to WFP, so that views and messages from beneficiaries reach the country office. The

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<sup>157</sup> Annex 6 has now been incorporated into the main body of the template: FLA 2024 Feb REL 1 En.

<sup>158</sup> Benin DE 2022, Chad CSPE 2022, Lebanon Resilience DE 2020, Sudan CSPE 2022, Zimbabwe CSPE 2022. Burkina Faso CSPE 2023, Burkino Faso DE 2020, El Salvador CSPE 2022, Myanmar CEE 2023, Ghana CSPE 2023, Jordan CSPE 2022, Lebanon CSPE 2021, Pakistan CSPE 2022, South Sudan CSPE 2022. Central African Republic CSPE 2022, Haiti CSPE 2023, Honduras CSPE 2022, Malawi CSPE 2023, Nigeria CSPE 2022, Peru CSPE 2022, Tajikistan CSPE 2022, Syria DE 2020, Technology SE 2022.

<sup>159</sup> Technology SE 2022, Nigeria CSPE 2022, Burkina Faso DE 2020.

<sup>160</sup> FLA general conditions version 2024.

<sup>161</sup> Benin DE 2022, Chad CSPE 2022, Lebanon Resilience DE 2020, Sudan CSPE 2022, Zimbabwe CSPE 2022, Burkina Faso CSPE. 2023, El Salvador CSPE 2022, Myanmar CEE 2023, Ghana CSPE 2023, Jordan CSPE 2022, Lebanon CSPE 2021, Pakistan CSPE 2022, South Sudan CSPE 2022, Central African Republic CSPE 2022, Haiti CSPE 2023, Malawi CSPE 2023, Nigeria CSPE 2022, Peru CSPE 2022, Syria DE 2020, Tajikistan CSPE 2022 .

<sup>162</sup> Malawi CSPE 2023 and Ghana CSPE 2023.

<sup>163</sup> Burkina Faso CSPE 2023, Myanmar CEE 2023, Jordan CSPE 2022, Lebanon CSPE 2021, Pakistan CSPE 2022, South Sudan CSPE 2022.



**Senegal CSPE 2022** highlights that cooperating partners were trained on the application of the principles of accountability to affected populations, with the objective to integrate the vulnerable population into WFP activities. Cooperating partners are contributing to accountability through regular reports related to the community feedback mechanism. Monitoring of accountability relies notably on reports from cooperating partners, village community support systems, and complaint management mechanisms, which have functioned relatively well. However, some evaluations noted gaps in WFP capacity strengthening efforts for accountability to affected populations, including taking a blanket approach for participants,<sup>164</sup> poor quality orientation sessions<sup>165</sup> and turnover of cooperating partner staff resulting in lost capacity.<sup>166</sup>

83. Evaluations found that the effectiveness of cooperating partners' engagement in community feedback mechanisms was variable. Nine evaluations<sup>167</sup> (19 percent) presented examples of where cooperating partners ensured effective use of the complaints management system. For example, the **South Sudan CSPE** found that community feedback mechanism training was delivered to WFP and cooperating partner staff, and a community feedback mechanism database supported community feedback in order to feed into programming and implementation decisions. Three evaluations<sup>168</sup> (6 percent), however, identified challenges related to underreporting of complaints by cooperating partners and to ensuring that cooperating partners involved in community feedback mechanism implementation are systematically using these mechanisms across their work. The **Chad CSPE 2023** identified an issue with both lack of systematic use of community feedback mechanisms and a lack of communication on the claims received through the mechanisms to cooperating partners. The evaluation found that this limited the ability of cooperating partners to fully understand the beneficiaries' perspective and measure the success of interventions.

### 2.3.3 Disability inclusion

84. Finding 8: Evaluations reflect that disability inclusion is not yet systematically integrated into the programme implementation of cooperating partners.
85. Evaluative evidence was limited regarding disability inclusion, with only six evaluations<sup>169</sup> (13 percent) containing evidence. The evidence available reflects an overall lack of programme integration but only provides limited insight into the level of guidance or support cooperating partners have received in this area.
86. Positively, the **Myanmar CEE 2022** reported that cooperating partners are required to consider disability, along with gender, in targeting and designing support delivery, and notes consultations with persons with disabilities and a concerted attempt to increase the availability of disability data. Elsewhere, however, persons living with disabilities were not adequately considered as a target group. For example, the **Tajikistan CSPE 2022** reports that cooperating partners did not consider disability in food assistance for asset provision, while the **Sudan CSPE 2022** and the **Democratic Republic of the Congo CSPE 2020** evaluation outlined that cooperating partners did not consider persons living with disabilities in emergency programmes. The **Lebanon SF DE 2020** noted gaps in ensuring the enrolment and retention of people living with disabilities.

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<sup>164</sup> South Sudan CSPE 2022, Lebanon CSPE 2021.

<sup>165</sup> Pakistan CSPE 2022.

<sup>166</sup> Burkina Faso CSPE 2023

<sup>167</sup> Burkina Faso CSPE 2023, Central African Republic CSPE 2022, Myanmar CEE 2023, Haiti CSPE 2023, Honduras CSPE 2022, Malawi CSPE 2023, Nigeria CSPE 2022, South Sudan CSPE 2022, and Syria DE 2020.

<sup>168</sup> Lebanon SF DE 2020, Chad CSPE 2023, South Sudan CSPE 2022

<sup>169</sup> The Democratic Republic of the Congo CSPE 2020, Lebanon SF DE 2020, Myanmar CEE 2022, Sudan CSPE 2022, Syria DE 2020, Tajikistan CSPE 2022.

### 2.3.4 Protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA)

87. Finding 9: The evaluations provided limited evidence relating to PSEA, but that available indicates variable attention to the issue, with codes of conduct and training emphasized in some contexts, but a lack of engagement on standards, systems and protocols in others.
88. The WFP Executive Director's Circular on Special Measures for PSEA updated in May 2023 highlights the WFP approach of "zero-tolerance for inaction on all forms of SEA" complementing the direction on PSEA set out in the WFP strategic plan.<sup>170</sup> One of its stated objectives is to strengthen partners' capacity to identify, prevent and respond to PSEA. Through the circular, WFP managers are obligated to ensure that cooperating partners understand and comply with PSEA obligations. The updated FLA template<sup>171</sup> includes a clause on PSEA. PSEA focal points at the country office level are responsible for raising awareness and providing training on PSEA to WFP staff and, when necessary, to cooperating partners, in accordance with the clause. The UN Partner Portal PSEA Capacity Assessment Module was launched in June 2023, which allows UN agencies and civil society organizations to assess and build partner capacity to prevent PSEA, and WFP has made it mandatory for country offices to assess cooperating partners using the common tool. The guidance for government cooperating partners<sup>172</sup> also commits to considering PSEA.
89. Eight evaluations<sup>173</sup> (17 percent) contained evidence on PSEA concerning NGO cooperating partners. Of these, two<sup>174</sup> noted the presence of PSEA codes of conduct for NGO cooperating partners, and four evaluations<sup>175</sup> (9 percent) noted that training for cooperating partners on PSEA was provided. The recently published Strategic Evaluation of WFP's Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse<sup>176</sup> found that cooperating partners make significant contributions to WFP analysis of area-based PSEA (and wider protection) risks. Digital technology, training and the careful drafting of contracts were the main ways that WFP worked with cooperating partners to mitigate sexual exploitation and abuse risks.
90. Three evaluations<sup>177</sup> (6 percent) provide examples of where processes for NGO cooperating partners were not sufficiently briefed on PSEA; largely due to a lack of engagement on standards, systems and protocols. The [Burkina Faso CSPE 2023](#) found, for example: ad hoc incident management for cooperating partners and insufficient efforts by INGOs to foster a culture for discussing and reporting PSEA; variable use of a toll-free feedback number due to cooperating partners' capacities; and difficulties in monitoring local NGO cooperating partners' PSEA approaches.

