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Summary report on the evaluation of the country strategic plan for Ethiopia (2020–2025)

Executive summary

The evaluation of the Ethiopia country strategic plan for 2020–2025 was conducted between September 2023 and September 2024 for the purposes of accountability and learning, with a view to informing the design of the next country strategic plan.

The evaluation determined that the areas of intervention of the country strategic plan – which sought to address chronic food insecurity and malnutrition – were highly relevant and mostly based on solid evidence. The strategic direction of the plan was aligned with the Government's vision, aiming to reduce the need for humanitarian assistance by strengthening sustainable food systems through programming for resilience and livelihoods. However, in the face of multiple shocks and the outbreak of conflict in Tigray, which soon spread beyond that region, WFP had to shift to crisis response mode, for which the plan provided limited guidance.

The extent to which WFP was able to realize the strategic direction of the plan was limited due to overoptimistic assumptions underpinning the plan and a lack of integration of relief and resilience activities. Funding for “changing lives” activities fell below WFP's expectations, in part due to diverging views of WFP's comparative advantage held by the organization and donor partners, and WFP's limited ability to demonstrate progress in resilience.

In response to the needs arising from the conflict in northern Ethiopia, WFP expanded operations significantly, providing an unprecedented level of assistance to crisis-affected people, including refugees, which helped them to meet their basic food and nutrition needs. Reliance on government systems for delivering relief assistance, however, put WFP at risk of compromising

In line with WFP evaluation policy (2022) (WFP/EB.1/2022/4-C), to respect the integrity and independence of evaluation findings the editing of this report has been limited and as a result some of the language in it may not be fully consistent with the World Food Programme's standard terminology or editorial practices. Please direct any requests for clarification to the Director of Evaluation.

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the humanitarian principles of humanity, operational independence and neutrality. The implementation arrangements challenged WFP's ability to ensure that assistance reached those most in need without discrimination. In a situation of conflict-driven humanitarian crisis, WFP's limited controls further risked WFP being perceived as siding with a party to the conflict. Following the discovery of food aid diversion, the suspension of assistance between June and October 2023 had a notable negative impact on the food security of vulnerable populations and conflicted with the principle of humanity.

While the country office has made progress on integrating cross-cutting programme objectives, in particular as part of work on strengthening accountability through WFP's assurance project, further efforts are needed to implement guidance and improve WFP and partner capacity at the field level.

WFP underestimated prevailing risks, and its mitigation measures were insufficient. The assurance project, which was put in place to address these shortcomings, is seen as broadly satisfactory by partners, but concerns remain. The intended move under the country strategic plan from in-kind food aid to cash-based assistance, which could also mitigate some of the risks associated with in-kind assistance, has not yet been achieved.

Clarity of strategic direction and staff morale were negatively affected by high turnover of country directors. Country office staff have continuously worked under a great deal of stress since the response to the situation in northern Ethiopia, in the aftermath of the aid diversion scandal and due to recent budget cuts that undermine staff wellness.

The evaluation made six recommendations, which encourage WFP to better reflect uncertainty in its plans to ensure the relevance of strategic direction over time; to continue to pursue the shifts in strategy and modality envisioned under the country strategic plan, including from a "saving lives" to a "changing lives" agenda; to take steps to ensure an environment conducive to a principled approach to addressing humanitarian need; to improve its ability to demonstrate results; to accelerate the shift to cash-based assistance; and to promote stability at the senior management level.

Draft decision*

The Board takes note of the summary report on the evaluation of the country strategic plan for Ethiopia (2020–2025) (WFP/EB.A/2025/7-H/1) and the management response (WFP/EB.A/2025/7-H/1/Add.1) and encourages further action on the recommendations set out in the report, taking into account the considerations raised by the Board during its discussion.

* This is a draft decision. For the final decision adopted by the Board, please refer to the decisions and recommendations document issued at the end of the session.

Introduction

Evaluation features

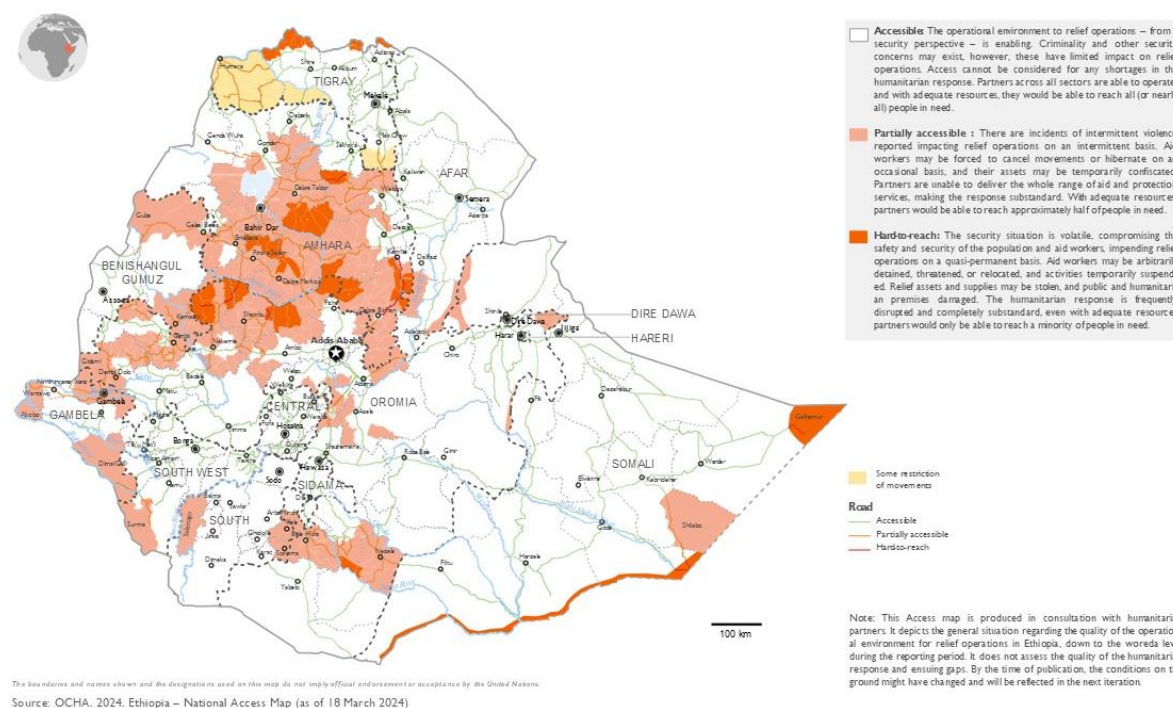
1. The evaluation of the country strategic plan (CSP) for Ethiopia for 2020–2025 was commissioned by the WFP Office of Evaluation. It serves accountability and learning purposes and has informed the design of the next CSP for Ethiopia.
2. The evaluation covered the activities implemented by WFP under the interim CSP (ICSP) for Ethiopia from 2019 to June 2020 and under the CSP from 2020 to March 2024. It was conducted between September 2023 and September 2024 by an external independent team using a theory-based, mixed-methods approach.
3. The main intended users of the evaluation are the WFP country office in Ethiopia, the Regional Bureau for Eastern Africa, technical divisions at headquarters in Rome, the Executive Board, the Federal Government of Ethiopia, partner United Nations entities and donors. Other potential users include civil society and non-governmental organizations in Ethiopia and WFP's beneficiaries.

