



WFP EVALUATION



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Programme**

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Evaluation of Ethiopia WFP country strategic plan 2020-2025

Centralized evaluation report

**OEV/2024/005
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Executive summary

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.

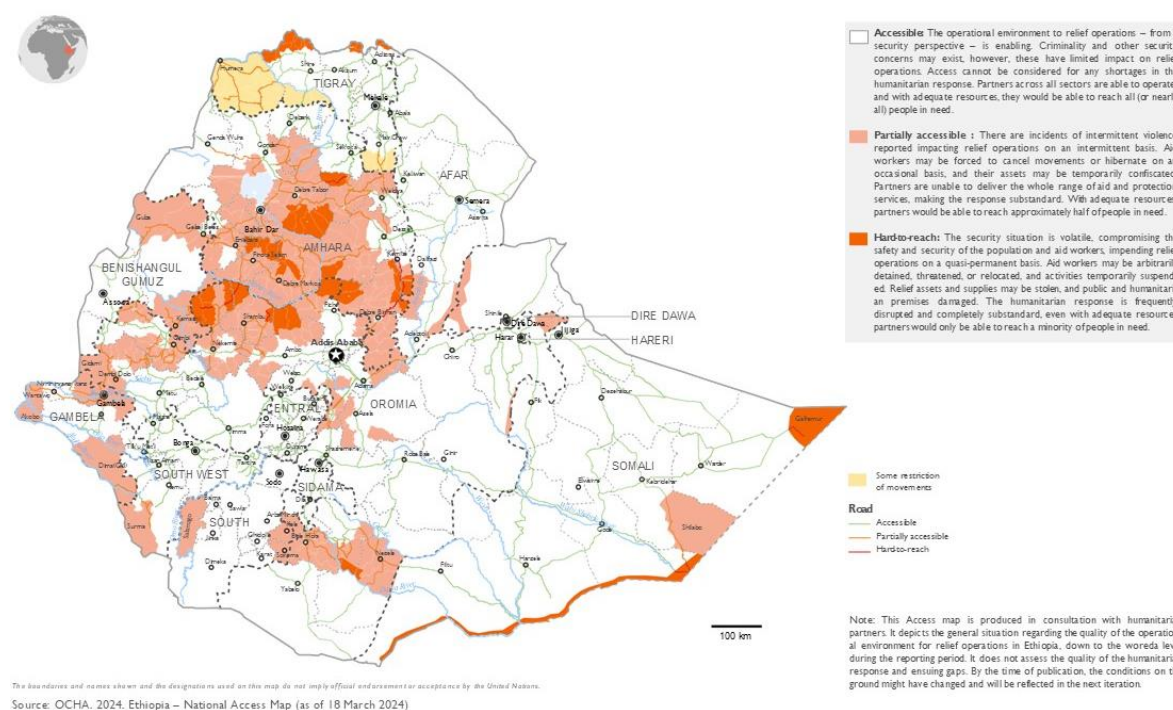
Context

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. 2022. Gender Inequality Index. (Accessed 22/04/2024).

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).

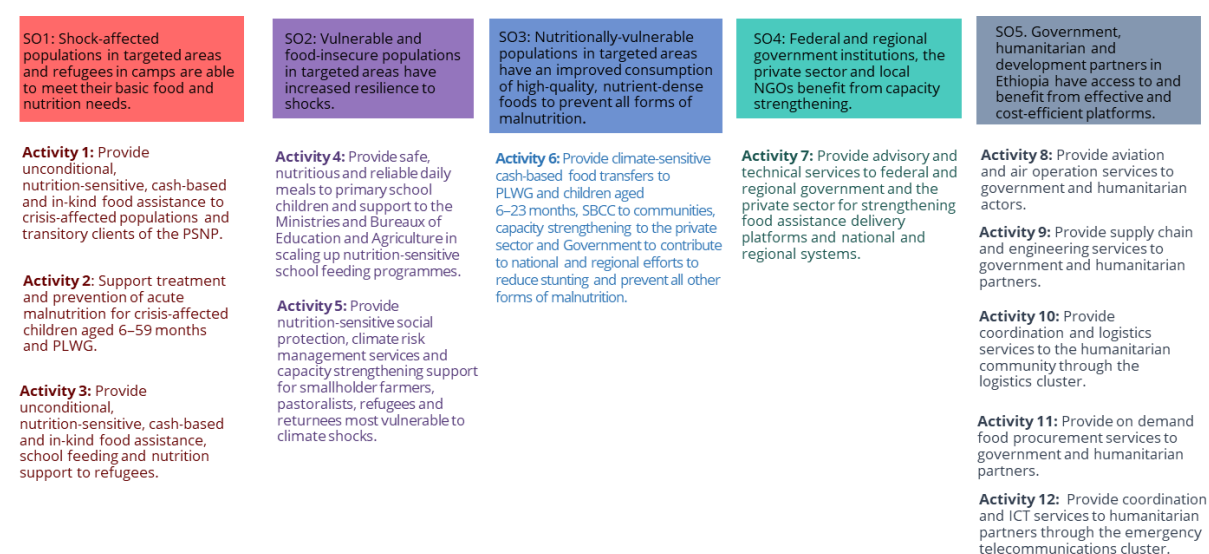
7. In March 2023, WFP and the United States Agency for International Development uncovered evidence of food aid diversion. General food assistance was suspended in June 2023 until measures to ensure effective distribution were enhanced and investigations undertaken.³ WFP initiated an assurance project 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



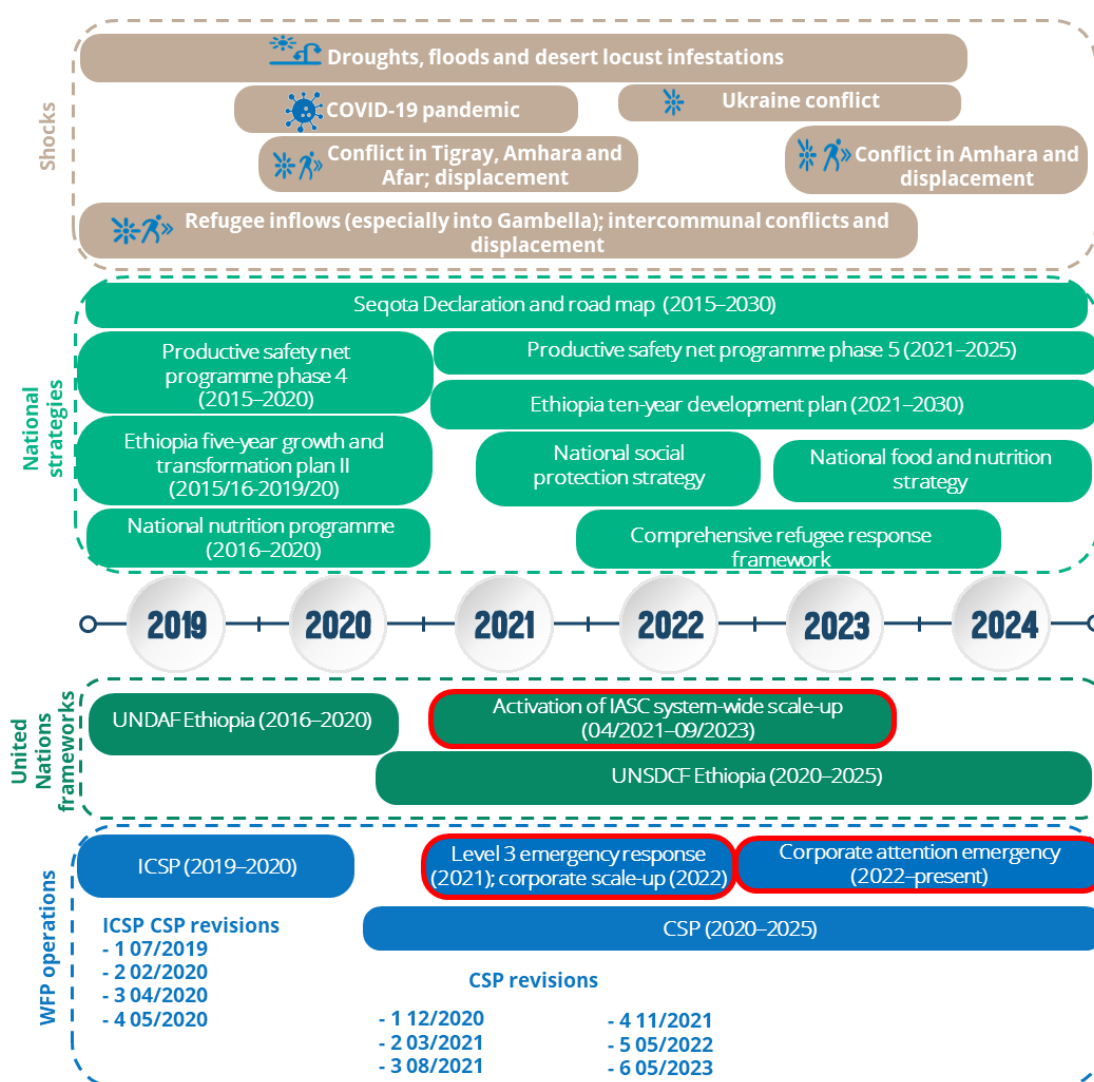
Source: Ethiopia country strategic plan line of sight.

Abbreviation: ICT = information and communications technology; PLWG = pregnant and lactating women and girls; PSNP = Productive Safety Net Programme; SBCC = social and behaviour change communication; and SO = strategic objective.