## 2.4 SYNTHESIS QUESTION 4 - WHAT FACTORS DO EVALUATIONS INDICATE CONTRIBUTED TO OR HINDERED THE QUALITY AND PERFORMANCE OF WFP'S WORK WITH COOPERATING PARTNERS?

91. The synthesis team reviewed the evaluations to identify factors that hindered or contributed to the quality and performance of WFP work with cooperating partners.
92. Factors affecting performance have been mapped to the (NGO) cycle of cooperating partnership management (Figure 6 above). Table 5 outlines the number of evaluations that detail factors influencing the quality and performance of WFP work with cooperating partners throughout the cycle.

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<sup>170</sup> ED's Circular Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (PSEA)" (OED2023/011).

<sup>171</sup> FLA General Conditions Template Version 2024.

<sup>172</sup> Guidance for Government CPs.

<sup>173</sup> Burkina Faso CSPE 2023, Cameroon CSPE 2020, CPs in Eastern Africa Region DE 2021, Myanmar CEE 2023, Haiti CSPE 2023, Honduras CSPE 2022, Jordan CSPE 2022, Lebanon CSPE 2021.

<sup>174</sup> Haiti CSPE 2023 and Lebanon CSPE 2021.

<sup>175</sup> Haiti CSPE 2023, Lebanon CSPE 2021, CPs in Eastern Africa Region DE 2021, Jordan CSPE 2022.

<sup>176</sup> Strategic Evaluation of WFP's Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, OEV/2022/025.

<sup>177</sup> Burkina Faso CSPE 2023, Myanmar CEE 2023, and Cameroon CSPE 2020.

**Table 5: Evidence coverage of factors influencing the quality and performance of WFP work with cooperating partners.**<sup>178</sup>

Stage of the CP management cycle	Contributing factor (NGO CPs)	Contributing factor (government CPs)	Hindering factor (NGO CPs)	Hindering factor (government CPs)
Selection of CP	7 (15%) <sup>179</sup>	2 (4%) <sup>180</sup>	3 (6%) <sup>181</sup>	0
Preparing the contract	8 (17%) <sup>182</sup>	0	18 (38%) <sup>183</sup>	6 (13%) <sup>184</sup>
Implementation	9 (19%) <sup>185</sup>	3 (6%) <sup>186</sup>	20 (43%) <sup>187</sup>	7 (15%) <sup>188</sup>
Review of the partnership	1 (2%) <sup>189</sup>	0	2 (4%) <sup>190</sup>	0

### 2.4.1 Selection of cooperating partner

93. Finding 10: WFP has robust processes for selecting NGO cooperating partners with the necessary expertise and capacity, however this can be hindered by WFP financial constraints, country office capacity or a lack of suitable local partners. There is limited evidence on selection of government cooperating partners.
94. Evaluations reported that WFP has appropriate tools and systems to identify and select cooperating partners with the capacity and expertise to deliver planned activities. The **Myanmar CEE 2023** states that cooperating partners are selected through annual calls for proposals based on experience, capacity and ability to operate in any given areas. The **Cameroon CSPE 2020** noted that the country office created a dedicated tool to map the expertise and capacity of cooperating partners, while the **CPs in Eastern Africa Region 2021** noted the utility of the UN Partner Portal to enhance transparency and clarity at cooperating partner selection stage. Interview data validated this finding but highlighted the importance of addressing capacity issues for both WFP country offices and cooperating partners during the selection process.

<sup>178</sup> To note that some evaluations provide evidence of both hindering and contributing factors, as well as NGO and government CPs. Additionally, since only one evaluation (Sri Lanka DE 2021) provides evidence on UN acting as a CP during the implementation phase, it has not been included in the table.

<sup>179</sup> Benin DE 2022, Cameroon CSPE 2020, CPs in Eastern Africa Region DE 2021, Myanmar CEE 2023, Jordan CSPE 2022, Syria DE 2020 and Tajikistan CSPE 2022.

<sup>180</sup> Jordan CSPE 2022 and Syria DE 2020.

<sup>181</sup> Cameroon CSPE 2020, the Democratic Republic of the Congo CSPE 2020 and Lebanon DE 2020.

<sup>182</sup> Benin DE 2020, COVID-19 CEE 2022, Guinea DE 2022, Malawi CSPE 2023, Nutrition and HIV/AIDS SE 2022, Rwanda DE 2021, Sudan CSPE 2022 and Zimbabwe CSPE 2022.

<sup>183</sup> Algeria CSPE 2023, Benin DE 2020, Bolivia CSPE 2021, Central African Republic CSPE 2022, Chad CSPE 2022, Côte d'Ivoire DE 2022, COVID-19 2022, El Salvador CSPE 2022, in Sri Lanka CSPE2022, Guinea DE 2022, Guinea-Bissau DE 2021, Haiti CSPE 2023, Malawi CSPE 2023, Pakistan CSPE 2022, Rwanda DE 2021, Sudan CSPE 2022, Zimbabwe CSPE 2022 and Zimbabwe DE 2022.

<sup>184</sup> Algeria CSPE 2023, Benin DE 2022, Cameroon CSPE 2020, the Democratic Republic of the Congo CSPE 2020, El Salvador CSPE 2022, Guinea DE 2022.

<sup>185</sup> Benin DE 2020, Benin DE 2022, COVID-19 CEE 2022, Myanmar CEE 2022, Honduras CSPE 2022, Rwanda DE 2021, South Sudan CSPE 2022, Syria DE 2020 and Tajikistan CSPE 2022.

<sup>186</sup> COVID-19 CEE 2022, Rwanda DE 2021, Syria DE 2020.

<sup>187</sup> Bangladesh DE 2020, Benin DE 2020, Benin DE 2022, Bolivia CSPE 2021, Central African Republic CSPE 2022, Chad CSPE 2022, CPs in Eastern Africa Region DE 2021, Côte d'Ivoire DE 2022, the Democratic Republic of the Congo CSPE 2020, Guinea-Bissau DE 2021, Haiti CSPE 2023, Honduras CSPE 2022, Lebanon CSPE 2021, Lebanon DE 2020, Pakistan CSPE 2022, Peacebuilding PE 2022, South Sudan CSPE 2022, Sri Lanka DE 2021, Syria DE 2020 and Zimbabwe DE 2022.

<sup>188</sup> Bolivia CSPE 2021, Chad CSPE 2022, the Democratic Republic of the Congo CSPE 2020, Sudan CSPE 2022, Syria DE 2020, Pakistan CSPE 2022, Sri Lanka DE 2021.

<sup>189</sup> CPs in Eastern Africa Region DE 2021.

<sup>190</sup> Central African Republic CSPE 2022, Jordan CSPE 2022.

95. Cooperating partners' knowledge of local communities was a determining factor for partner selection. For example, the [Guinea-Bissau DE 2021](#) noted that local NGOs can work directly with smallholder farmers and can best identify and work with those most in need, including women producers and farmers. Other technical skills were valuable too: the [Cambodia McGovern Dole Endline DE 2020](#), reported that one cooperating partner brought extensive experience in programme management, which was instrumental in the successful implementation and monitoring of the programme.
96. Constraining factors related to the limited number of cooperating partners with the relevant technical expertise and experience in some contexts, alongside WFP financial constraints. For example, the [Democratic Republic of the Congo CSPE 2020](#) noted that there were delays in selecting and contracting cooperating partners due to limited availability of adequately capacitated NGOs, taking into account the operating context. The [Cameroon CSPE 2020](#) reported that WFP financial constraints limited the ability of WFP to contract the more costly services of INGOs with more expertise, which contributed to a suboptimal selection of partners.