Context

4. Despite some development gains, Ethiopia remains one of the poorest countries in the world, with 68.7 percent of its population experiencing multidimensional poverty. In 2022, Ethiopia ranked 176th of 193 countries on the Human Development Index, with a score of 0.492, while its score of 0.494 on the Gender Inequality Index made it 125th of 166 countries.¹
5. Recent shocks, including the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, two years of armed conflict between the Government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (November 2020–November 2022), conflict in Amhara since 2023 and ongoing at the time of the evaluation, climate shocks including floods and severe drought in the south and east, desert locust infestations, food price inflation driven by the conflict in Ukraine and economic downturn have threatened development gains (see figure 3 for an overview of external events in relation to WFP's operations).
6. Insecurity and violence related to ethnic and inter-regional tensions and subsequent access challenges are persistent impediments to humanitarian efforts in Ethiopia, hampering the delivery of assistance and affecting the performance of humanitarian organizations (see figure 1). Access restrictions were particularly severe during the conflict in Tigray, when telecommunications, banking and basic services were interrupted for significant periods, the safety and security of humanitarian responders was jeopardized and the movement of humanitarian personnel and cargo was heavily controlled.²

¹ United Nations Development Programme. 2024. [Human Development Report 2023/2024. Breaking the gridlock: Reimagining cooperation in a polarized world.](#)

² ACAPS. 2022. [Ethiopia – Northern Ethiopia: two years into the crisis. Thematic report.](#)

Figure 1: Humanitarian access in Ethiopia as of March 2024

Source: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. 2024. [Ethiopia – National Access Map](#) (as of 18 March 2024).

7. In March 2023, WFP and the United States Agency for International Development uncovered evidence of food aid diversion. General food assistance was suspended in June 2023 until measures to ensure effective distribution were enhanced and investigations undertaken.³ WFP initiated an assurance project to address the factors that had allowed assistance to be diverted. Measures included changes in targeting, monitoring and oversight mechanisms and a significant reduction in the role of the Government in targeting and implementation. In October 2023 WFP concluded that the new assurance measures were functioning adequately and that conditions were such as to permit the resumption of food assistance.

Country strategic plans

8. The ICSP and CSP for Ethiopia had similar structures, but the CSP included some changes in strategic outcomes and activities as well as the addition of new activities under strategic outcome 5 (see figure 2).

³ The extent of the diversion has not been confirmed.