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

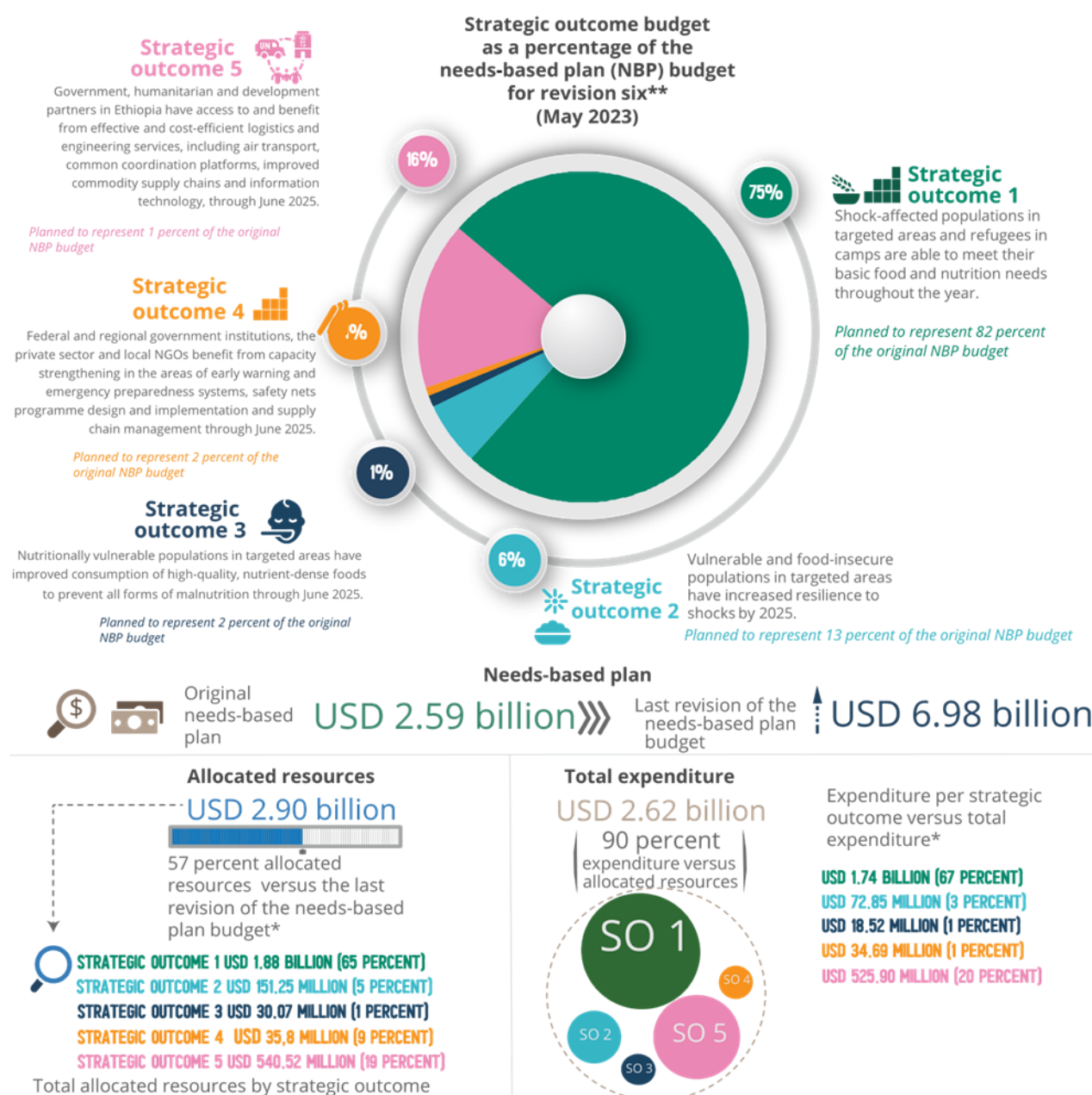


Source: Office of Evaluation.

Abbreviations: CSP = country strategic plan; IASC = Inter-Agency Standing Committee; ICSP = interim country strategic plan; UNDAF = United Nations development assistance plan; 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 992.4 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 6.9 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



Abbreviation: NBP = needs-based plan; SO = strategic outcome.

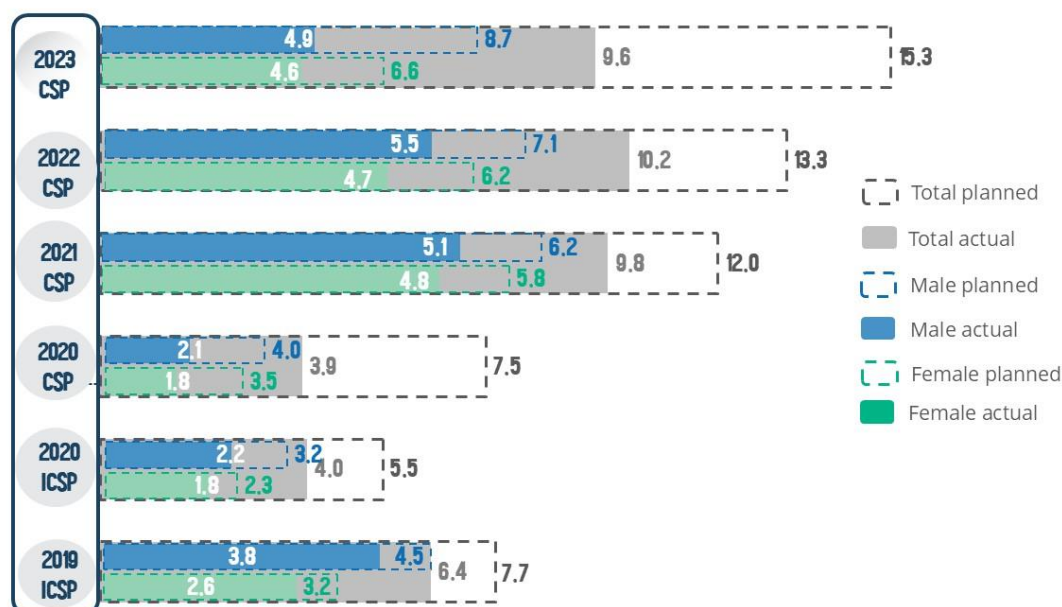
**The CSP NBP budget underwent a seventh revision in April 2024; that revision is not included in this analysis as it is beyond the scope of this evaluation.

*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.

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

Abbreviations: CSP = country strategic plan; ICSP = interim country strategic plan.

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 have 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, is 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 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.

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

⁶ Inter-agency humanitarian evaluation of the response to the crisis in northern Ethiopia.

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, 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

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

Recommendation	Type Theme Short/medium/ long-term	Responsibility (one lead office/entity)	Other contributing entities (if applicable)	Priority: high/medium	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>Strategic</p> <p>Medium term</p>	Country office management and programme, partnerships and monitoring and evaluation units		High	End 2027

Recommendation	Type Theme Short/medium/ long-term	Responsibility (one lead office/entity)	Other contributing entities (if applicable)	Priority: high/medium	Deadline for completion
<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, 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>					
<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 feedback mechanisms and enhancing case management and follow-up.</p>	Strategic Medium term	Country office management and partnerships and programme units	Deputy Executive Director and Chief Operating Officer	High	End 2026

Recommendation	Type Theme Short/medium/ long-term	Responsibility (one lead office/entity)	Other contributing entities (if applicable)	Priority: high/medium	Deadline for completion
<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>					
<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</p>	Operational Medium term	Country office monitoring and evaluation unit	n/a	High	End 2026

Recommendation	Type Theme Short/medium/ long-term	Responsibility (one lead office/entity)	Other contributing entities (if applicable)	Priority: high/medium	Deadline for completion
humanitarian–development–peace nexus has not resulted in donor buy-in for WFP’s changing lives agenda.					
<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>	Operational Long term	Deputy Executive Director and Chief Operating Officer Country office management and human resources unit	n/a	High	Mid-2028

Recommendation	Type Theme Short/medium/ long-term	Responsibility (one lead office/entity)	Other contributing entities (if applicable)	Priority: high/medium	Deadline for completion
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.					

1. Introduction

1.1. Evaluation features

1. The evaluation of the Ethiopia World Food Programme (WFP) Interim Country Strategic Plan (ICSP) 2019–June 2020 and Country Strategic Plan (CSP) July 2020–June 2025 was mandated by the WFP Office of Evaluation (OEV) and conducted by an independent evaluation team. The purpose of the evaluation was to provide evidence and learning on the performance of WFP in Ethiopia from 2019 to March 2024, as well as accountability to stakeholders (see Annex 1: Summary terms of reference (ToR)).
2. The timing of this CSP evaluation (CSPE) enabled the Ethiopia country office (CO) to use the evidence on past and current performance for the design of the new Ethiopia CSP, as well as enabling the Office of Evaluation to present this evaluation to the Executive Board in June 2025 (see Annex 2: Evaluation Timeline).
3. The timeframe for the evaluation started in 2019 when the ICSP was introduced, which enabled the evaluation team to assess changes in the approach between the two consecutive (I)CSPs.⁷ This evaluation covered all WFP-supported interventions as well as considered relevant recent developments and adopted a forward-looking perspective.
4. The evaluation addressed four standard evaluation questions (EQs) (see paragraph 57). The evaluation devoted particular attention to three areas: first, the “changing lives” agenda (that is, the transition from the humanitarian “saving lives” mission to a transformative “changing lives” agenda) and specifically, lessons learned to inform the next CSP; second, the readiness of WFP to implement the emergency response in northern Ethiopia and how its scale affected other intended CSP outcomes; and third, initial insights emerging from the recent measures to address aid diversion (see section 1.2).
5. The evaluation team took into consideration cross-cutting issues, including gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE), protection and accountability to affected people (AAP), humanitarian principles and access, climate change and the inclusion of people with disabilities. The evaluation adopted appropriate gender and age-responsive tools and methods in data collection, analysis and reporting.
6. The evaluation sought the views of a broad range of internal and external WFP stakeholders. The primary users of the evaluation included the Ethiopia country office, sub and field offices, the regional bureau in Nairobi (RBN), headquarters’ (HQ) technical units and senior management and the United Nations Country Team (UNCT). The WFP Executive Board is a user and stakeholder in this CSPE's purpose of accountability. Other users and relevant stakeholders include the Government of Ethiopia, donors, cooperating partners (CPs) and WFP target populations.
7. The evaluation used a mix of methods, including documentary review, remote and in-person key informant interviews (KIIs), focus group discussions (FGDs) and site visits (see Annex 3: List of people interviewed and Annex 4: Fieldwork agenda). The evaluation started with an in-country inception mission in October 2023. The primary data collection took place in February–March 2024 and stakeholder workshops were held in September 2024 to validate evaluation findings and finalize the recommendations.