## 2.4.2 Negotiating and preparing the contract

97. Negotiating and preparing the contract is the stage of the cycle of partnership management where the contract modality is determined and agreed by WFP and cooperating partners. NGO cooperating partners sign a FLA with WFP, while for engaging with government there is not yet a template or standardized process but ad-hoc solutions have been used.
98. Twenty-four evaluations<sup>191</sup> (51 percent) identified factors contributing to enhancing or hindering the quality and performance of cooperating partners at the contracting phase, with most evidence relating to NGO cooperating partners. Contract length was a key factor in the partner management process, with long-term durations of FLAs supporting medium-term planning and enhancing WFP-cooperating partner relationships, while delays in signing contracts and other administrative issues were the main hindering factors.
99. Finding 11: For NGO cooperating partners, the duration of a FLA is key for success. Long-term FLAs support medium-term planning and sustained relationships, whereas short-term FLA contracts prove inefficient for both WFP and cooperating partners.
100. Eight evaluations<sup>192</sup> (17 percent) found that, for NGOs, the duration of FLAs was a major factor in determining the quality and performance of partnerships. For example, the [Malawi CSPE 2023](#) noted that when WFP introduced longer-term FLAs, spanning more than 12 months, child protection partners were able to offer more sustained support to beneficiaries.

### Good practice example on the use of long-term agreements

The [Nutrition and HIV/AIDS SE 2022](#) found that in Uganda, the longer-term agreements spanning over three years (with annual reviews based on funding availability), enabled the country office to gather insights on contextual factors, develop programme impact pathways, and foster relationships that were previously challenging under single-year agreements.

101. Conversely, nine evaluations<sup>193</sup> (19 percent) identified short-term FLAs (less than one year) as a factor hindering the performance of NGO cooperating partners.<sup>194</sup> The [CPs in Eastern Africa Region DE](#)

<sup>191</sup> Algeria CSPE 2023, Benin DE 2020, Bolivia CSPE 2021, Cameroon CSPE 2020, Central African Republic CSPE 2022, Chad CSPE 2022, COVID-19 CEE 2022, CPs in Eastern Africa Region DE 2021, Côte d'Ivoire DE 2022, the Democratic Republic of the Congo CSPE 2020, El Salvador CSPE 2022, Myanmar CEE 2023, Guinea DE 2022, Guinea-Bissau DE 2021, Haiti CSPE 2023, Lebanon DE 2022, Malawi CSPE 2023, Nutrition and HIV/AIDS SE 2022, Pakistan CSPE 2022, Rwanda DE 2021, Sudan CSPE 2022, South Sudan CSPE 2022, Sri Lanka CSPE 2022, and Zimbabwe DE 2022.

<sup>192</sup> CPs in Eastern Africa Region DE 2021, COVID-19 CEE 2022, the Democratic Republic of the Congo CSPE 2020, Lebanon DE 2020, Malawi CSPE 2023, Nutrition and HIV/AIDS SE 2022, Sudan CSPE 2022, and Zimbabwe CSPE 2022.

<sup>193</sup> Chad CSPE 2022, CPs in Eastern Africa Region DE 2021, the Democratic Republic of the Congo CSPE 2020, Guinea-Bissau DE 2021, Lebanon DE 2020, Malawi CSPE 2023, Sudan CSPE 2022, Zimbabwe CSPE 2022, Zimbabwe DE 2022.

<sup>194</sup> This issue was raised in the Report of the External Auditor on the management of CPs, and in interviews.

**2021** noted that short FLA durations are a significant challenge for NGO cooperating partners partnering with WFP. The evaluation found that local NGOs face particular challenges here, with lack of future security placing a strain on staff retention and budgeting. The evaluation calls for longer-term FLAs (2-5 years) for such local partners, which often lack the capacity of international NGOs to leverage diverse funding sources to bridge gaps between FLAs. The **Zimbabwe CSPE 2022** highlighted that FLAs for food assistance were short-term, lasting 6 and 12 months respectively. This required frequent creation and negotiation of annual proposals for multi-year engagements, which created inefficiencies. The evaluation recommended multi-year agreements with annual budget adjustments to optimize resources utilization.

102. A significant reason for the necessity of short-term contracts was attributed to the nature of WFP funding. Three evaluations<sup>195</sup> (6 percent) explicitly mentioned that limited or unpredictable WFP funding hindered the contracting process. For example, the **Cote d'Ivoire DE 2022** reported that the lack of long-term sustainable funding, in the absence of other funding being available, made it more challenging to provide continued assistance through the school feeding programme.

103. Thirteen evaluations<sup>196</sup> (28 percent) included recommendations to use long-term and multimodal agreements with NGO cooperating partners. The recommendations overall state that WFP should:

- develop strategic, long-term agreements with cooperating partners such as three-year FLAs and multi-year funding commitments to improve planning and stability;
- establish framework contracts with local cooperating partners in areas vulnerable to shocks to improve response times and reduce procurement delays;
- promote rapid operational adjustments through flexible, multimodal FLAs, supported by management tools and capacity development; and
- engage in capacity building of specialized cooperating partners and longer-term agreements to reduce administrative burdens.

#### **Good practice example on the use of flexible FLA models**

The **Myanmar CEE 2023** found that WFP applied an innovative and flexible FLA approach called "shadow FLAs" (also referred as "floating" or "standby" agreements) to provide flexibility and overcome limitations of FLA formats with cooperating partners. This allows for a more rapid shift between cash-based transfers and in-kind assistance when the original form of transfer is not feasible. This system serves as an annex that prepares for an amendment to the field-level agreement, enabling a more efficient transition between modalities.<sup>197</sup>

104. Finding 12: Evaluations that discuss how contracts are negotiated and managed with government cooperating partners signal the importance of developing a clear strategic framework for engaging with government cooperating partners.

105. Four evaluations<sup>198</sup> (9 percent) note the importance of developing a clear strategic framework for engaging with governments as cooperating partners. For example, the **Benin DE 2022** noted that the absence of a formal coordination framework at the operational level with government cooperating partners impeded the efficiency of programme implementation. The **Sudan CSPE 2022** noted that while there were memorandums of understanding with government ministries in their role as

<sup>195</sup> Bolivia CSPE 2021, Côte d'Ivoire DE 2022, and Guinea-Bissau DE 2021.

<sup>196</sup> Algeria CSPE 2023, Benin DE 2020, Burkina Faso DE 2020, Cameroon CSPE 2020, CPs in Eastern Africa Region DE 2021, the Democratic Republic of the Congo CSPE 2020, Myanmar CEE 2023, Guinea DE 2022, Guinea-Bissau DE 2021, Lebanon Resilience DE 2020, Sudan CSPE 2022, Syria DE 2020, and Zimbabwe CSPE 2022.

<sup>197</sup> The Myanmar CEE 2023 further defined the shadow FLA as "an annex that prepares for an amendment in the field-level agreement in any one month when the original form of transfer is not feasible and so allows a more rapid shift to an alternative - usually a move from CBT to in-kind assistance".

<sup>198</sup> Benin DE 2022, Bolivia CSPE 2021, Sri Lanka CSPE 2022, and Sudan CSPE 2022.

cooperating partners, the lack of a clear strategic framework impeded coordinated action with government, both as a cooperating partner and as a strategic partner.

106. To provide further clarity and guidance, WFP is currently developing draft guidance on direct assistance through government entities.<sup>199</sup> The guidance is intended to provide a framework for WFP country offices as they navigate often new territory with government cooperating partners.

107. Finding 13: Administrative delays at the contracting stage, such as late signing of contracts and lack of transparency on programme budgets, created inefficiencies. Multiple cooperating partner agreements in the same geographical area also impeded efficiency.

108. Inefficiencies related to contracting were identified in 11 evaluations.<sup>200</sup> Delays in the signing of FLAs were identified as a challenge in eight evaluations.<sup>201</sup> These delays had tangible programmatic consequences; for example, the **Pakistan CSPE 2022** found that, following a delay in contract finalization, some cooperating partners found it challenging to reach beneficiaries in the time allocated for the activities.

109. Two evaluations<sup>202</sup> (4 percent) identified a lack of transparency by WFP on programme budgets, where programmes and activities were being delivered by cooperating partners, as a hindering factor. For example, the **Bolivia CSPE 2021** found that insufficient WFP transparency in sharing budgets with cooperating partners resulted in the need for programme rebudgeting.