Figure 2: Overview of Ethiopia CSP July 2020–June 2025

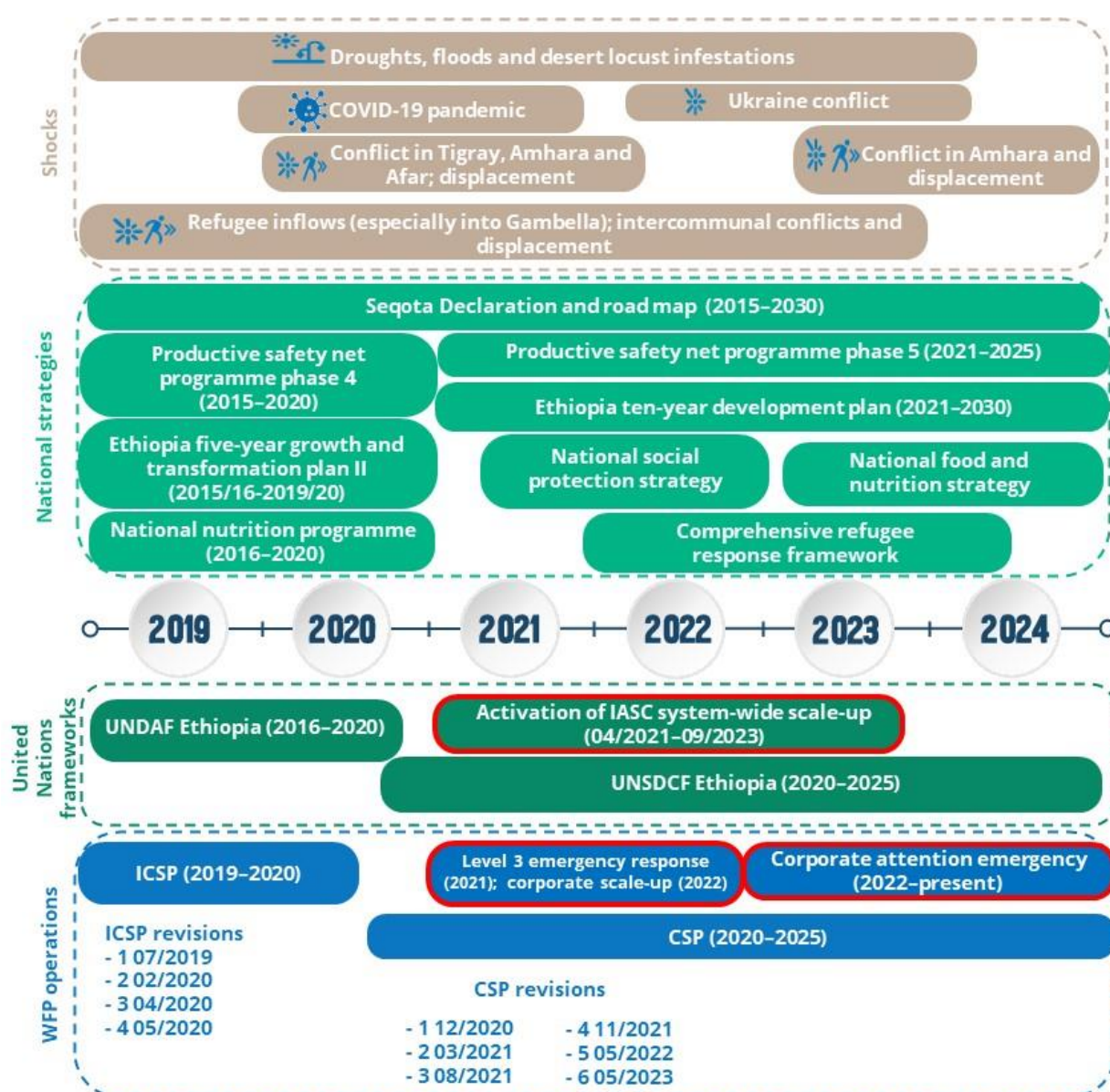
Source: Ethiopia country strategic plan line of sight.

Abbreviation: ICT = information and communications technology; PSNP = Productive Safety Net Programme; SBCC = social and behaviour change communication; and SO = strategic outcome.

9. Large-scale conflict broke out in Tigray in November 2020, resulting in rapidly rising need for emergency assistance. WFP activated a Level 3 corporate emergency response on 25 March 2021 for the region.⁴ The response was later expanded to northern Ethiopia and then to the entire country as the conflict spread and food insecurity in other parts of the country increased due to drought. In March 2022 the corporate emergency was re-classified as a “corporate attention” emergency, which was still ongoing in December 2024 (see figure 3).

⁴ With the update to WFP’s emergency activation protocol in early 2022 it was reclassified as a corporate scale-up emergency.

Figure 3: Country context and WFP operational overview, 2019–2024

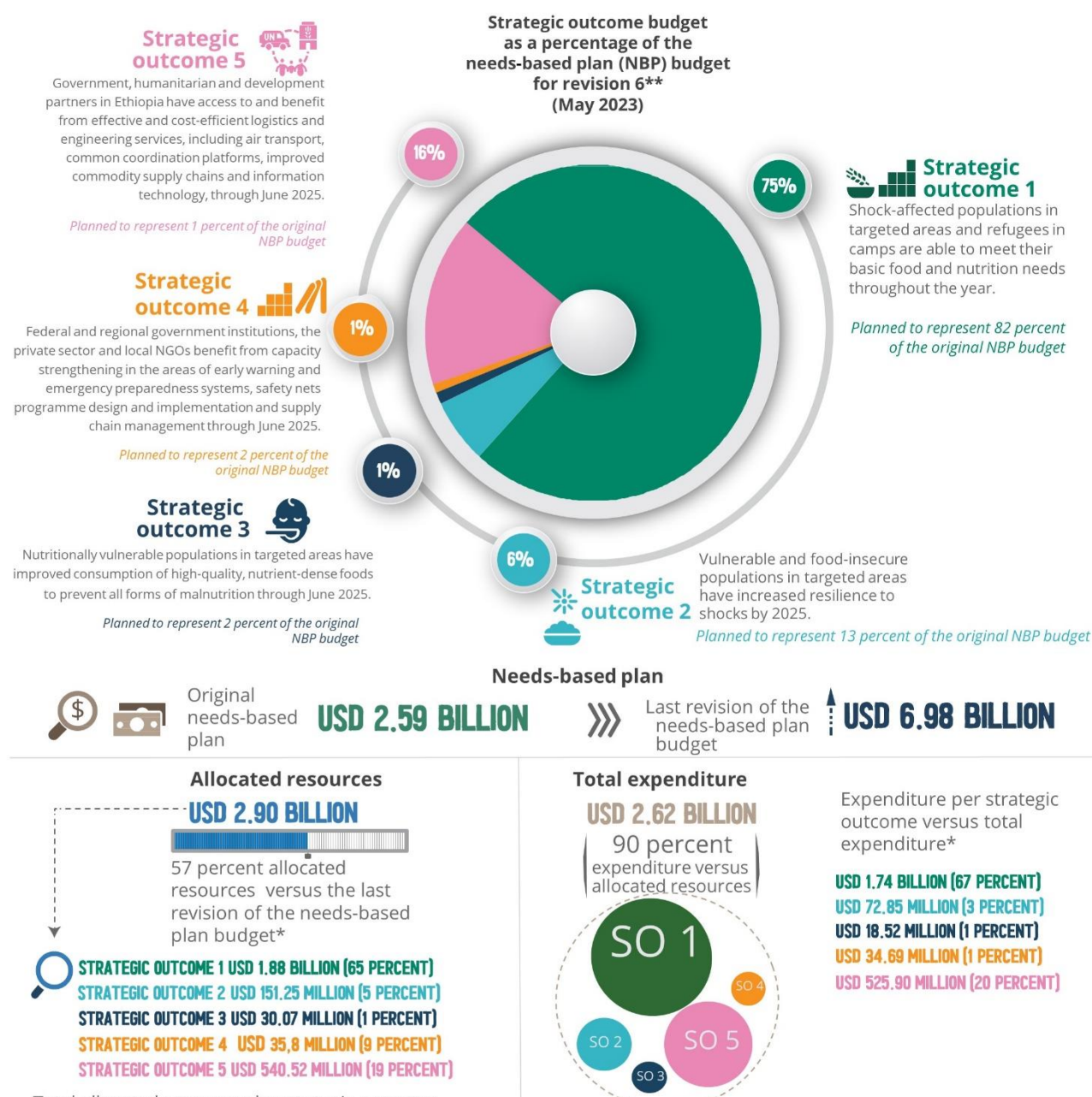


Source: Office of Evaluation.