⁷ Throughout the report, the text refers to (I)CSP to cover the two consolidated strategic plans.

1.2. Context

General overview

8. The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, hereafter referred to as Ethiopia, had a population of over 123 million people in 2022 (49.8 percent women), of whom 77 percent lived in rural areas and 40 percent were under 14 years old;⁸ it is the second most populous country in Africa.⁹ Life expectancy at birth is 65 years (68 for women and 62 for men).¹⁰ The fertility rate is 4.2 births per woman¹¹ and the adolescent birth rate is 72 births per 1,000 girls aged 15-19.¹² Ethiopia has significant ethnic and linguistic diversity, consisting of over 80 languages and more than 90 ethnicities, with Oromo and Amhara ethnic groups representing more than half of the population.^{13,14}

9. Ethiopia is a low-income country that has made impressive development gains over the past two decades, reducing poverty and expanding investments in basic social services. Over the last 15 years, the country's economy averaged a nearly 10 percent annual growth rate¹⁵ but has slowed since the COVID-19 pandemic. To contain fiscal deficits, public spending has progressively reduced, falling to 10.8 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) in the fiscal year 2023 (less than half the early-2000s level). Inflation remained high at 28.7 percent in December 2023, driven particularly by non-food inflation due to the phased removal of fuel subsidies, monetary financing of deficits and compounding shocks.¹⁶

10. Despite some development gains, Ethiopia remains one of the poorest countries in the world. As much as 68.7 percent of the population experiences multidimensional poverty.¹⁷ In 2022, the Human Development Index was 0.492, ranking Ethiopia 176th of 193 countries,¹⁸ and the Gender Inequality Index was 0.494, ranking the country 125th of 166 countries.¹⁹

11. Recent shocks - including COVID-19, the two-year armed conflict that erupted between the Federal Government of Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) in November 2020 (see timeline in Figure 1), ongoing conflict in Amhara at the time of the evaluation that broke out in 2023, 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 been posing threats to development gains (see Figure 6 for an overview of external events in relation to WFP operations). The number of people in need of humanitarian assistance estimated in humanitarian response plans have nearly tripled in the last six years, from 8.9 million in 2019 to 21.4 million in 2024 (Figure 2).²⁰

12. Recent conflict and insecurity have had significant impacts on the population and social dynamics, including loss of social cohesion and the exacerbation of inter-communal conflicts, often ethnic in nature and related to loss of livelihoods and access to resources. This has resulted in the emergence and strengthening of militias, which are highly mobile and well-armed, with consequent erosion of government authority.

⁸ World Bank. Open data Ethiopia. Accessed 22/04/2024. <https://data.worldbank.org/country/ethiopia>.

⁹ World Bank. 2024. The World Bank in Ethiopia. Accessed 22/04/2024.

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/ethiopia/overview>.

¹⁰ World Bank. Open data Ethiopia. Accessed 22/04/2024. <https://data.worldbank.org/country/ethiopia>.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). 2024. Ethiopia. Accessed 22/04/2024. <https://www.unfpa.org/data/ET>.

¹³ Minority Rights Group International. Ethiopia. Accessed 27/09/2023. <https://minorityrights.org/country/ethiopia/>.

¹⁴ The most recent census was in 2007 given the planned 2017 census was postponed, and as such the demographic data should be reviewed with caution. See: Akuiyibo, H. September 2022. Ethiopia's Forgotten Census. Accessed 22/04/2024. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/ethiopias-forgotten-census>.

¹⁵ World Bank. 2024. The World Bank in Ethiopia. Accessed 22/04/2024.

¹⁶ World Bank. 2024. Ethiopia Macro Poverty Outlook.

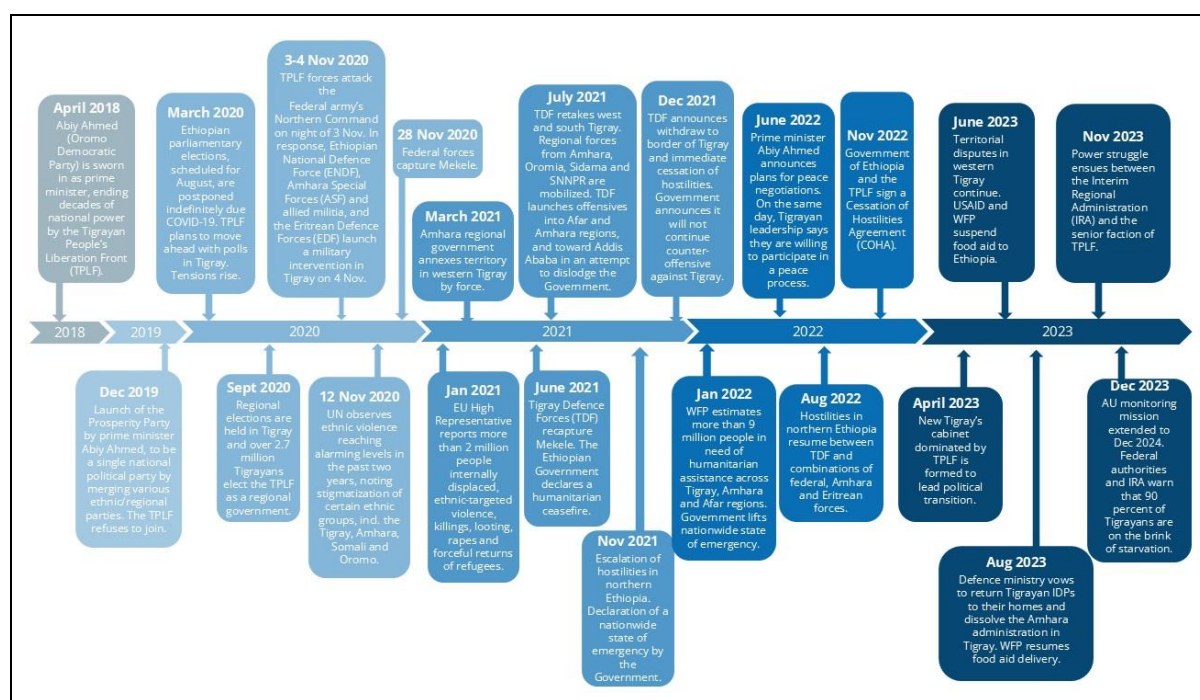
¹⁷ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). 2023. Briefing note for countries on the 2023 Multidimensional Poverty Index – Ethiopia.

¹⁸ UNDP. 2022. Human Development Index. Accessed 22/04/2024. <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/human-development-index#/indicies/HDI>.

¹⁹ UNDP. 2022. Gender Inequality Index. Accessed 22/04/2024. <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/thematic-composite-indicies/gender-inequality-index#/indicies/GII>.

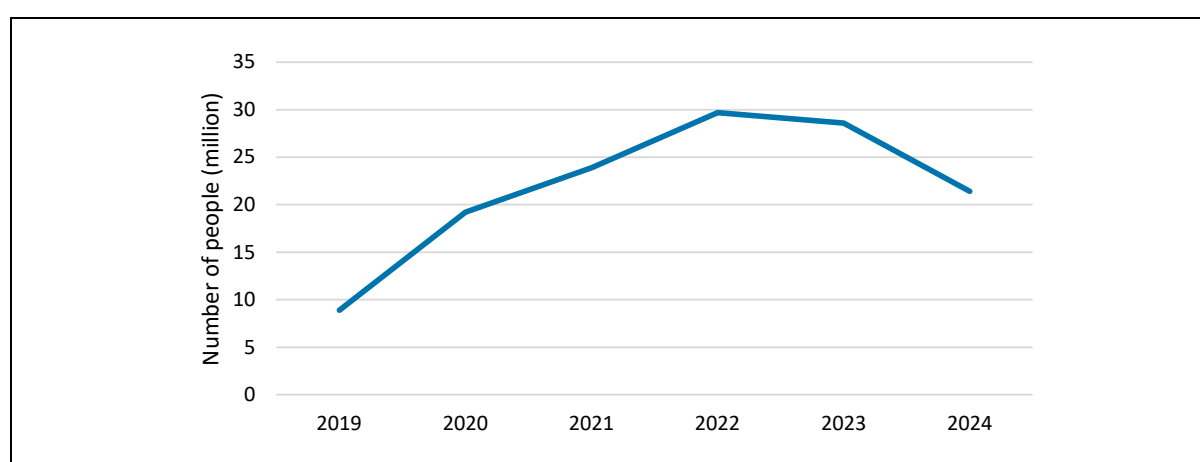
²⁰ Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). 2019-2024. Ethiopia Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) – Dashboard. <https://humanitarianaction.info/plan/1195>

Figure 1: Timeline of the northern Ethiopia conflict



Source: Security Council Report. 2022. Ethiopia Chronology of Events. Accessed 09/01/2024, <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/chronology/ethiopia.php>; IPIS. 2022. A timeline of the Tigray Conflict; International Crisis Group. 2022. Avoiding the Abyss as War Resumes in Northern Ethiopia. Accessed 11/09/2024, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/ethiopia/avoiding-abyss-war-resumes-northern-ethiopia>. Developed by Particip.

Figure 2: People in need, 2019-2024



Source: OCHA. 2019-2021, 2023-2024. Ethiopia HRP – Dashboard. Accessed 22/04/2024. <https://humanitarianaction.info/plan/1128>; 2022 data from OCHA 2023 Ethiopia HRP (as dashboard only provides an estimate).