110. Finally, three evaluations<sup>203</sup> (6 percent) highlighted the challenges with contracting multiple concurrent FLAs in the same area and resulting inefficiencies. For example, the **South Sudan CSPE 2022** and the **Algeria CSPE 2023** reported that numerous FLAs with multiple NGOs in the same area incurred increased overhead costs both for WFP and for the NGOs.<sup>204</sup>

111. The rollout of Partner Connect in 2023 is intended to enable greater transparency and efficiency in elements of cooperating partner management. However, the results of this initiative are not yet available.

### 2.4.3 Implementation phase

112. Twenty-eight evaluations<sup>205</sup> (60 percent) provide evidence relating to the implementation phase of cooperating partner management when cooperating partners are delivering activities and programmes.<sup>206</sup> The flexibility and adaptive capacity of WFP was appreciated by its partners during programme implementation, while there was mixed evidence on the use of technology to support implementation. Some WFP-cooperating partner partnerships experienced challenges in coordination.

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<sup>199</sup> WFP. 2023. Guidance on direct assistance through government entities (draft).

<sup>200</sup> Algeria CSPE 2023, Cameroon CSPE 2020, South Sudan CSPE 2022, Benin DE 2022, Chad CSPE 2022, Central African Republic CSPE 2022, COVID-19 CEE 2022, the Democratic Republic of the Congo CSPE 2020, Lebanon DE 2020, and Pakistan CSPE 2022 and Zimbabwe CSPE 2022.

<sup>201</sup> Benin DE 2022, Cameroon CSPE 2020, Chad CSPE 2022, Central African Republic CSPE 2022, COVID-19 CEE 2022, the Democratic Republic of the Congo CSPE 2020, Lebanon DE 2020, Pakistan CSPE 2022.

<sup>202</sup> Bolivia CSPE 2021 and Zimbabwe DE 2022.

<sup>203</sup> Algeria CSPE 2023, Cameroon CSPE 2020 and South Sudan CSPE 2022.

<sup>204</sup> Also validated by interview evidence.

<sup>205</sup> Bangladesh DE 2020, Benin DE 2020, Benin DE 2022, Bolivia CSPE 2021, Burkina Faso DE 2020, Cambodia Food Aid Procurement DE 2023, Chad CSPE 2022, Central African Republic CSPE 2022, CPs in Eastern Africa Region DE 2021, Côte d'Ivoire DE 2022, COVID-19 CEE 2022, the Democratic Republic of the Congo CSPE 2020, Myanmar CEE 2023, Honduras CSPE 2022, Guinea-Bissau DE 2021, Haiti CSPE 2023, Lebanon CSPE 2021, Lebanon DE 2020, Pakistan CSPE 2022, Rwanda DE 2021, Sudan CSPE 2022, South Sudan CSPE 2022, Sri Lanka CSPE 2022, Syria DE 2020, Tajikistan CSPE 2022, Technology SE 2022, Zimbabwe DE 2022, and Zimbabwe CSPE 2022.

<sup>206</sup> In setting out the evidence in relation to implementation of partnerships with CPs, it is well noted that Partner Connect - a system which is intended to aid in transparency and address some of the challenges around CP management - was implemented in over twenty countries from 2023 onwards. However, the evaluation universe (which is the primary evidence source for this synthesis) is retrospective and does not take Partner Connect into account.

113. Finding 14: There is some evidence that WFP is recognized as a flexible partner, appreciated for its responsiveness to cooperating partners' input and its ability to tailor programmes and activities to evolving local and national contexts.
114. Nine evaluations<sup>207</sup> (19 percent) reported that a key contributing factor to the successful implementation of WFP partnerships with both government and NGO cooperating partners is its adaptive capacity and flexibility. In particular, evaluations highlighted WFP willingness to respond to feedback from cooperating partners as situations changed – meaning that programmes and activities could be appropriately adjusted to meet needs on the ground.
115. For example, the **South Sudan CSPE 2022** found that following major flooding, cooperating partners engaged with WFP to agree an extension to contracts so that the needs of beneficiaries could be met. Resource allocations were also adapted to meet the challenges posed by COVID-19. In the same vein, the **Rwanda DE 2021** found that WFP was adaptable and quick to adjust activities of cooperating partners based on emerging evidence related to contextual change.
116. Finding 15: While technology at times reduced administrative difficulties, such as reducing delays in invoice processing, in some contexts there is a need to build the technological capacity of cooperating partners. This includes consideration of the systems used for data collection and the lack of standardization across different organizations.
117. Two evaluations<sup>208</sup> (4 percent), credited the appropriate use of technology with supporting WFP partnerships with its cooperating partners. The benefits of technology use were noted in the **South Sudan CSPE 2022**, which found that technology supported the timely delivery of aid by cooperating partners, for example, through the use of biometric registration systems and digitized systems to respond to beneficiary feedback and provide online reporting to WFP. Delays in invoicing payments were reduced. However, the **Technology SE 2022** found that beneficiary data integration efforts have been made, but the data remain fragmented and inconsistent, with non-integrated formats held by different cooperating partners, often not digitized, and lacking comprehensive datasets, making it challenging to access accurate and coordinated data about programme implementation upon which to base decision making.
118. Three evaluations<sup>209</sup> (6 percent) outlined specific challenges with cooperating partners' use of new technology. The **Lebanon CSPE 2021** and **Lebanon DE 2020** found that cooperating partners experienced challenges in new systems to gather and validate beneficiary data, while the **Technology SE 2022** highlighted a lack of standardization in the way that data were collected and held by different cooperating partners. It advised that WFP has not focused strongly enough in building the technological capacity of NGO cooperating partners, beyond the capacities needed to work with WFP. It proposed enhanced automation of cooperating partner management processes, including revisiting the FLA template for digital use and exploring possibilities for digitizing implementation processes like invoicing and payments. It also recommended enhancing the digital literacy of cooperating partners.
119. Finding 16: Evaluations reported that challenges in coordination and communication between WFP and cooperating partners have hindered programme implementation, although mediation has proven valuable.
120. Nine evaluations<sup>210</sup> (19 percent) reported poor coordination and communication between WFP and cooperating partners or cooperating partners and other partners, of which five concerned NGO partners, three government partners, and one a UN cooperating partner. A lack of coordination affected the ability of cooperating partners to implement programmes and impeded the coherence of programming. For example, the **Sri Lanka DE 2021** highlights that cooperating partners were working

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<sup>207</sup> Benin DE 2020, Benin DE 2022, COVID-19 CEE 2022, Myanmar CEE 2023, Honduras CSPE 2022, Rwanda DE 2021, South Sudan CSPE 2022, Syria DE 2020, and Tajikistan CSPE 2022.

<sup>208</sup> Myanmar CEE 2023 and South Sudan CSPE 2022.

<sup>209</sup> Lebanon CSPE 2021, Lebanon DE 2020 and Technology SE 2022.

<sup>210</sup> Bangladesh DE 2020, Benin DE 2020, Benin DE 2022, Côte d'Ivoire DE 2022, Sri Lanka CSPE 2022, Sri Lanka DE 2021, Syria DE 2020, Zimbabwe DE 2022, and Zimbabwe CSPE 2022.

in silos in the early stages of a programme, but that coordination and communication improved afterwards with the hiring of a project coordinator.