Abbreviations: IASC = Inter-Agency Standing Committee; UNDAF = United Nations development assistance framework; UNSDCF = United Nations sustainable development cooperation framework.

10. The original needs-based plan for the ICSP had a budget of USD 871.3 million, which was revised upwards four times, reaching USD 992.3 million. Allocated resources amounted to 57 percent of the adjusted needs-based plan and were nearly fully spent. The original needs-based plan for the CSP had a budget of USD 2.59 billion, which by May 2023 had been revised upwards to USD 6.98 billion. By December 2023, cumulative allocated resources amounted to 57 percent of the budget for 2020–2023 (USD 5.05 billion), while expenditures reached 90 percent of allocated resources (figure 4).
11. The United States of America was by far the largest donor to both the ICSP and the CSP, accounting for 30 percent of funds, although it should be noted that the donor base for the CSP was considerably broader than that for the ICSP.

**Figure 4: Ethiopia country strategic plan (2020–2025)
strategic outcomes, budget and expenditures**



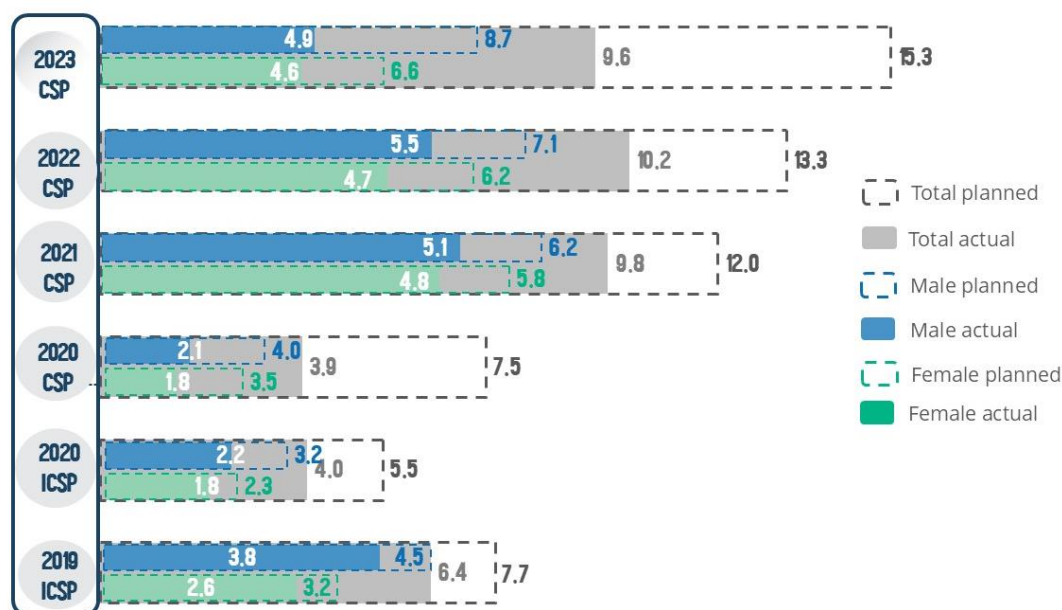
Total allocated resources by strategic outcome

* Percentages of allocated resources and expenditures by strategic outcome do not add up to 100 percent because resources were also allocated to and spent on non-strategic outcome purposes. The percentages of allocated resources reflect the reported CSP annual needs-based plan figure of USD 5.05 billion up to 31 December 2023 and therefore not the full needs-based plan figure of USD 6.98 billion reflected in the sixth CSP revision.

** The CSP NBP budget underwent a seventh revision in April 2024; that revision is not included in this analysis as it is beyond the scope of this evaluation.

Sources: Revision 6 of the Ethiopia country strategic plan (2020–2025) and country portfolio budget resources overview.

Figure 5: Actual versus planned direct beneficiaries by sex, 2019–2023 (figures in millions)



Source: WFP Ethiopia 2019–2023 annual country reports.

Summary of key findings and conclusions

12. The following section presents a summary of key evaluation findings and conclusions.

Relevance

The areas of action supported by WFP – continued relief for conflict-affected people, nutrition, school meals, and resilience and livelihoods – were highly relevant and solidly grounded in evidence of needs. There were exceptions to this, however: estimates of populations in need of crisis response assistance were contested, especially during the northern Ethiopia crisis, and there was limited consideration of government capacity gaps in the design of capacity strengthening activities.

13. The ICSP and CSP were based on evidence relating to food security, school meals, nutrition and agriculture, and high-level geographical targeting of support was in line with assessed food insecurity levels. Despite some progress, chronic food insecurity and malnutrition persisted, especially in rural areas. Accordingly, the ICSP and CSP focused on some of the most vulnerable population groups in the country, such as women and children, internally displaced persons and refugees.
14. The quality of the data used to estimate humanitarian need was limited due to access constraints, outdated harvest estimates and population figures, and high and fluctuating rates of internal displacement; this led to estimates being contested among stakeholders.
15. Apart from support for the national productive safety net programme, capacity-strengthening activities were carried out on demand rather than based on a comprehensive capacity assessment.