13. Insecurity and violence related to ethnic and inter-regional tensions and subsequent access challenges remain persistent impediments to humanitarian efforts in Ethiopia, hampering the delivery of assistance and affecting performance of humanitarian organizations. Access restrictions during the conflict were particularly severe in Tigray, where telecommunications, banking and basic services were interrupted for significant periods, safety and security of humanitarian responders were jeopardized and movement of humanitarian personnel and cargo heavily controlled.^{21,22} While access to affected populations has

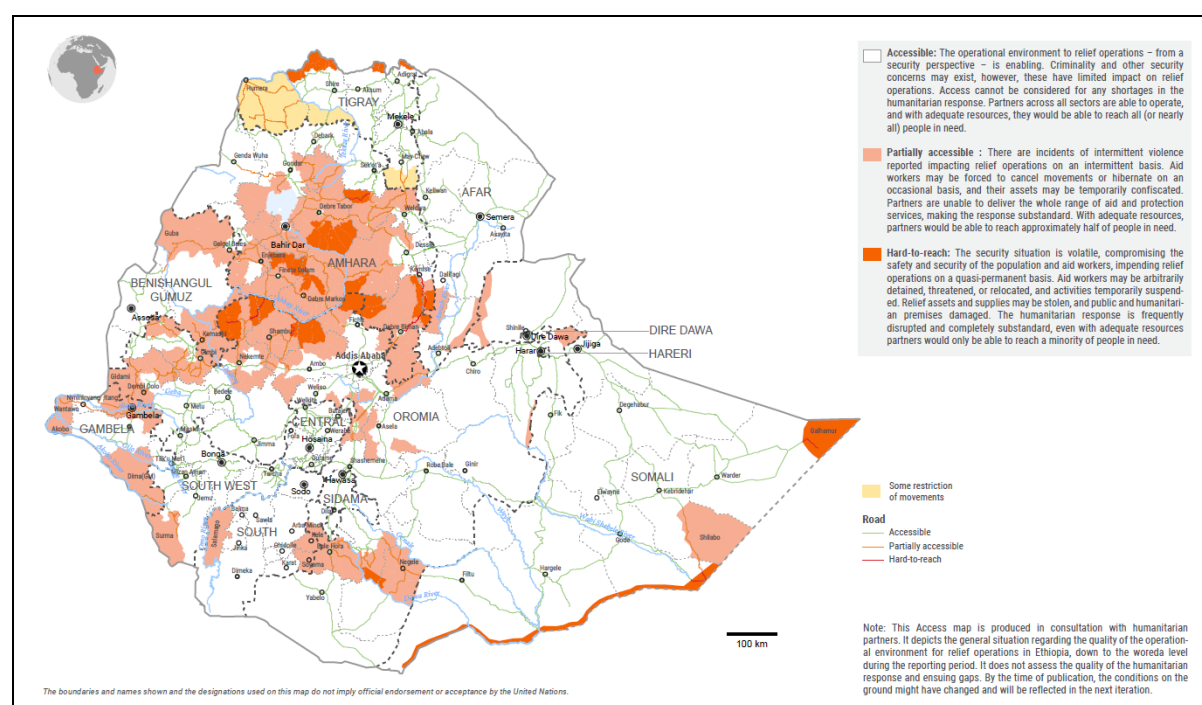
²¹ Assessment Capacities Project (ACAPS). 2022. Ethiopia – northern Ethiopia: two years into the crisis. Thematic report.

²² For more detail on the Tigray context refer to vol 2, annex 5.

improved significantly in northern Ethiopia following the signing of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement in November 2022, ongoing conflicts in other parts of the country continue to hinder access efforts.²³

14. The Amhara regional conflict, which has seen an extension of the state of emergency declared in August 2023 to June 2024 due to continued armed clashes and insecurity, complicates commercial transport and aid delivery, especially in rural areas. Fuel shortages, road closures and inadequate internet connectivity further affect commercial and humanitarian movement. Humanitarian actors remain at high risk, with 93 incidents impacting the safety of aid workers recorded in 2023.²⁴ These included kidnapping, robbery and acts of violence. Figure 3 below provides an overview of access by region. It is estimated that 608,000 people in need are located in hard-to-reach areas.²⁵ Recognizing these challenges, the 2024 Ethiopia Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) places special focus on the Amhara, Oromia, Tigray, Benishangul Gumuz and Somali regions.²⁶

Figure 3: Humanitarian access in Ethiopia as of March 2024



Source: OCHA. 2024. Ethiopia - National Access Map (as of 18 March 2024).

15. Following WFP and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) uncovering the food aid diversion in March 2023, a countrywide suspension of general food assistance (GFA) took place in June 2023 until measures to ensure effective distribution were enhanced and investigations were undertaken (including from WFP, the Government of Ethiopia and the United States Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance).²⁷ Volumes of the diversion have not been confirmed. In response, WFP initiated an assurance project to address underlying causes. Assurance measures fundamentally reduced the role of the Government in implementing assistance and introduced changes in targeting, monitoring and oversight mechanisms. In October 2023, WFP assessed that conditions to resume food aid were in place and that new assurance measures were functioning adequately (see Figure 4).²⁸

²³ OCHA. 2023. Ethiopia HRP.

²⁴ OCHA. 2024. Ethiopia Situation Report. March 2024.

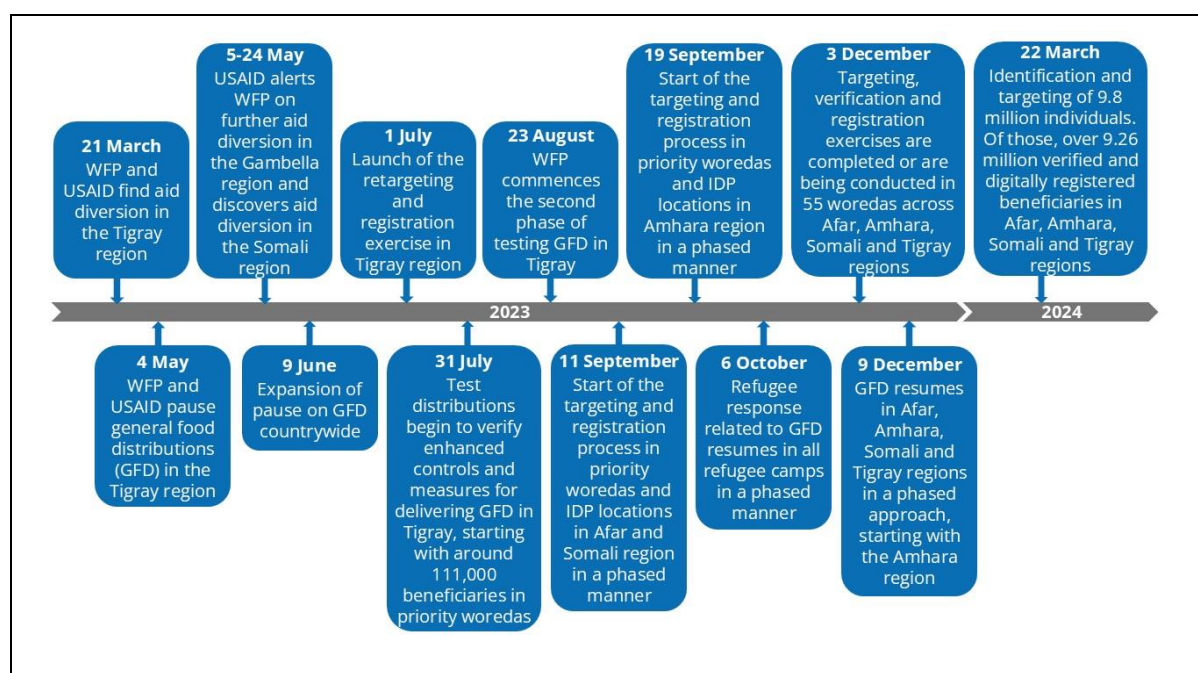
²⁵ OCHA. 2024. Ethiopia Humanitarian Snapshot. February 2024.

²⁶ OCHA. 2024. Ethiopia HRP.

²⁷ WFP. November 2023. Situation Report 7 September 2023.

²⁸ WFP. November 2023. WFP launches new operating model to restart food distribution to millions of vulnerable Ethiopians. Accessed 13/12/2023. <https://www.wfp.org/news/wfp-launches-new-operating-model-restart-food-distribution-millions-vulnerable-ethiopians>.

Figure 4: Timeline of reported aid diversion and ongoing assurance project

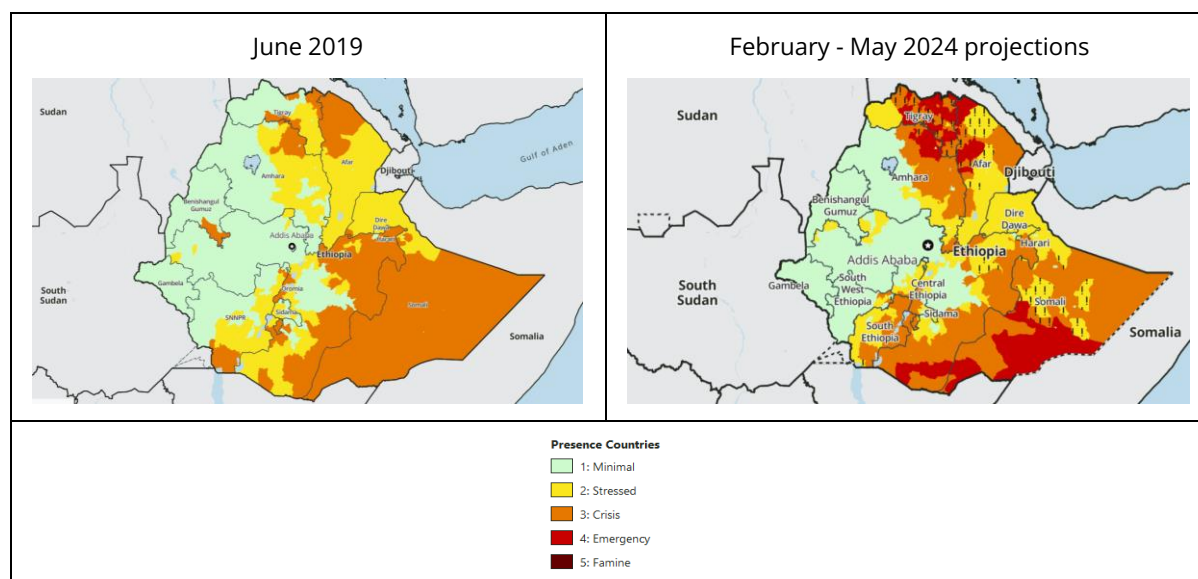


Source: WFP. 2023-2024. Ethiopia Action Plan Weekly Progress Reports; WFP. 2023. 3rd Management Update on Operations in Ethiopia.