121. Finding 17: Payment delays at the implementation stage impeded the delivery of timely assistance to beneficiaries.
122. Ten evaluations<sup>211</sup> (21 percent) reported that delayed payments to cooperating partners impeded the delivery of timely assistance to beneficiaries. Of these, nine provided evidence related to NGO cooperating partners, and one to government cooperating partners.
123. Four evaluations<sup>212</sup> (9 percent) reported that payment points, designed at contracting stage, were not aligned with activity delivery during implementation. For example, the **Democratic Republic of the Congo CSPE 2020** found that the structure of FLAs meant that funds were released at set points in the contract, rather than as actually needed for activity implementation. During the implementation stage, this created cash-flow challenges for smaller cooperating partner organizations in particular. The **CPs in Eastern Africa Region DE 2021** found that late payment particularly affected local NGOs without cash reserves to manage delays in WFP payments.
124. The resulting effects on beneficiaries were significant. The **Haiti CSPE 2023** reported that, following delays in WFP payments to cooperating partners, the consequent cashflow issues resulted in delayed cash-based transfers to beneficiaries, with affected populations having to wait weeks or months to receive payments for conditional cash-based transfer activities. The **Peacebuilding PE 2022** similarly noted that late payments by WFP for programmes such as cash for work, and a lack of clarity about the delays, created tensions in local communities that cooperating partners had to then manage.
125. Finding 18: Capacity constraints, including high levels of staff turnover within government cooperating partners particularly, impeded programme implementation.
126. Fourteen evaluations<sup>213</sup> (30 percent) signaled capacity constraints as impeding programme implementation, including in resilience, gender equality and vulnerability analysis. The **Honduras CSPE 2022** evaluation found that WFP struggled to identify cooperating partners with the skills to engage in resilience-related work.<sup>214</sup> On the other hand, the **Cambodia Food Aid Procurement DE 2023** found that the turnover of WFP national staff made it challenging for cooperating partners to effectively engage with relevant stakeholders on resilience-related work.<sup>215</sup>
127. Six evaluations<sup>216</sup> – (11 percent) of which five concerned government cooperating partners and three related to NGO cooperating partners - reported high turnover of staff in NGOs and government cooperating partners. The staff turnover in cooperating partner institutions resulted in delays in progressing planned activities, and impeded the deepening of partnerships, since individual relationships were not able to be sustained over time. For instance, the **Bolivia CSPE 2021** found that turnover of staff in public institutions hindered the establishment of a collaborative partnership between WFP and government cooperating partners. The **Benin DE 2022** found that high turnover among NGO partner staff, caused by short-term FLAs, negatively affected the efficiency and quality of fieldwork and made it challenging to recruit and retain qualified staff.

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<sup>211</sup> Benin DE 2020, Benin DE 2022, Chad CSPE 2022, Central African Republic CSPE 2022, CPs in Eastern Africa Region DE 2021, the Democratic Republic of the Congo CSPE 2020, Guinea-Bissau DE 2021, Haiti CSPE 2023, Pakistan CSPE 2022, South Sudan CSPE 2022.

<sup>212</sup> The Democratic Republic of the Congo CSPE 2020, Myanmar CEE 2023, Guinea DE 2022, Haiti CSPE 2023.

<sup>213</sup> CPs in Eastern Africa Region DE 2021, Bolivia CSPE 2021, Burkina Faso DE 2020, Cambodia Food Aid Procurement DE 2023, Chad CSPE 2022, the Democratic Republic of the Congo CSPE 2020, Guinea-Bissau DE 2021, Myanmar CEE 2023, Honduras CSPE 2022, Pakistan CSPE 2022, Sri Lanka DE 2021, Sudan CSPE 2022, Syria DE 2020, Technology SE 2022.

<sup>214</sup> Honduras CSPE 2022.

<sup>215</sup> Cambodia Food Aid Procurement DE 2023.

<sup>216</sup> Benin DE 2022, Bolivia CSPE 2021, Chad CSPE 2022, Honduras CSPE 2022, Sudan CSPE 2022, Syria DE 2020.



## 2.4.4 Reviewing the partnership

128. Finding 19: Evidence is limited on performance assessments of NGO cooperating partners, but available evidence shows continued shortcomings and challenges.
129. WFP audits have previously highlighted cooperating partner performance management as an issue.<sup>217</sup> For NGOs, WFP country offices have access to the partner performance evaluation (PPE) tool and conduct cooperating partner performance evaluation reports to review cooperating partner performance and prepare improvement plans where needed.
130. Only three evaluations<sup>218</sup> (6 percent) reported on the use of the PPE tool.
131. Two of these highlighted the challenges in reviewing partnership effectiveness. The **Central African Republic CSPE 2023** noted that partner management is centralized at the country office level, limiting the level of monitoring at the sub-office level. The FLAs are signed in the capital and their content is not communicated to the sub-offices. As a result, the sub-offices do not have any precise benchmarks to which they can refer in order to analyse the performance of the cooperating partners. It also found weak systems for monitoring the quality of NGO cooperating partners' work, a finding supported by the **Jordan CSPE 2022** and evidence from interviews. The **CPs in Eastern Africa Region DE 2021** included recommendations to develop a framework for cooperating partner management at the country level, provide predictable funding and resources, and ensure a "whole of office" approach to cooperating partner management.<sup>219</sup>
132. On the contrary, the **CPs in Eastern Africa DE 2021** presented an example of good practice, with the PPE tool used to develop partner improvement plans based on learning from the period under contract.
133. Finding 20: Evaluations reported that some WFP capacity strengthening activities addressed partner needs well, including on cross-cutting areas. However, a strategic approach was not always evident, and the effectiveness of capacity strengthening activities for targeting partners was not consistently assessed.
134. Fourteen evaluations<sup>220</sup> (30 percent), contain evidence on contributing and hindering factors for capacity strengthening of NGOs cooperating partners. Positively, capacity strengthening had led to improved cooperating partner practice in some contexts, though such activities were not always planned or implemented in the most strategic way.
135. Six evaluations<sup>221</sup> (13 percent) reported on WFP capacity strengthening for cooperating partners. Of these, three evaluations<sup>222</sup> found that WFP provided comprehensive and effective capacity strengthening, which addressed specific capacity gaps, including cross-cutting areas such as conflict sensitivity. All three evaluations reported that this led to improved practice by cooperating partners.
136. Evaluations offer examples of WFP work to build the capacity of local NGOs, noting that tailored support and dedicated resources are required. **The Lebanon Resilience DE 2020** noted the desire of the country office to build the capacity of national and local NGOs, but crucially highlighted the resource costs of this, a point validated by interview evidence. The **Sri Lanka CSPE 2022** noted that for WFP to build the capacity of community-based organizations (CBOs), including women's organizations,

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<sup>217</sup> For example, the Internal Audit of Mali, which noted that the performance evaluation process did not capture poor CP performance (WFP. 2021. Internal Audit Mali), and Audit Syria, which noted delays in performance evaluations. WFP. 2022. Internal Audit Syria. See also WFP. 2022. Report of the External Auditor on the management of cooperating partners. WFP/EB.A/2022/6-H/1.

<sup>218</sup> Central African Republic CSPE 2022, CPs in Eastern Africa Region DE 2021, and Jordan CSPE 2022.

<sup>219</sup> CPs in Eastern Africa Region DE 2021.

<sup>220</sup> Benin DE 2022, Bolivia CSPE 2021, Chad CSPE 2022, CPs in Eastern Africa Region DE 2021, Myanmar CEE 2023, Guinea DE 2022, Honduras CSPE 2022, Jordan CSPE 2022, Peacebuilding PE 2022, South Sudan CSPE 2022, Sudan CSPE 2022, Syria DE 2020, Technology SE 2022, and The Gambia DE 2021.

<sup>221</sup> Myanmar CEE 2023, Guinea DE 2022, Peacebuilding PE 2022, South Sudan CSPE 2022, and Technology SE 2022, The Gambia DE 2021.

<sup>222</sup> Myanmar CEE 2023, The Gambia DE 2021, and South Sudan CSPE 2022.

most “require extensive mentoring and capacity-strengthening support to reach their full development potential”.