Adaptability and preparedness

While a shift in geographical focus from southern to northern Ethiopia and the scale-up of the emergency response demonstrated WFP's flexibility in responding to changing needs, emergency preparedness was insufficient and the CSP provided limited strategic guidance for the shift.

16. The initial concentration of relief assistance in the Somali region, which is prone to periods of acute drought, and eastern Oromia, which hosts a large number of internally displaced

persons, was appropriate, and the expansion of the emergency response in the north while operations were maintained in the south, notably in Somali, demonstrated flexibility.

17. Although WFP was largely prepared to respond to consecutive and compounding humanitarian crises when they occurred, the relevance of the CSP, with its strategic focus on shifting from humanitarian to development work, diminished when conflict broke out and WFP needed to engage in a large-scale humanitarian response, for which the CSP provided limited guidance.
18. In the period between the outbreak of fighting in early November 2020 and the request by the Government for WFP to respond in March 2021, the country office was not as proactive as it should have been in anticipating the need for crisis response, and efforts to prepare for an eventual scale-up ahead of the corporate emergency activation were insufficient.

Strategic direction

The ambition of the CSP and ICSP to reduce the need for humanitarian assistance by strengthening sustainable food systems through programming for resilience and livelihoods was a strategically sound response to future anticipated needs and was aligned with the Government's vision of robust development for Ethiopia. However, the expected shift in focus was impeded by gaps in country office technical capacity and operational planning, overoptimistic assumptions underpinning the CSP, especially in relation to political and macroeconomic stability, and the limited integration of relief and resilience activities. Diverging views between WFP and donor partners regarding the organization's comparative advantages resulted in funding not being fully aligned with the "dual track" humanitarian and development approach.

19. WFP aimed to simultaneously support the Government's ambitious development goals and respond to acute and chronic humanitarian needs and vulnerability to shocks. Its strategy intended to link short-term humanitarian assistance ("saving lives") with sustainable long-term interventions focusing on social protection, home-grown school feeding, diversification of livelihoods and food production at the household and community levels ("changing lives").
20. The strategy was appropriate at the time, given Ethiopia's record of strong economic growth and promising development progress. However, key assumptions underpinning the CSP on matters such as sociopolitical and economic stability, the financial capacity of the Government to sustain a large-scale social protection system and the adequacy of targeting and monitoring systems were too optimistic.
21. Interventions focusing on livelihoods diversification, food systems, climate change and financial inclusion were an essential step towards shifting WFP's focus from humanitarian operations to resilience. While those activities had positive effects at the local level, WFP was not able to fulfil its ambition to expand the geographical coverage of resilience activities, support a scale-up and transfer over 1 million relief beneficiaries to resilience support, despite increased funding and well-defined strategic goals.
22. Challenges included gaps in technical capacity among WFP and cooperating partner staff, the short duration of partnership agreements and insufficient strategic engagement with cooperating partners. Links between the targeting of people for relief operations and the targeting of resilience initiatives were insufficient to ensure a systematic transition from relief to self-reliance support.
23. Perceptions of WFP's comparative advantage vary between the organization and its donor partners. WFP presents itself in the ICSP as "straddling both humanitarian and development spheres", while partners continue to view its strength as firmly rooted in humanitarian assistance and crisis response. WFP's limited ability to demonstrate development results has led it to fall short of expected funding levels and has slowed progress towards its goal of

strengthening its development focus. As a result, WFP has so far not been able to position itself as a partner of choice for recovery, risk reduction and resilience interventions.

Humanitarian principles

In Ethiopia WFP has been confronted with stark ethical dilemmas. Its long-standing operational partnership with the Government and reliance on government systems for delivering relief assistance was well aligned with its objective of strengthening national emergency preparedness and response capacity but put WFP at risk of compromising the humanitarian principles. It exposed WFP to limitations in government capacity, particularly at the local level, and challenged its ability to ensure that assistance reached those most in need without discrimination.

24. The close operational partnership and implementation arrangements for relief assistance with the targeting of beneficiaries, registration and distribution managed by the Government entailed low implementation costs and strong operational coordination. However, it risked compromising operational independence and provided WFP with limited assurances that food reached the most vulnerable without discrimination, despite efforts to strengthen government capacity. This put the organization's adherence to the principle of impartiality at risk.
25. Given that the federal Government was one of the parties to the conflict in Tigray, WFP's close relationship with it and a perceived lack of effort by WFP and other humanitarian actors to advocate the lifting of access restrictions in the north led to the risk of WFP being seen as siding with the federal Government, potentially compromising its perceived neutrality.
26. Upon the discovery of food aid diversion, WFP faced pressure to suspend all relief assistance and stop distributions while investigations were under way and oversight mechanisms were being reviewed; this conflicted with the principle of humanity. Doubts remain about whether WFP made sufficient efforts to find ways to continue distributing assistance, although it is acknowledged that this would not have been an easy task given WFP's reliance on a few big donors for relief assistance, heavy earmarking of contributions and concerns about the use of flexible funding.

Effectiveness and coverage

Although the quality of available data is limited, WFP provided an unprecedented level of assistance to crisis-affected people, including refugees, helping them to meet basic food and nutrition needs. To achieve this, WFP managed a massive expansion of operations in the northern region of the country under its corporate scale-up response and provided key services to the humanitarian community and the Government. In the face of insufficient resources for general food assistance, WFP tended to favour reaching more people in need over providing full rations, which reduced food and nutrition security gains at a time when the coverage of nutrition assistance was reduced. The suspension of relief assistance between June and October 2023 had notable negative impacts on food security. School meals and nutrition interventions have contributed to both crisis response and resilience, while implementation of resilience initiatives has fallen behind ambitions and results have not been well captured.