Food security

16. Food security remains a major concern across the country and has deteriorated in recent years with large areas progressing from a situation of stress or crisis to emergency (Figure 5). Between 2020 and 2022, 58.1 percent of the population suffered from moderate or severe food insecurity, representing 69.9 million people.²⁹ In 2024, an estimated 15.8 million people required urgent food assistance.³⁰

Figure 5: Ethiopia food insecurity situation, 2019 and 2024



Source: FEWS NET. Ethiopia. Accessed 25/04/2024. <https://fewsn.net/east-africa/ethiopia>

²⁹ The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), WFP and the World Health Organization (WHO). 2023. The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2023.

³⁰ OCHA. 2024. Ethiopia HRP.

17. Key drivers of food insecurity included drought, flooding, insect infestations, subnational conflict (see Figure 1 and Annex 5 for detail on selected regions), and macroeconomic challenges such as the depreciation of the Ethiopian *birr* (Ethiopian currency) and high inflation.³¹ In 2023, food price inflation ranged from 26 to 34 percent³² with prices of imported wheat and vegetable oil at near record levels due to high international prices exacerbated by the war in Ukraine. The food insecurity situation is further compounded by the aid diversion-related suspension in humanitarian food assistance, which lasted over four months.³³

18. Acute food insecurity in Ethiopia's refugee camps is concerning, where 49 percent of surveyed households present poor food consumption scores and 25 percent face borderline food consumption scores. Approximately 65 percent of households employ negative coping strategies, such as reducing or skipping meals, consuming less-preferred foods and borrowing food for survival.³⁴

19. Relief food assistance to vulnerable populations³⁵ is provided by three main partners, each of which are allocated *woredas* (districts) under the "single" operator approach: the Government of Ethiopia through the Ethiopian Disaster Risk Management Commission (EDRMC) and the Food Security Coordination Office (FSCO); a large consortium of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) called the Joint Emergency Operations Programme (JEO); and WFP.³⁶

Nutrition

20. Although Ethiopia has shown progress in some nutrition indicators, it is not on track to meet the global World Health Assembly targets by 2025.³⁷ Between 2020 and 2022, 21.9 percent of the population suffered from undernourishment, corresponding to 26.4 million people³⁸ and, as at 2024, an estimated 5 million people are in need of urgent nutrition assistance.³⁹ In 2022, despite positive infant and child nutrition trends compared to previous years, 6.8 percent and 34.4 percent of children under 5 were wasted and stunted, respectively. The prevalence of obesity among adults and anaemia among women of reproductive age has been slowly rising.⁴⁰

21. The nutrition situation is especially concerning in drought- and conflict-affected northern areas. In 2023, the prevalence of very high and critical acute malnutrition was reported in rural areas and internally displaced person (IDP) sites in Tigray, with internally displaced person populations more severely affected. Some 61 percent of pregnant and breastfeeding women and girls (PBWG) in surveyed areas were acutely malnourished.⁴¹

22. Drivers of acute malnutrition include food insecurity and a lack of access to healthy diets, inadequate maternal and child-feeding practices, high prevalence of infectious diseases and strained water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services due to conflict, displacement and persisting epidemics.⁴²

23. Recognizing these challenges, in 2012 the Government of Ethiopia joined the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement, which focuses on underlying causes of malnutrition, particularly for children under 2. The Ethiopia Ministry of Health hosts the national SUN secretariat as it spearheads the National Nutrition Programme (NNP).⁴³ The second National Nutrition Programme (2016-2020) promotes an integrated approach, linking nutritional needs and improvement of the agriculture sector.⁴⁴ In parallel, the

³¹ WFP and FAO. 2023. Hunger Hotspots: FAO-WFP early warnings on acute food insecurity, November 2023 to April 2024 outlook.

³² FSIN and Global Network Against Food Crises. 2024. Global Report on Food Crises.

³³ WFP and FAO. 2023. Hunger Hotspots: FAO-WFP early warnings on acute food insecurity, November 2023 to April 2024 outlook.

³⁴ FSIN and Global Network Against Food Crises. 2023. Global Report on Food Crises.

³⁵ More accurately, people at risk/in a position of great vulnerability/marginalized people.

³⁶ OCHA. 2024. Ethiopia HRP.

³⁷ USAID. Ethiopia Nutrition. Accessed 25/04/2024. <https://www.usaid.gov/ethiopia/nutrition>.

³⁸ FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2023. The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2023.

³⁹ OCHA. 2023. Ethiopia HRP.

⁴⁰ FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2023. The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2023.

⁴¹ FSIN and Global Network Against Food Crises. 2024. Global Report on Food Crises.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Scaling Up Nutrition Ethiopia. About Sun Business Network. Accessed 23/05/2024, <https://sunbizethiopia.org/>

⁴⁴ FAO. Ethiopia – National Nutrition Programme (NNP II) 2016-2020, FAOLEX Database. Accessed 23/05/2024, <https://www.fao.org/faolex/results/details/en/c/LEX-FAOC190946/>.

Government made a 15-year commitment in 2015 to end stunting in children under 2 by 2030; this is known as the Seqota Declaration. The declaration formally requested the SUN donors to expand fresh food vouchers (FFV) to all *woredas* (districts) in the country. Operationalized through a multisectoral programme involving nine different sector ministries, it is currently implemented in 240 *woredas* and it is planned to cover 700 *woredas* by 2030.⁴⁵

Agriculture

24. Agriculture is the backbone of the Ethiopian economy, representing 37.6 percent of the gross domestic product and 63 percent of total employment.⁴⁶ Smallholder farmers produce 90-95 percent of the country's agricultural output. Agricultural productivity is hampered by land degradation, poor water management, low technology usage and an underdeveloped marketing system,⁴⁷ as well as conflict, climate-related emergencies in the form of drought and recurrent locust infestations, the last of which in 2019-2020 was the worst in a quarter-century.⁴⁸ Ethiopia loses about 2 billion tons of fertile soil annually to land degradation and the siltation of water bodies is a major threat to irrigation development.⁴⁹

25. The northern Ethiopia conflict resulted in large-scale displacements, destruction of critical agriculture infrastructure and disruption of agriculture activity, while the drought has led to negative impacts on both farming and pastoralist communities, including livestock deaths, loss of income and crop failure.⁵⁰ In Somali alone, over 6.8 million livestock have died since 2021.⁵¹

Climate change and vulnerability

26. Ethiopia is highly vulnerable to climatic shocks and one of the most drought-prone countries globally, ranking 163 of 185 countries in the 2021 Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative Index (ND-GAIN).⁵² After five consecutive failed rainy seasons since late 2020, communities affected by the prolonged severe drought in southern and south eastern Ethiopia received good 2023 *belg* rains (short, rainy season). However, impacts of the protracted drought continue to be felt and recovery is expected to take multiple years. In 2024, El Niño caused a new drought in the country, particularly affecting northern communities.⁵³

27. Although the country has a long history of droughts, these have increased in magnitude, frequency and impact since the 1970s.⁵⁴ In parallel, floods have become a recurring phenomenon in some parts of the country. The reduced availability of food, water and pasture have triggered internal displacement and deepened food insecurity and malnutrition.⁵⁵

Humanitarian protection

28. Compounding crises in Ethiopia have translated to increased protection concerns, particularly for women and children. These include greater vulnerability to violence, neglect, exploitation and abuse.⁵⁶ According to the national protection cluster the three main protection risks in Ethiopia are: i) gender-based violence (GBV), particularly conflict-related sexual violence; ii) child, early or forced marriage; and iii) theft, extortion, forced eviction or destruction of personal property. Other widespread risks include attacks on civilians as well as discrimination and denial of resources, opportunities, services and humanitarian access.⁵⁷

⁴⁵ Ministry of Health Ethiopia. Seqota Declaration. Accessed 23.05.2024, https://www.moh.gov.et/en/initiatives-4-col/Seqota_Declaration?language_content_entity=en.

⁴⁶ World Bank. Open data Ethiopia. Accessed 25/04/2024. <https://data.worldbank.org/country/ethiopia>.

⁴⁷ IFAD. Ethiopia. Accessed 25/04/2024. <https://www.ifad.org/en/web/operations/w/country/ethiopia>.

⁴⁸ OCHA. 2023. Ethiopia HRP.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ OCHA. 2023. Ethiopia HRP.

⁵¹ WFP and FAO. 2023. Hunger Hotspots: FAO-WFP early warnings on acute food insecurity, June 2023 to November 2023 outlook.

⁵² University of Notre Dame. 2024. The ND-GAIN Index. Accessed 25/04/2024. <https://gain.nd.edu/our-work/country-index/rankings/>.

⁵³ OCHA. 2024. Ethiopia HRP. *Note:* Belg refers to Ethiopia's February–May rainfall season.

⁵⁴ World Bank. 2021. Climate Risk Profile: Ethiopia.

⁵⁵ OCHA. 2023. Ethiopia HRP.

⁵⁶ UNHCR. 2023. Ethiopia Country Refugee Response Plan January–December 2023.

⁵⁷ Ethiopia protection cluster. 2024. Monthly Protection Overview – December 2023.