#### **Good practice: Effective capacity strengthening in Myanmar**

In Myanmar, WFP was praised for diverse range of skills and knowledge shared with cooperating partners, extending beyond the training scope to cover various cross-cutting issues. ([Myanmar CEE 2023](#))

137. Three evaluations<sup>223</sup> (6 percent) highlighted the absence of a strategic approach to cooperating partner capacity strengthening, which ultimately hindered programme implementation. Specific issues included: the lack of focus on long-term capacity strengthening;<sup>224</sup> the absence of a clear strategic framework at regional or country levels to guide the design of capacity strengthening activities; and insufficient details on planned or implemented capacity strengthening activities in key documents such as FLAs, cooperating partner evaluations and annual country reports.<sup>225</sup>

138. Two evaluations<sup>226</sup> (4 percent) highlighted that the effects of capacity strengthening activities on cooperating partner performance were not being monitored sufficiently. For example, the [CPs in Eastern Africa Region 2021](#) found that WFP contributions to capacity strengthening were not well documented. Consequently, there were insufficient data to determine whether or not the performance of cooperating partners across the region had improved. Evidence from interviews noted that many country offices lack the resources to adequately monitor the effects of capacity strengthening activities on cooperating partner performance on the ground.

#### **2.4.5 Fiduciary risk**

139. Finding 21: Evaluations highlight the tension inherent in balancing a “risk hungry” approach to serving those in need with fiduciary risk aversion and a duty of care<sup>227</sup> to cooperating partners.

140. The challenge of balancing fiduciary risk with the commitment to serve the most vulnerable is reflected in the WFP Enterprise Risk Management Policy, which characterizes WFP as “risk hungry” at an operational level, and “highly risk averse” in relation to managing fiduciary responsibilities and countering potential fraud and corruption.<sup>228</sup> The tensions this can raise are reflected in the [Myanmar CEE 2023](#), which notes that “the priority in the WFP risk appetite is to reach people. However, this contradicts fiduciary risk aversion, indicating a potential for more planning around the duty of care towards cooperating partners”. Evidence of WFP providing duty of care towards cooperating partners was identified in the [COVID-19 CEE 2022](#), which found that during the COVID-19 pandemic WFP responded flexibly to cooperating partner needs, for example, by providing personal protective equipment.

141. WFP defines fiduciary responsibility as the extent to which anti-fraud and corruption has been managed to reduce risk to WFP including internal control mechanisms to mitigate risk of fraud and corruption. Seven evaluations<sup>229</sup> (15 percent) discussed this issue explicitly in relation to cooperating partners.

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<sup>223</sup> CPs in Eastern Africa Region DE 2021, Technology SE 2022, and The Gambia DE 2021.

<sup>224</sup> The Gambia DE 2021.

<sup>225</sup> CPs in Eastern Africa Region DE 2021.

<sup>226</sup> CPs in Eastern Africa Region DE 2021 and Syria DE 2020.

<sup>227</sup> WFP recognizes its duty of care to staff and its obligations to stakeholders and partners, with whom WFP shares risks. WFP commits to proactive engagement with its partners in operational decision making. WFP commitments related to strategic and operational risks include sharing of information and proactive communication with all its strategic partners, maintaining transparency and building trust, and to conduct due diligence, monitor performance and work to build partners' capacity to comply with standards. (WFP. 2018. 2018 WFP Enterprise Risk Management Policy).

<sup>228</sup> WFP Enterprise Risk Management Policy (2018).

<sup>229</sup> Chad CSPE 2022, CPs in Eastern Africa Region DE 2021, the Democratic Republic of the Congo CSPE 2020, Myanmar CEE 2023, Haiti CSPE 2023, Malawi CSPE 2023, Peacebuilding PE 2022.

142. Four evaluations<sup>230</sup> (9 percent) report that WFP has standardized its risk management approach and has taken measures to ensure compliance and reduce fraud. These evaluations explicitly specified the use of control mechanisms to ensure that a robust process was applied to select WFP cooperating partners and that due diligence was applied. They also reported that WFP had clear mechanisms in place to monitor and address any issues of fraud during programme implementation.<sup>231</sup> For example, the [Peacebuilding PE 2022](#) noted that WFP checked cooperating partners against the UN Sanctions List and Global Marketplace Ineligible Vendor List to ensure probity in selection. The [Haiti CSPE 2023](#) confirmed alignment with requirements for codes of conduct for cooperating partners to be introduced, which contained clauses on cooperating partner responsibility to report any cases of fraud, corruption and embezzlement.

143. However, gaps in control measures were identified in three evaluations.<sup>232</sup> These all related to suspected or confirmed cases of fraud, that is, when food or cash provided by WFP did not reach intended beneficiaries. The [Chad CSPE 2023](#) noted that there were instances where the amount of cash-based transfers received and declared by beneficiaries differed from those reported by WFP and implementing partners. The [Democratic Republic of the Congo CSPE 2020](#) found that refugees had experienced retaliation when reporting fraud occurring within cooperating partners. The [Malawi CSPE 2020](#) noted that, in response to the high volume of extortion cases, the WFP programme team had developed and socialized a code of conduct in late 2021 that was signed by village chiefs, local government officials, and cooperating partners explaining that WFP would temporarily halt distributions if issues of misconduct arose.

## 2.5 SYNTHESIS QUESTION 5 - To what extent do evaluations indicate that WFP's relationships with its cooperating partners have changed over time?

144. Finding 22: Evidence shows that there has been a shift away from solely transactional relationships with cooperating partners, where cooperating partners are viewed as implementers of WFP activities, toward more collaborative relationships characterized by greater consultation and more equitable power dynamics, but there was still some progress to be made.

145. The WFP Partnership Strategy (2017-2029) maps WFP partnerships of all kinds on a continuum of transactional to collaborative, noting that, while partnerships may sit at different places on the continuum, "collaborative relationships between actors achieve better outcomes for the people we serve".<sup>233</sup> While the evaluation universe provided limited evidence on changes in the WFP relationship with cooperating partners over time, 18 evaluations<sup>234</sup> (38 percent) contained insights into the nature of these relationships.

146. **Transactional relationships:** Eight evaluations<sup>235</sup> (17 percent) provided evidence that characterized relationships with cooperating partners as transactional, where cooperating partners were considered by WFP mainly as implementers of activities, with little acknowledgement (or use) of their wider knowledge and skills. For example, the [Sudan CSPE 2022](#) found that NGO cooperating partners felt at times that they were treated by WFP primarily as delivery contractors rather than as knowledgeable partners and did not appreciate the directiveness of WFP. The evaluation found that that few consultations with cooperating partners had occurred, and that WFP did not benefit from the expertise that NGOs had at the community level. The [Pakistan CSPE 2022](#) noted that the relationship with

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<sup>230</sup> CPs in Eastern Africa Region DE 2021, Haiti CSPE 2023, Malawi CSPE 2023, Peacebuilding PE 2022.

<sup>231</sup> The WFP procedure for sanctioning CPs is guided by the WFP Framework for Vendor Sanctions (Circular No.: OED 2020/005)

<sup>232</sup> Chad CSPE 2022, the Democratic Republic of the Congo CSPE 2020, and Malawi CSPE 2023.

<sup>233</sup> WFP Corporate Partnership Strategy (2014-2017).

<sup>234</sup> Algeria CSPE 2023, Bolivia CSPE 2021, CPs in Eastern Africa Region DE 2021, COVID-19 CEE 2022, the Democratic Republic of the Congo CSPE 2020, El Salvador CSPE 2022, Myanmar CEE 2023, Honduras CSPE 2022, Jordan CSPE 2022, Malawi CSPE 2023, Nigeria CSPE 2022, Pakistan CSPE 2022, Peru CSPE 2022, Rwanda DE 2021, Sudan CSPE 2022, Syria DE 2020, Zimbabwe DE 2022, Zimbabwe CSPE 2022.

<sup>235</sup> Algeria CSPE 2023, Bolivia CSPE 2021, CPs in Eastern Africa Region DE 2021, the Democratic Republic of the Congo CSPE 2020, Myanmar CEE 2023, Jordan CSPE 2022, Pakistan CSPE 2022, Sudan CSPE 2022.

cooperating partners largely served as implementing service providers rather than as experienced partners that could share lessons.