27. The number of people in need of humanitarian assistance in Ethiopia increased dramatically in 2021. In response WFP expanded its assistance to crisis-affected populations **under strategic outcome 1** to reach 6.3 million people, adding Tigray as well as Amhara and Afar to the regions it focused on, while reducing assistance in Oromia in the face of resource constraints. Simultaneously WFP continued to deliver assistance in large quantities in other regions, in particular in Somali.
28. Shock-affected people, including refugees, reported that food assistance had helped them to meet their basic food and nutrition needs. However, the ration cuts introduced to sustain coverage levels in the face of funding shortfalls frequently led beneficiaries to adopt negative coping strategies such as taking children out of school to send them to work or supplement

- household production; incurring high levels of debt; and begging. Reduced rations, interruptions in assistance and delays in its delivery, in particular as a result of the conflict in Tigray and severe constraints on humanitarian access, are a likely cause of the persistent underachievement of food consumption score targets.
29. Food price inflation, the conflict in the north and indicators of worsening nutrition triggered by the prolonged severe drought in southern and southeastern Ethiopia led to a three-fold increase in planned beneficiary numbers between 2019 and 2023. While funding available for crisis response nutrition assistance more than doubled between 2019 and 2022 and allowed WFP to reach 3.3 million women and children, it was not sufficient to enable WFP to fully meet the increased need. Nutrition needs continued to increase in 2023, but a decline in funding forced WFP to reduce the number of beneficiaries assisted and withdraw from certain *woredas* (administrative districts), decreasing the coverage of people in need of malnutrition treatment by 35 percent and discontinuing malnutrition prevention activities. Prevention and treatment of moderate acute malnutrition in refugee camps was overall effective, with good coverage and effective treatment.
 30. Under **strategic outcome 2**, school meals programmes played an important role as safety nets in conflict-affected and food-insecure areas but were affected by funding shortages and school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The five-month suspension of relief and school feeding assistance was found to have intensified the risk of malnutrition, reduced enrolment and increased school dropout rates.
 31. Since 2019 WFP has not managed to reach the planned number of people with resilience-building interventions and its implementation of resilience activities has not returned to pre-pandemic levels. Reasons for this include the scaling-down of activities due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the shift of attention towards the conflict in northern Ethiopia. These events disrupted implementation processes such as preparation, contracting and procurement and delayed the onboarding of cooperating partners. While people who received assistance reported predominantly positive effects, inadequate and inconsistently measured outcome indicators and unclear target setting meant that the results of resilience interventions were not well captured. An exception is the R4 Rural Resilience Initiative, which an assessment found had led to a significant improvement in dietary diversity among participating households, who also engaged less in negative coping strategies than households who did not take part.
 32. Through operations under **strategic outcome 3**, WFP expanded the distribution of fresh food vouchers from Amhara to Afar and Somali. Vouchers contributed to an increase in the proportion of children aged 6–23 months who had acceptable diets and reportedly boosted the production of fresh food in targeted areas. Nevertheless, the poor reliability of the phone network, the low value and short duration of the vouchers and the fact that the voucher programme complemented the national safety net programme only to a limited degree meant that transfers were often delayed and insufficient to meet needs fully.
 33. WFP capacity strengthening efforts under **strategic outcome 4** were aligned with government priorities but were hindered by a lack of clear targets and comprehensive strategy. Capacity strengthening for the productive safety net programme has been a constant, but its effectiveness has been affected by funding cutbacks. Supply chain capacity strengthening and technical support through seconded experts contributed to better planning and execution of food assistance delivery. Although the extent to which efforts contributed to institutionalization remains unclear, WFP supported the review and finalization of regional anticipatory action plans for drought and floods.
 34. Key services provided by WFP under **strategic outcome 5**, in often challenging and volatile circumstances, underpinned its ability to scale up its response in the north. These included reliable air transportation, effective support through the logistics cluster, on-demand food

procurement services to the Government and emergency telecommunications services in Tigray, which supported the delivery of humanitarian assistance by WFP and its partners, including the Government.

Timeliness

The effectiveness of assistance was affected by frequent delays, and WFP's efforts to reduce them were only partly successful.

35. All activities were affected by frequent delays in the delivery of assistance due to access constraints, volatile security conditions, administrative red tape, Ethiopia's vast geography and delays in the receipt of contributions. Partners experienced delays in the finalization of field-level agreements, which affected implementation. WFP used internal advance financing mechanisms to reduce delays caused by the late confirmation of contributions, but this did not fully mitigate negative consequences for people in need; this in turn contributed to a loss of trust in the humanitarian community.

Modality shift

Despite some success, the intended shift under the CSP from in-kind food aid to cash-based assistance where feasible was largely not achieved because WFP underestimated the time required for the transition. While pilot initiatives showed promise, external and internal constraints and high levels of in-kind donations led to delays in the intended shift. As a consequence, WFP has not been able to reap the potential benefits of cash-based assistance in locations where conditions would have permitted its use.

36. WFP did not manage to scale up cash-based assistance as envisaged in the CSP, with assistance rarely reaching more than 20 percent of the planned number of beneficiaries and often remaining below 10 percent. While many donors, including the largest, voiced overall support for the move towards cash assistance and financed cash-based modalities implemented by other organizations, they preferred to support WFP through in-kind donations.
37. In a context of often challenging logistics and access conditions, WFP has not been able to introduce cash-based assistance in locations where conditions would have allowed its use, missing out on potential cost-efficiency and cost-effectiveness gains.
38. The ambitious transfer modality goals in the CSP were not based on a feasibility study, and the country office, long accustomed to providing in-kind assistance, had little experience of cash-based assistance. Disruption to WFP and partners' work caused by the COVID-19 pandemic also impeded a change in transfer modality. In addition WFP encountered some resistance to cash-based assistance from beneficiaries because the amount of money provided was less than the resale value of food received in kind.

Gender

WFP has made progress on implementing its gender strategy and a good degree of gender-sensitivity has been achieved in WFP activities. Transformative approaches to social inclusion and women's empowerment, which involve changes in power structures, are not yet evident, and gaps remain in implementation at the community level. There has been very limited mainstreaming of inclusion principles into activities.