Gender and wider inclusion

29. Despite some progress, gender gaps, gender-based violence, and disadvantageous social norms facing women and girls persist, and gains in the human capital of women and girls remain untapped (see Annex 5 for regional specificities). As of 2022, 41.5 percent of seats in parliament were held by women. In terms of employment, while labour force participation by women has increased over the last three decades, it remains lower than for men (75 versus 86 percent). Around 60 percent of women do not own any land registered under their name, despite agriculture representing 54 percent of employment by women.⁵⁸

30. In terms of agency, 40.3 percent of women aged 20–24 years old were married or in a union before age 18. For women and girls aged 15–49 years, 27 percent reported that they had been subject to physical and sexual violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months and 65 percent experienced female genital mutilation.⁵⁹ Shocks have disproportionately affected women and girls who also experienced an unprecedented level of gender-based violence due to the conflict in the north.⁶⁰ The number of people in need of gender-based violence services increased from 3.5 million in 2021 to 5.8 million in 2022.⁶¹

31. It is estimated that nearly 7.8 million people in Ethiopia live with some form of disability, of which 2.2 million have profound difficulties. Approximately 30 percent of people with disabilities are children and young people. Access to appropriate services such as rehabilitation, support and assistance remain a challenge, with the majority of services being run by non-governmental organizations and often focusing on physical impairments, with less attention being given to intellectual impairments. Persons with disabilities face wide-ranging disadvantages, including being more likely to live in poverty and have lower labour market participation rates, and children with disabilities are less likely to start school.⁶²

Social protection

32. The government-led Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP), launched in 2005, is one of the largest social protection schemes in sub-Saharan Africa and, under its current phase, Phase V (2021–2025), will reach around 8 million people living in extreme poverty every year.⁶³ The programme provides cash (for 75 percent of recipients) and in-kind support (for 25 percent of recipients) to food-insecure families living in the most drought-prone areas in exchange for public work activities that aim to improve communities' climate resilience. The assistance spans a duration of six months and recurs annually until participants leave the programme due to re-targeting or graduation or exit. For families that are labour-constrained (approximately 20 percent), the programme provides unconditional cash transfers over several years.⁶⁴

33. Cuts in government social spending in the 2023/2024 financial year have lowered support to vulnerable households, while the removal of fuel subsidies is likely to further increase the cost of essential goods.⁶⁵

Migration, refugees and internally displaced persons

34. As of March 2024, 1,059,232 refugees and asylum seekers were registered by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as compared to roughly 744,000 in 2019.⁶⁶ The majority originate from South Sudan, Somalia and Eritrea. Among these, 80 percent were women and children, and 77 percent were hosted in the 20 active refugee camps of Ethiopia.⁶⁷ Refugees face various challenges, such as

⁵⁸ World Bank. Gender Data Portal – Ethiopia. Accessed 25/04/2024.

<https://genderdata.worldbank.org/countries/ethiopia>.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ OHCHR. 2021. Tigray conflict: UN experts call for urgent action to stop violence against women. Accessed 09/10/2023. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/2021/12/tigray-conflict-un-experts-call-urgent-action-stop-violence-against-women>.

⁶¹ UNFPA. 2022. GBV AOR Ethiopia: Situation of GBV in Ethiopia.

⁶² UNICEF. 2020. Briefing Note: Situation and access to services of persons with disabilities in Addis Ababa.

⁶³ Ministry of Agriculture. 2020, Productive Safety Net Programme Phase 5, General Programme Implementation Manual.

⁶⁴ WFP. 2022. Microinsurance and Social Protection: Ethiopia Country Case Study.

⁶⁵ WFP and FAO. 2023. Hunger Hotspots: FAO-WFP early warnings on acute food insecurity, November 2023 to April 2024 outlook.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ UNHCR. 2024. Ethiopia Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons March 2024. Note: UNHCR reports 20 active refugee camps in the country, while WFP reports a higher number of around 30, which are understood to also include inactive refugee camps and sites.

limited access to services and obstacles to economic inclusion due to special work permit regulations, lack of access to land and limited freedom of movement for refugees living in camps.⁶⁸

35. The number of internally displaced persons rose from 3 million in 2019 to 3.5 million in March 2024. Internally displaced persons live in equal shares in sites and settlements, and host communities and families.⁶⁹ The Somali, Oromia and Tigray regions have the highest number of internally displaced persons. Around two thirds of these internally displaced persons (65 percent) cite conflict as the reason for displacement. Other drivers include drought, social tensions, floods and landslides.⁷⁰ Many internally displaced persons experience protracted displacement, with as many as 745,000 displaced for over five years.⁷¹

1.3. Subject being evaluated

Evolution of WFP engagement in Ethiopia

36. **Engagement prior to the ICSP (February 2019-June 2020):** WFP has been present in Ethiopia since 1968, maintaining a project approach until 2019 (Figure 6). Operations prior to 2019 included the Ethiopia Country Programme (2012-2018) focusing on disaster risk management (DRM), resilience to climatic shocks and livelihoods, access to education and HIV/AIDS-related support and four protracted relief and recovery operations (PRROs) that covered emergency assistance to food-insecure crisis-affected populations and refugees as well as the initial transition to more resilient strategies. In parallel, four special operation projects were implemented, focusing on logistics and infrastructure.⁷²

37. In February 2019, the Ethiopia ICSP (January 2019-June 2020) was approved. The ICSP included five strategic outcomes (SOs) addressing the high levels of food insecurity and malnutrition among food-insecure crisis-affected and refugee populations. As shown in Figure 7, this included emergency food and nutrition assistance (SO1), home-grown school feeding (HGSF), social protection and climate-resilient livelihoods (SO2), malnutrition prevention and treatment (SO3), capacity strengthening (SO4), and provision of logistical and engineering services (SO5).

38. In July 2020, the Ethiopia CSP (July 2020-June 2025) was approved. While the CSP maintained a similar structure to the ICSP, there were some changes among the focus of strategic outcomes and activities as well as the addition of new activities under SO5 (see Figure 7).⁷³

39. Following the outbreak of large-scale conflict in Tigray in November 2020 and in a context of related rapidly rising emergency needs, WFP activated a Level 3 corporate emergency response on 25 March 2021 for Tigray, which became a corporate scale-up emergency with the updated WFP emergency activation protocol in the beginning of 2022. This was first expanded to northern Ethiopia and later to the whole country as, in addition to the conflict in the north, food insecurity was increasing in other parts of the country due to drought. In March 2022, the corporate emergency was reclassified to an emergency of corporate attention, which was still ongoing in October 2024. In parallel, an Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) system-wide scale-up was activated for northern Ethiopia on 28 April 2021 and extended to cover the entire country as of 2 November 2022, which was then deactivated on 2 October 2023.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ ACAPS. 2022. Ethiopia, Understanding humanitarian concerns across the country.

⁶⁹ UNHCR. 2024. Ethiopia Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons February 2024.

⁷⁰ UNHCR. 2024. Ethiopia Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons March 2024.

⁷¹ OCHA. 2023. Ethiopia HRP.

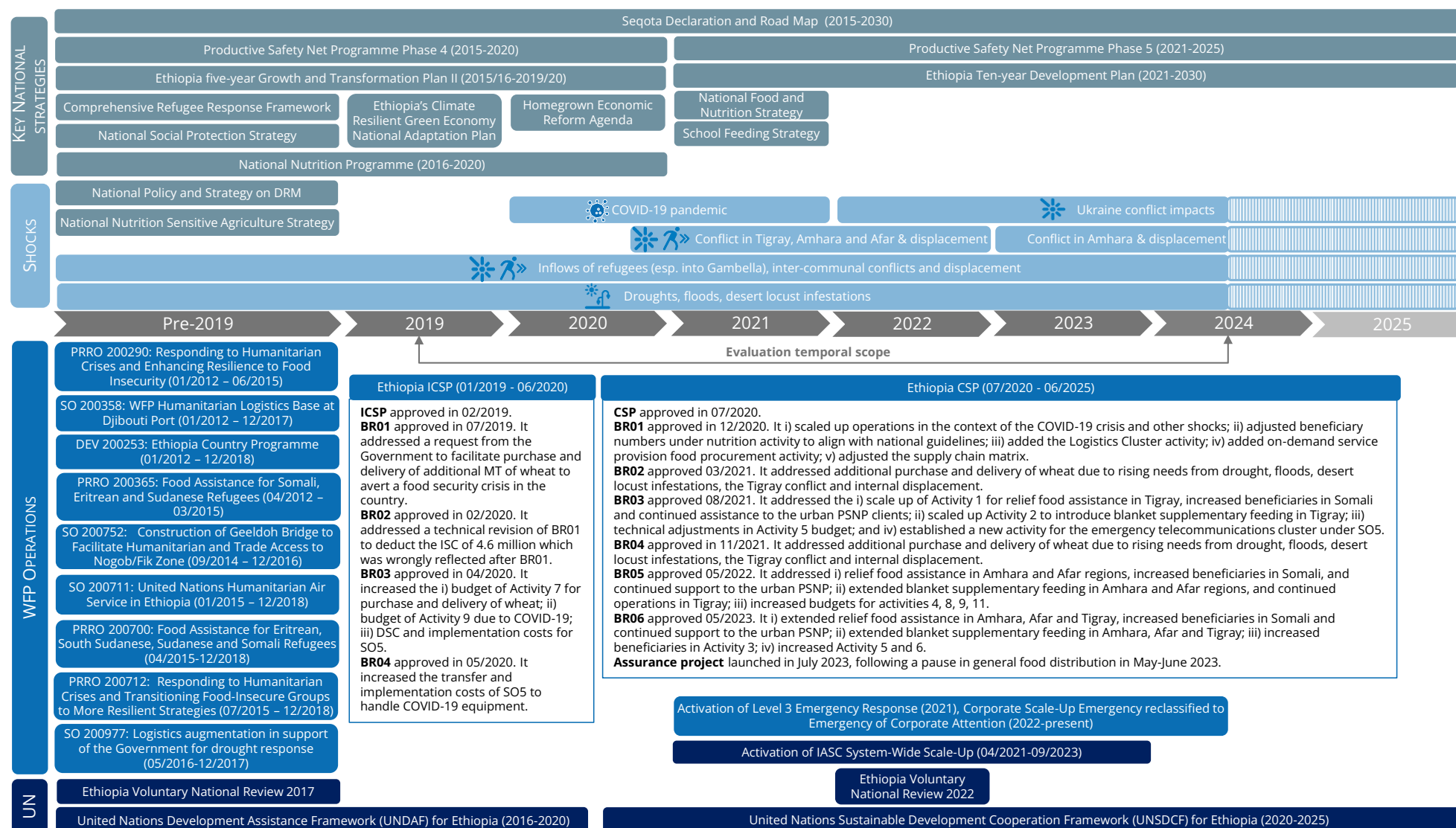
⁷² WFP. Operations database-Ethiopia. Accessed 03/11/2023.