147. Three evaluations<sup>236</sup> (6 percent) reported a lack of strategic planning for cooperating partner partnerships. **Bolivia CSPE 2021** and **Sudan CSPE 2022** both found missed opportunities to extend and deepen partnerships with cooperating partners within an overall framework of cooperation. In the **Democratic Republic of the Congo CSPE 2020**, challenges arising from conflict and political instability constrained the ability of WFP to develop a strategic partnership with cooperating partners.
148. **Collaborative relationships:** Thirteen evaluations<sup>237</sup> (28 percent) characterized WFP relationships with its cooperating partners as transparent, equitable and mutually beneficial, with shared responsibilities. For example, the **COVID-19 CEE 2022** and the **Peru CSPE 2022** noted a shift in power dynamics as a marker of a more collaborative relationship between WFP and NGO cooperating partners. The **El Salvador CSPE 2022** noted that the relationship between cooperating partners and WFP had moved toward one that included more respect for the voice of the cooperating partner.
149. Three evaluations<sup>238</sup> (6 percent) found examples of WFP engaging cooperating partners in planning processes, often where there were long-term relationships with cooperating partners. For example, the **Zimbabwe DE 2022** found that WFP shared information with partners, and increasingly involved them in design phases of projects as valued and knowledgeable partners. The degree of collaboration was, however, inconsistent; the **Myanmar CEE 2023** found that cooperating partner relationships with sub-offices were collaborative in nature, but with more limited engagement at the country office level, where cooperating partners were less likely to be consulted in planning and coordination. The **Cambodia DE McGovern Dole Endline Evaluation 2023** pointed out that engaging cooperating partners collaboratively in planning and delivery processes enabled local authorities and communities to assume greater responsibilities, ultimately supporting the transition of the WFP programme to national ownership.
150. **Supporting localization:** WFP is in the process of developing a localization policy and has not yet established an official definition of localization. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) offers guidance for the participation, representation and leadership of local and national humanitarian actors to ensure that local communities, systems and processes have the support they need to address the challenges that affect them.<sup>239</sup> The collaborative relationships described above provide evidence of participation (for example, in planning and design); and representation (for example, in the **Cambodia DE 2023**). However, the evaluations synthesized here did not provide evidence of cooperating partner leadership.
151. Evaluations highlight the added value of local cooperating partners' knowledge, access and relationships with local communities. The **Côte d'Ivoire DE 2022** and the **El Salvador CSPE 2022** provide examples of local NGOs, with expertise of working with women on livelihoods and resilience activities, supporting direct engagement with women's production groups at the community level.

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<sup>236</sup> Bolivia CSPE 2021, the Democratic Republic of the Congo CSPE 2020, Sudan CSPE 2022.

<sup>237</sup> Algeria CSPE 2023, COVID-19 CEE 2022, El Salvador CSPE 2022, Myanmar CEE 2023, Honduras CSPE 2022, Jordan CSPE 2022, Malawi CSPE 2023, Nigeria CSPE 2022, Peru CSPE 2022, Rwanda DE 2021, Syria DE 2020, Zimbabwe DE 2022, Zimbabwe CSPE 2022.

<sup>238</sup> Rwanda DE 2021, Syria DE 2020, 2022, Zimbabwe CSPE 2022.

<sup>239</sup> IASC. 2021. Guidance on Strengthening Participation, Representation and Leadership of Local and National Actors in IASC Humanitarian Coordination Mechanisms.

# 3. Conclusions and recommendations

## 3.1 CONCLUSIONS

153. Overall, the evidence synthesized here reflects the instrumental nature of relationships, learning, and coordination with cooperating partners for enabling WFP to realize its food security and nutrition aims. While WFP has robust processes and procedures in place to engage with cooperating partners, the “softer” aspects of relationships have not always been optimal, and cooperating partner skills, capacities and expertise not always leveraged to maximum effect. The synthesis found opportunities to optimize the added value of cooperating partners and to enhance the efficiency of the WFP approach to management of cooperating partners.
154. **Conclusion 1: Cooperating partners play a major role in supporting WFP to deliver its assistance.** Evaluations document the centrality of the cooperating partner role in programme implementation. In particular, they contribute to: the life-saving assistance of WFP under SO1; its nutrition, health and education programming under SO2; and, though less prominently reflected in evaluations, its livelihoods and resilience programming under SO3. Contributions under SO4 were less visible, since much of WFP capacity strengthening activity is directly delivered by the organization. However, where government cooperating partners were involved, this helped strengthen the national enabling environment for food security and nutrition.
155. **Conclusion 2: Cooperating partners play a significant role in helping WFP realize its current strategic outcomes.** Within this set of evaluations, cooperating partner contributions were most prominently noted in school-based programme activities, community and household asset creation, and in unconditional resource transfer activities, including WFP beneficiaries receiving distributions of assistance in the form of in-kind food, cash or vouchers. Cooperating partners helped WFP mobilize food and scale up cash-based transfers to reach some of the most vulnerable and to build and rehabilitate community assets and they made notable contributions to the implementation of school feeding and nutrition programmes. However, cooperating partners also faced challenges in implementing WFP activities, such as a lack of clarity in targeting criteria, delayed disbursement of funds by WFP, high staff turnover within cooperating partners, and FLA-related issues including delays in signing contracts and short-term contracting.
156. **Conclusion 3: There is scope for more systematic attention to cross-cutting issues.** NGO cooperating partners play a visible role in gender equality and accountability to affected populations activities, though the evidence finds inconsistent attention to, and capacity for, gender equality considerations. Not all cooperating partners had adequate capacity on accountability to affected populations, and evaluations also show that attention to disability inclusion has significant room to improve. Attention to PSEA was not found to be consistent in the evaluations, but it should be noted that recent efforts at the country office level regarding PSEA were not considered due to the temporal scope of evaluations in the synthesis.
157. **Conclusion 4: Cooperating partners brought valuable capacities and assets to support WFP programme implementation– but evaluations also found capacity gaps.** Capacities and strengths brought by cooperating partners included: strong local knowledge and expertise; strong technical capacity in relevant areas; and the ability to deliver efficiently at the community level. However, gaps included: a lack of familiarity with WFP targeting criteria; and specific technical capacity gaps, compounded by sometimes high staff turnover. Evaluations reported examples where WFP was not fully harnessing the potential skills, expertise and experience that cooperating partners possess, particularly regarding NGO cooperating partners.
158. **Conclusion 5: The efficiency of cooperating partner management for NGOs can improve, and processes for managing government cooperating partners be developed.** Evaluations clearly highlighted gaps in WFP administration and management of cooperating partners, including late signing of contracts and delayed payments. The tangible effects of these gaps on affected populations on the ground were clearly recorded, including late receipt of assistance, sometimes for considerable periods. FLA agreements do not always include scope to adjust in response to changing realities on the ground. In some locations, high concentrations of cooperating partners contracted by WFP led to high

overhead and transaction costs. Evaluations also highlight the tension inherent in balancing a “risk hungry” approach for strategic risks, to serving those in need with fiduciary risk aversion and ensuring a duty of care to cooperating partners, with some gaps in control measures identified at the time evaluations were conducted.

159. **Conclusion 6: WFP is taking steps toward more collaborative relationships with cooperating partners, though the transition is not yet complete.** Although some relationships with cooperating partners remain transactional, evidence shows that there has been a shift towards more collaborative relationships, characterized by greater consultation and somewhat more equitable power dynamics. WFP has not yet framed its cooperation with partners within a localization framework, though guidance under development promises to enhance momentum here. Evaluations signal the need to adopt more strategic frameworks and approaches to working with government partners, and to adopt a medium-term approach to cooperating partner relationships.