39. Significant progress was made on providing capacity strengthening and guidance on gender mainstreaming to cooperating partners and WFP staff, and many activities explicitly targeted women. Measures designed to mitigate gender-based violence were integrated into malnutrition prevention activities. The R4 Rural Resilience Initiative⁵ employed a transformative approach to social inclusion and initiatives such as support for village savings

⁵ The R4 initiative focused on providing access to climate risk insurance and improving natural resource management.

and loans associations and the targeting of female retailers under the fresh food voucher modality supported economic empowerment. Challenges remain, however, in mainstreaming gender and monitoring gender-related results at the community level, mainly because of a shortage of staff and funding.

40. Attention to disability and inclusion was more sporadic. Disability was not systematically included in monitoring efforts but was referenced in community feedback data and in post-distribution monitoring questionnaires; it was also used as a criterion in vulnerability-based targeting.

Accountability to affected people and protection

WFP has strengthened accountability to affected people and improvements have been made as part of the assurance project, particularly with regard to community feedback mechanisms. However, WFP's capacity to identify and mitigate protection risks and strengthen accountability through systematic case management and follow-up needs to be improved.

41. Protection risks in communities where WFP operates are high.⁶ As protection was regarded as a second-tier concern, given that WFP has no direct protection mandate, the organization's commitment, budget, staffing and training were limited in this area. The direct interaction between beneficiaries and WFP was not sufficient for protection issues to be identified and tracked because WFP relied initially on government mechanisms for targeting, distribution and monitoring for the larger part of its relief assistance.
42. Under its assurance project WFP has sought to strengthen the accessibility of community feedback mechanisms by increasing the number of call centre operators and improving case handling protocols, but the feedback received through these mechanisms has not yet led to programme changes. Direct interaction between WFP staff, beneficiaries and communities can be further strengthened – something that beneficiaries themselves have called for.

Risk management

The CSP identified prevailing risks, but their likelihood and impact were underestimated and measures to prevent and mitigate them were insufficient. The discovery of aid diversion affected WFP's credibility and reputation. While partners have expressed broad satisfaction with measures put in place under the assurance project, concerns over high cost and limited cooperating partner capacity remain.

43. The measures introduced under the assurance project, such as increased monitoring coverage and household-level targeting, helped to restore confidence by increasing effectiveness of oversight, but the switch from implementing through government entities to working through NGOs – which have higher operating costs and increased monitoring and reporting requirements – has led to an overall increase in implementation costs. Concerns remain over the high cost of assurance measures, which are reflected in the country office's resourcing plans for 2024, and the need to strengthen cooperating partner capacity, especially in monitoring and protection. Humanitarian interventions were implemented in a conflict-responsive way but there was a lack of analysis aimed at supporting a conflict-sensitive approach, such as analysis of the potential politicization of assistance and other aspects of the effect of assistance on the conflict.

Monitoring and evaluation

With access constrained by conflict and insecurity and limitations on the use of remote methods, monitoring and evaluation has been a longstanding weak point for WFP in Ethiopia. While staffing has increased and improvements have been made under the assurance project,

⁶ Inter-Agency Standing Committee. 2024. *Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation of the Response to the Crisis in northern Ethiopia*.

especially in process and output monitoring, the monitoring of outcome-level changes remains heavily focused on quantitative data and year-end organizational reporting and was particularly weak for resilience interventions and cross-cutting objectives. Insufficient qualitative data are collected and analysed to explain programmatic results and inform learning.

44. Operations in Ethiopia have been chronically affected by weak monitoring, with the 2019 portfolio evaluation and the two most recent internal audits pointing out areas for improvement. Weaknesses identified included limited monitoring coverage of distribution sites, inadequate escalation processes for ensuring fast action on high-priority issues, poor reporting by cooperating partners and the Government and challenges in producing credible donor reports on resilience activities.
45. Monitoring in all programmatic areas (crisis response, resilience and root causes) has been biased towards outputs rather than outcomes; it has also been largely quantitative, not sufficiently complemented by qualitative information. The evaluability of the CSP was constrained by the limited reliability of reported output data, especially beneficiary and food transfer data for relief assistance provided through government channels, limited regional disaggregation of data, and gaps in outcome data. The focus on corporate annual reporting limited the usefulness of monitoring for informing adjustments to programme implementation or demonstrating the effectiveness of resilience and livelihood activities to donors.

Staffing and institutional arrangements

At the beginning of the emergency response in northern Ethiopia, WFP's response capacity was stretched because although staff capacity was strong in the areas of resilience and livelihoods, it was weaker in the area of conflict-driven emergency response. Infusions of staff on temporary duty assignments addressed this, but this created tensions and high staff turnover. Concerns about job security following budget cuts and staff reductions have impaired staff motivation and productivity in the country office. Discontinuity and high and unpredictable turnover in senior leadership have also hampered implementation of the CSP.

46. The achievements under the CSP and ICSP reflect positively on the ability of WFP staff to work under very difficult conditions. Nevertheless, the stress under which WFP staff have had to work during and since the northern Ethiopia response, in the aftermath of the discovery of aid diversion and, more recently, due to fears about job security following budget and staff reductions has had significant negative impacts on staff wellness, motivation and productivity. High turnover of country directors had a negative impact on the clarity of strategic direction and staff morale.
47. WFP built up strong "changing lives" human resource capacity and management structures during the period of the CSP and ICSP, but "saving lives" capacity was stretched by the response to the conflict in northern Ethiopia. This was due to a range of factors: the scale of the crisis, challenges moving staff into Tigray and high turnover given the difficult conditions, varying levels of experience and relevant knowledge of surge staff and coordination challenges between the country office and the emergency coordinator based in Tigray.

Recommendations

Based on the key findings and conclusions, the evaluation makes three strategic and three operational recommendations.