<https://www.wfp.org/operations?f%5B0%5D=country%3A1980>.

⁷³ Annex 12 in vol 2 provides more details on the evolution of the strategic focus between the ICSP and the CSP.

⁷⁴ <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-humanitarian-system-wide-scale-activations-and-deactivations>

Figure 6: Evolution of WFP operations and changes in the external environment



Source: WFP. Operations database – Ethiopia. Accessed 03/11/2023. <https://www.wfp.org/operations?f%5B0%5D=country%3A1980>; FAO. Ethiopia – Country Profiles. <https://www.fao.org/faolex/country-profiles/general-profile/en/?iso3=ETH>. Developed by Particip. Notes: i) BR = budget revision. ii) The BR07 was issued April 2024, which is after the agreed evaluation cut-off date. It is therefore not considered in the CSPE's analysis.

Figure 7: Overview of strategic outcomes, activities, modalities and main shifts between the ICSP and CSP

	Ethiopia ICSP 2019 - June 2020	Ethiopia CSP July 2020 - 2025	Changes from the ICSP to the CSP
Crisis response	<p>SO1: Refugee and crisis-affected populations in targeted areas are able to meet their basic food and nutrition needs throughout the year</p> <p>Activity 1: Provide unconditional cash and food assistance, livelihood support and emergency school feeding to crisis-affected populations (<i>food, CBT, CS</i>)</p> <p>Activity 2: Provide nutritional support and treatment of moderate acute malnutrition to crisis-affected children aged 6-59 months, PLWG and anti-retroviral treatment and tuberculosis-directly observed treatment clients (<i>food, CS</i>)</p> <p>Activity 3: Provide unconditional cash-based and in-kind food assistance, school feeding and nutrition support to refugees and livelihood support to refugees and host populations (<i>food, CBT, CS</i>)</p>	<p>SO1: Shock-affected populations in targeted areas and refugees in camps are able to meet their basic food and nutrition needs throughout the year</p> <p>Activity 1: Provide unconditional, nutrition-sensitive, in-kind and cash-based food assistance to crisis-affected populations and transitory clients of the PSNP (<i>food, CBT, CS</i>)</p> <p>Activity 2: Support treatment and prevention of acute malnutrition for crisis-affected children aged 6-59 months and PLWG (<i>food, CS</i>)</p> <p>Activity 3: Provide unconditional, nutrition-sensitive cash-based and in-kind food assistance, school feeding and nutrition support to refugees (<i>food, CBT, CS</i>)</p>	<p>SO1: Act 1 shifted to a more explicit emphasis on nutrition-sensitive and cash-based assistance, as well as on relief beneficiaries transitioning to more durable solutions. School feeding is no longer planned under this activity.</p> <p>Act 2 continued the focus on malnourished PLWG and children but shifted away from anti-retroviral and tuberculosis treatment clients.</p> <p>Act 3 has a more explicit emphasis on nutrition and school feeding. It also excludes livelihood support to refugees, which moved to Act 5.</p>
Resilience	<p>SO2: Vulnerable and food-insecure populations are able to meet their essential food needs and establish climate-resilient livelihoods</p> <p>Activity 4: Provide safe and reliable food to primary school children and support the Ministries of Education and Agriculture in scaling up nutrition-sensitive school feeding programmes (<i>food, CBT, CS</i>)</p> <p>Activity 5: Provide conditional food assistance to chronically food-insecure households, disaster risk management solutions, economic empowerment of women and technical support to the Government for the implementation of the PSNP (<i>food, CBT, CS</i>)</p>	<p>SO2: Vulnerable and food-insecure populations in targeted areas have increased resilience to shocks by 2025</p> <p>Activity 4: Provide safe, nutritious and reliable daily meals to primary schoolchildren and support to the Ministries of Education and Agriculture in scaling up nutrition-sensitive and gender-equitable school feeding programmes (<i>food, CBT, CS</i>)</p> <p>Activity 5: Provide nutrition-sensitive social protection, climate risk management services and capacity strengthening support for smallholder farmers, pastoralists, refugees and returnees most vulnerable to climate shocks (<i>food, CBT, CS</i>)</p>	<p>SO2: Act 4 continued the school feeding modalities from ICSP (in-kind, HGSE, THRs, capacity development) and introduced a fresh food component in the HGSE.</p> <p>Act 5 has a more comprehensive and inclusive targeting approach, including refugees and host communities, farmers and pastoralists (moving away from HH level). It includes a direct reference to climate risks and social protection.</p>
Root causes	<p>SO3: Nutritionally vulnerable populations in targeted areas receive support aimed at preventing all forms of undernutrition</p> <p>Activity 6: Provide cash-based transfers for PLWG and children aged 6–23 months, combined with social and behaviour change communication, training for outreach workers and capacity strengthening for the Government in order to contribute to national efforts to reduce stunting and prevent undernutrition (<i>Food, CBT, CS</i>)</p>	<p>SO3: Nutritionally vulnerable populations in targeted areas have improved consumption of high-quality, nutrient-dense foods to prevent all forms of malnutrition through June 2025</p> <p>Activity 6: Provide cash-based food transfers to PLWG and children aged 6–23 months, SBCC to communities, training to outreach workers and capacity strengthening to the private sector and Government to contribute to national and regional efforts to reduce stunting and prevent all forms of malnutrition (<i>CBT, CS</i>)</p>	<p>SO3: Act 6 scaled up the Fresh Food Voucher project, including support to market retailers to provide nutrition-dense food and continued promoting nutrition-sensitive programming internally and externally.</p>
Crisis response	<p>SO4: Government institutions and the private sector benefit from capacity strengthening in the areas of early warning and emergency preparedness systems, the design and implementation of safety net programmes and supply chain management</p> <p>Activity 7: Provide advisory and technical services to Government and private sector for strengthening delivery platforms and national systems, including early warning and emergency preparedness systems, safety nets programme management, and supply chain management (<i>CS</i>)</p>	<p>SO4: Federal and regional government institutions, the private sector and local NGOs benefit from capacity strengthening in the areas of early warning and emergency preparedness systems, safety nets programme design and implementation and supply chain management through June 2025</p> <p>Activity 7: Provide or enable advisory and technical services to federal and regional government and the private sector for strengthening food assistance delivery platforms and national and regional systems, including social safety nets programme management, early warning and emergency preparedness systems, and supply chain solutions and management. (<i>CS</i>)</p>	<p>SO4: Act 7 puts stronger emphasis on regional and local capacities, and the private sector. More emphasis is placed on strengthening the national logistics capacity and the support for cash-based programming.</p>
Crisis response	<p>SO5: Government, humanitarian and development partners in Ethiopia have access to and benefit from effective and cost-efficient logistics services, including air transport, common coordination platforms and improved commodity supply chains (<i>service delivery</i>)</p> <p>Activity 8: Provide aviation-related services to government and humanitarian partners</p> <p>Activity 9: Provide supply chain services to government and humanitarian partners</p>	<p>SO5: Government, humanitarian and development partners in Ethiopia have access to and benefit from effective and cost-efficient logistics and engineering services, including air transport, common coordination platforms, improved commodity supply chains and information technology, through June 2025 (<i>service delivery</i>)</p> <p>Activity 8: Provide aviation and air operation services to government and humanitarian actors.</p> <p>Activity 9: Provide supply chain services to government and humanitarian partners.</p> <p>Activity 10: Provide coordination and logistics services to the humanitarian community through the Logistics Cluster.</p> <p>Activity 11: Provide on demand food procurement services to government and humanitarian partners</p> <p>Activity 12: Provide coordination and ICT services to humanitarian partners through the Emergency Telecommunications Sector</p>	<p>SO5: SOS added additional coordination and logistical, emergency telecommunications and on-demand procurement services, all activities that were added progressively over the course of the CSP (Act 10-12)</p>

Source: WFP Ethiopia ICSP, CSP and BRs. Developed by Particip.

Reconstructed theory of change

40. Neither the ICSP 2019-2020 nor the CSP 2020-2025 contained an explicit theory of change (ToC). To better understand the intended objectives and WFP strategy in Ethiopia, the evaluation team developed an overall reconstructed theory of change based on available documentation (including the (I)CSP documents) and exchanges with WFP staff (the country office, field offices and Office of Evaluation) (see summary diagram in Figure 8). During the inception phase, the theory of change was used to develop the evaluation matrix and fine-tune the methodological approach. In the data collection and reporting phases, it has served as a simplified framework to assess mostly effectiveness and coherence, but also, to some extent, relevance.

41. The ICSP 2019-June 2020 was intended to align with Ethiopia's ambition of moving towards middle-income status and the achievement of SDG 2. WFP saw the opportunity to align its role and portfolio closely with the Government's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and national priorities, and to build on the added value of WFP in supporting the humanitarian-development nexus.

42. In line with the WFP Strategic Plan, the main strategic shift of the ICSP envisaged gradually reducing the role of WFP in emergency assistance in support of the national humanitarian system ("saving lives") while increasing its support for longer-term development objectives ("changing lives"). This includes support to livelihoods and asset creation for sustainable food security in the face of recurrent shocks, strengthening national social protection and safety net systems, and technical assistance to government ministries and agencies across a broad spectrum. This required continuity in emergency support while strengthening national systems and, at the same time, supporting the Government to pursue a broad range of development priorities contributing to addressing the root causes of food crises. Specifically, the ICSP outlined five strategic outcomes, all related to SDGs 2 and 17 and contributing to the outcome pillars of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) 2016-2020, which are outlined in Figure 7.