160. **Conclusion 7: Key aspects of WFP management and its engagement with cooperating partners supported achievement of results.** These included longer-term contracts, where available, which supported medium-term strategizing and planning. Practices, such as the use of flexible FLAs that enable real-time changes to contract payments and modalities, also helped build medium- and longer-term relationships with cooperating partners; as did the adoption of an ethos of trust and flexibility by WFP, which was highly valued by cooperating partners. Close working with cooperating partners on required codes of conduct and ensuring whistleblower reporting channels for fraud without fear of reprisals help clarify expectations and build trust.

### 3.2. RECOMMENDATIONS

161. The following recommendations are based on the synthesis findings and conclusions and are framed in recognition of the importance and added value of working with cooperating partners rather than in terms of compliance.

162. The recommendations take into account the following context:

- recent and ongoing organizational restructuring at the headquarters level, particularly concerning responsibilities for NGOs and government entities as a cooperating partner, and potential organizational changes at regional bureau and country office levels; and
- the current operating environment, characterized by reduced resources and a growing global need for assistance.

#	Recommendation	Responsibility (one lead office/entity)	Other contributing entities (if applicable)	Priority: High/ medium	By when
<b>1</b>	<b>PRIORITIZE SUSTAINABLE PARTNERSHIPS: Aim for long-term, sustainable partnerships, grounded in appreciation of CPs and an ethos of shared interests, mutual respect and trust.</b>	Operational Partners Unit			
1.1	To promote partnerships with cooperating partners that are sustainable beyond the funding cycle, where relevant (e.g. based upon fund availability), encourage the use of multi-year field-level agreements (within the approved duration of the relevant CSP, interim CSP or limited emergency operation) and the application of guidance on developing strategic and risk-informed approaches to engaging with CPs.	Operational Partners Unit	Programme Policy and Guidance Division; regional bureaux CP management advisers; country office programme officers and CP managers	Medium	November 2025
1.2	Where government CPs play a key role in CSP implementation, develop clear operational guidance for partnerships supporting CSPs, based on an ethos of shared interests. This should consider the wide range of operating contexts within which governments act as a CP or WFP transfers resources through government systems.  Contract templates for engagement with government CPs should be developed and regularly reviewed.	Programme Policy and Guidance Division	Legal Office; regional bureaux CP management advisers; country office programme officers and CP managers	Medium	November 2025
<b>2</b>	<b>ADOPT STRATEGIC AND TAILORED APPROACHES TO CAPACITY STRENGTHENING: Build upon strengths in areas of joint priority for WFP and partners, applying a localization lens.</b>	Operational Partners Unit			
2.1	Enhance existing CP management guidance to support country offices in conducting, in a spirit of partnership, analysis and mapping of partners' capacities from a localization perspective, to better identify the assets and comparative advantages that CPs bring to partnerships.	Operational Partners Unit	Programme Policy and Guidance Division; regional bureaux CP management advisers; country office programme officers and CP managers	Medium	January 2026

#	Recommendation	Responsibility (one lead office/entity)	Other contributing entities (if applicable)	Priority: High/medium	By when
2.2	Enhance the clarity and quality of communication to CPs on key aspects of the WFP approach to programme delivery by developing and monitoring the implementation of an induction programme for CPs to familiarize them with WFP programmatic approaches (e.g. targeting criteria, priority groups) and cross-cutting concerns.	Operational Partners Unit	Programme Policy and Guidance Division; Analysis, Planning and Performance Division; country office programme officers and CP managers	Medium	June 2026
2.3	Following approval of the localization policy, develop tools for assessing, developing and/or enhancing CP leadership in relevant areas, in line with Grand Bargain and Inter-Agency Standing Committee commitments on leadership by local partners.	Gender, Protection and Inclusion Service	Operational Partners Unit	Medium	June 2026
<b>3</b>	<b>INCORPORATE PLAN FOR ENGAGEMENT THROUGHOUT CSP: Facilitate CP engagement at all stages of the CSP programme cycle design, implementation through to performance assessment.</b>	Programme Cycle and Quality Unit			
3.1	To formulate programmes that better respond to local context and community needs at the country strategic plan design stage, country offices should be supported in conducting comprehensive mapping and analysis of government and NGO cooperating partnerships and engaging cooperating partners in the programme design process, including engaging in needs analysis and the development of a country strategic plan theory of change and intended aims.	Programme Cycle and Quality Unit	Operational Partners Unit; Gender, Protection and Inclusion Service; Analysis, Planning and Performance Division; regional bureaux CP management advisers; country office programme officers and CP managers	Medium	November 2025
3.2	Embed mechanisms for consultation, joint planning and feedback from government and NGO CPs on programme quality throughout CSP implementation.	Programme Cycle and Quality Unit	Operational Partners Unit; Programme Policy and Guidance Division; Analysis, Planning and Performance Division; country office programme officers and CP managers	Medium	November 2025



#	Recommendation	Responsibility (one lead office/entity)	Other contributing entities (if applicable)	Priority: High/medium	By when
<b>4</b>	<b>STRENGTHEN ALIGNMENT WITH CROSS-CUTTING PRIORITIES: To ensure CP alignment with cross-cutting priorities and reduce risk, match clear contractual requirements with capacity-strengthening opportunities.</b>	Operational Partners Unit			
4.1	Following the design of WFP's next strategic plan (which will cover 2026–2030), conduct regular reviews of the field-level agreement template to ensure that CP contracting is aligned with any new corporate priorities and policies (including cyber security and, following its approval, the policy on localization).	Operational Partners Unit	Delivery Assurance Service; Legal Office; Risk Management Division; Technology Division	High	November 2026
4.2	Provide clear guidance and capacity support – in collaboration with (or upon request from) regional bureau and country office counterparts where specialist resources are available – to NGO and government CPs on current WFP commitments on gender equality and inclusion, including with regard to the adoption of gender-transformative approaches in their organizations and programme work.	Gender, Protection and Inclusion Service	Operational Partnerships Unit, Ethics Office; regional bureaux CP management advisers; country office CP managers; PSEA focal points in country offices	High	November 2025
4.3	Noting that disability inclusion is now a contractual obligation within the field-level agreement template, provide capacity strengthening for CPs, country offices and regional bureaux to enable them to adopt and support a disability-inclusive approach to WFP programming in accordance with WFP standards. Compliance should be monitored by country offices, with support from regional bureaux and headquarters as required, to ensure adherence to these standards.	Gender, Protection and Inclusion Service	Operational Partners Unit; Ethics Office; regional bureaux CP management advisers; country office CP managers	High	June 2025
4.4	In accordance with the strategic evaluation on PSEA (2024), conduct an assessment and prioritization of the risks facing and the capacity needs of CPs in respect of meeting PSEA commitments, including specific analysis of government CP capacity needs.	Ethics Office	Operational Partners Unit; regional bureaux CP management advisers; country Office CP managers	High	November 2025

#	Recommendation	Responsibility (one lead office/entity)	Other contributing entities (if applicable)	Priority: High/ medium	By when
<b>5</b>	<b>IMPROVE CP MANAGEMENT: Enhance the efficiency of, and learning from, CP management and administration.</b>	Operational Partners Unit			
5.1	Clarify, share and promote existing guidance on the scope for flexibility to adjust contracting and payment processes in response to changes in the operating environment, and train staff responsible for CP management on implementing the revised guidance.	Operational Partners Unit	Delivery Assurance Service; Legal Office; Financial Operations and Insurance Service; regional bureaux CP management advisers; country office CP managers	High	June 2025
5.2	Establish targets and performance indicators for the timeliness of signing contracts with – and the processing and delivery of payments to – CPs. These should be integrated into a shared responsibility framework and take into account the ongoing implementation of Partner Connect.	Operational Partners Unit	Delivery Assurance Service; Financial Operations and Insurance Service; Analysis, Planning and Performance Division	High	December 2025
5.3	Complementing the tools available, establish a space for exchanging knowledge and good practices on NGO CP management across WFP.	Operational Partners Unit	Delivery Assurance Service; Research and Knowledge Management Service; regional bureaux CP management advisers; country office CP managers	High	June 2025

**Office of Evaluation**

**World Food Programme**

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