Recommendations and sub-recommendations	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities (if applicable)	Priority	Deadline for completion
<p>Recommendation 1: Ensure that the next CSP identifies and explicitly addresses areas of uncertainty to ensure that its strategic direction remains relevant over time.</p> <p>1.1 When designing the new CSP, WFP should adopt a scenario-based planning approach with baseline, downside and upside assumptions on both external and internal conditions.</p> <p>1.2 The CSP should include a better assessment of risks and explicit measures to avoid and mitigate them.</p> <p>Rationale: Uncertainty was insufficiently reflected in the CSP and ICSP; risks were correctly identified but the estimation of their scale was poor and, as a result, risk management was weak. While WFP adapted the CSP through budget revisions as the situation changed, the plan provided limited strategic direction for the response to the conflict in northern Ethiopia.</p>	<p>Strategic</p> <p>Short term</p>	Country office management		High	June 2025
<p>Recommendation 2: Continue to pursue the shift from a “saving lives” to a “changing lives” agenda.</p> <p>2.1 WFP should ensure that its future strategy for Ethiopia is based on realistic resourcing forecasts.</p> <p>2.2 The shift needs to be underpinned by a better ability to demonstrate results for various groups of beneficiaries and a demonstrated comparative advantage.</p> <p>2.3 Resilience and livelihoods activities will require stronger operational plans and closer integration with relief activities to achieve scale and scope.</p> <p>Rationale: School feeding, nutrition and resilience and livelihoods interventions are highly effective at promoting development,</p>	<p>Strategic</p> <p>Medium term</p>	Country office management and programme, partnerships and monitoring and evaluation units		High	End 2027

Recommendations and sub-recommendations	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities (if applicable)	Priority	Deadline for completion
particularly as their benefits for individuals are felt over the medium and long term, but WFP has struggled to demonstrate results and convince donors of its comparative advantage and to implement activities in these areas at scale. The “saving lives” and “changing lives” agenda largely ran on separate tracks in the last CSP, and opportunities for integration and the elimination of silos were not sufficiently exploited.					
<p>Recommendation 3: In the area of humanitarian assistance, take steps to ensure that there is a conducive environment for principled responses to humanitarian needs.</p> <p>3.1 WFP should address its overdependence on one donor.</p> <p>3.2 WFP should maintain operational independence from the Government based on strategic engagement through relevant coordination platforms, including the humanitarian country team and the United Nations country team. In conjunction with its partners, it should establish red lines.</p> <p>3.3 WFP should continue to improve programme quality by further strengthening the implementation of protection, accountability to affected people and gender-based approaches, including by improving the user-friendliness of community feedback mechanisms and enhancing case management and follow-up.</p> <p>3.4 WFP should carefully document and assess the achievements (and shortcomings) of the assurance project and ensure transparent communication on residual operational risks.</p> <p>Rationale: Heavy reliance on one donor and operating through government systems have made it challenging to adhere fully to humanitarian principles in crisis situations. Although WFP has strengthened its strategic and operational independence through the assurance project and continuing assurance process, stakeholders continue to perceive it as an intermediary agent between one donor and the Government.</p>	Strategic Medium term	Country office management and partnerships and programme units	Deputy Executive Director and Chief Operating Officer	High	End 2026

Recommendations and sub-recommendations	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities (if applicable)	Priority	Deadline for completion
<p>Recommendation 4: Improve the ability to demonstrate results, in particular in terms of increased resilience, including the “graduation” of beneficiaries from relief to resilience support, and progress in cross-cutting areas.</p> <p>4.1 Quantitative monitoring should be complemented with qualitative monitoring and evaluations to contextualize and explain findings and support learning.</p> <p>4.2 WFP should ensure high-quality reporting on results for donors, country office management and programme staff in country and field offices. In the latter case, such reporting should be presented at a sufficiently granular geographical level to inform localized adjustments to programmes.</p> <p>Rationale: Despite some recent improvements, monitoring and evaluation have been oriented more towards strengthening donor support for emergency response than informing adjustments to the implementation of activities or changes in strategy. One result has been that evidence of effectiveness in areas such as resilience and livelihoods and cross-cutting areas such as gender and the humanitarian–development–peace nexus has not resulted in donor buy-in for WFP’s changing lives agenda.</p>	Operational Medium term	Country office monitoring and evaluation unit	n/a	High	End 2026

Recommendations and sub-recommendations	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities (if applicable)	Priority	Deadline for completion
<p>Recommendation 5: Accelerate the shift from in-kind to cash-based assistance where its higher cost-effectiveness is demonstrated.</p> <p>5.1 WFP should conduct and update feasibility and comparative cost effectiveness analyses to inform donor advocacy and plans to roll out cash-based assistance.</p> <p>5.2 WFP should underpin the rollout of cash-based assistance with realistic operational plans that take country office and partner capacity into account.</p> <p>Rationale: While some beneficiaries may prefer in-kind assistance to cash because they lack access to markets or the banking system, many prefer cash when it is an effective substitute for in-kind assistance. Cash is a more efficient transfer modality as it does not involve transporting goods. It promotes agency and dignity for beneficiaries. It may also reduce the risk of aid diversion if coupled with appropriate digital and identity management technologies.</p>	Operational Medium to long term	Country office programme unit	n/a	Medium	End 2026
<p>Recommendation 6: Improve planning for staffing needs to ensure agility in staffing and continuity in strategic direction.</p> <p>6.1 WFP should maintain stability at the senior management level, especially during crisis responses, to ensure the clarity of its strategic direction and decision making.</p> <p>6.2 WFP should ensure adequate staffing in situations of operational scale-up and scale-down.</p> <p>Rationale: High turnover among senior staff, including at the country director level, has affected the emergency response and implementation of the ICSP and CSP, as well as staff morale.</p>	Operational Long term	Deputy Executive Director and Chief Operating Officer Country office management and human resources unit	n/a	High	Mid-2028