43. The objectives and structure of the WFP strategy under the CSP July 2020-2025 represents more continuity than change – the strategic outcomes are carried over, using virtually the same language. The two-track strategy remains intact: i) emergency assistance to meet food and nutrition needs of crisis-affected populations (SO1/Activities 1-2), including refugees (SO1/Activity 3), while working through and strengthening government systems and ensuring access of government, humanitarian and development partners to logistics and engineering services (SO5/Activities 8-12); and ii) shifting focus towards longer-term development support with emphasis on addressing root causes of food crises and malnourishment (SO3/Activity 6) and strengthening resilience to shocks of food insecure and vulnerable populations (SO2/Activities 4-5), with emphasis on social protection and support to social safety nets. Nutrition-specific and school feeding activities cut across various strategic outcomes.

44. Under both the ICSP 2019-June 2020 and the CSP July 2020-2025, there are clear linkages between the WFP response strategy and government-led programmes, in particular the PSNP⁷⁵ and Government and United Nations humanitarian response plans. There is also a continuous emphasis on safety nets and capacity strengthening in the areas of early warning and emergency preparedness systems (SO4/Activity 7).

45. While the CSP makes limited differentiation in the strategy according to regions, there are significant regional differences in the profile of the assistance delivered by WFP due to the variety of vulnerable groups targeted in the different geographical contexts (see specifics on regional context in Annex 5). Moreover, the conflict that began in Tigray in November 2020 and subsequently spread to Amhara and Afar (see Figure 1) created a crisis to which WFP responded by expanding and massively scaling up its emergency activities both in Tigray and increasingly in surrounding areas as people were displaced by the fighting (the "northern Ethiopia crisis").

46. While the WFP strategy has remained largely the same between the ICSP and the CSP; CSP implementation has required significant adjustments in the face of consecutive shocks (see also section 1.2) – including six budget revisions (BRs).⁷⁶

47. Moreover, in recognition of the 2020-2022 conflict in the north, the humanitarian-development

⁷⁵ WFP provided in-kind and cash-based transfer (CBT) general food assistance to transitory clients of the PSNP. Some nutrition-specific activities (for example, fresh food vouchers (FFVs) to pregnant and breastfeeding women and girls (PBWG) and children) were designed to complement the government PSNP.

⁷⁶ BR07, issued April 2024, is after the agreed evaluation cut-off date and not considered in the CSPE's analysis.

nexus, already present in the ICSP, was broadened to include peace as part of a larger emphasis on the triple nexus among United Nations agencies. The adoption of the humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) nexus approach implies: i) incorporating conflict-sensitivity analysis and an understanding of the conflict dynamics into WFP interventions; ii) engaging in complementary actions and partnerships with other agencies, including active support for a localization approach; iii) coordinating efforts with development and peace actors; iv) adapting operational approaches, such as actively targeting vulnerable households to shift from humanitarian aid to sustainable livelihoods; and v) implementing anticipatory action and adaptive management to respond to climate change.

48. As illustrated in the theory of change diagram (Figure 8), WFP funding and institutional assets – in the form of human resources, partnerships and reputation – were deployed over 12 activities. The diagram then identifies how these activities are meant to generate the change that gives rise to outcomes related to each of the five strategic outcomes. By labelling the intermediary column “vectors of change,” the theory of change orients more closely to the process dimension of change than to static milestones in the form of outputs. Vectors of change also focus on specific groups of actors whose agency is essential to achieve transformational changes, identifiable at outcome and impact levels, which provide sustained benefits for beneficiaries. Finally, the right-most column maps WFP strategic outcomes into the relevant SDGs.

49. Contributing to the achievement of intended results is the adherence of WFP to standards, including humanitarian principles, the “do no harm” principle, accountability to affected people (AAP) and safeguarding dignity; and addressing cross-cutting issues such as GEWE (both in-house and with respect to beneficiaries), the inclusion of people with disabilities and climate change. Delivery of activities and outputs and their contribution to expected outcomes depend on the validity of several WFP-internal, WFP-external, and mixed internal-external assumptions. Examples of the first are adequate WFP human resources, procedures and processes. Examples of the second are access of WFP and its partners to populations in need of assistance (for example, in areas not under the control of the Government), adequate donor support, and the absence of exogenous shocks that disrupt the ability of WFP to effectively adapt and respond. Mixed internal-external assumptions include those related to strong partnerships with the Government and with humanitarian stakeholders; and the ability to credibly monitor outcome-level results of support.

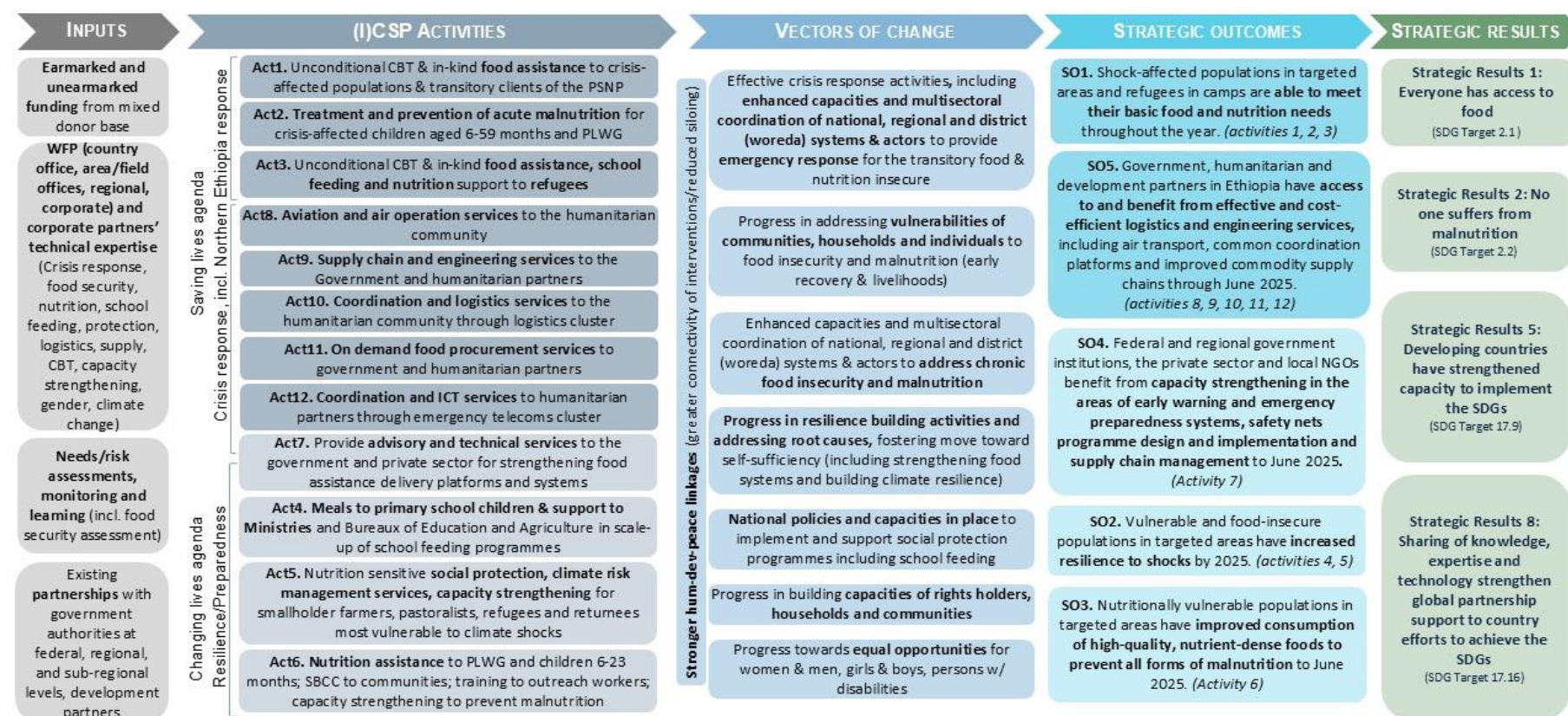
Resource mobilization

50. Table 2 in Annex 6 provides an overview of the WFP Ethiopia portfolio under the ICSP 2019-2020. Under the ICSP, the original needs-based plan (NBP) was USD 871.34 million but increased to USD 992.35 million following the fourth budget revision. While allocated resources were slightly over half (57 percent) of the adjusted needs-based plan, they were nearly fully spent (99 percent expenditure level). Under the CSP 2020-2025 (see Table 3 in Annex 6), the original needs-based plan was USD 2.59 billion but up to 31 December 2023, it increased to USD 5.05 billion⁷⁷ and allocated resources were slightly over half of this amount (57 percent) while expenditure levels reached 90 percent of allocated resources.

51. Crisis response (SO1, SO4-5) has consistently had the largest share of the budget (approximately 90-94 percent), while resilience (SO2) and root causes (SO3) remained a smaller portion (approximately 6-10 percent). Although funding levels remained relatively low across the years in relation to the needs-based plan, under the ICSP, they were highest for crisis response and lowest for root causes, while under the CSP they were highest for root causes and lowest for crisis response. Expenditures by focus areas neared or achieved 100 percent of allocated resources under the ICSP.

⁷⁷ Please note that the NBP figure of USD 5.05 billion is the sum of the CSP annual NBP figures up to 31 December 2023, and therefore not the full NBP figure of USD 6.98 billion reflected in BR06.

Figure 8: Reconstructed theory of change



Cross-cutting themes: Hum. principles; principled access; conflict sensitivity; affected populations able to hold WFP & partners accountable; protection; PSEA; safety, dignity and integrity respected; gender equality; climate change

Internal assumptions: continued emphasis on mainstreaming resilience work; adequate HR capacities; ability to adjust to shifts in context including onset of emergencies; progress on gender equality and women's empowerment and targeting people with disabilities; ongoing fostering of integration between WFP programming areas

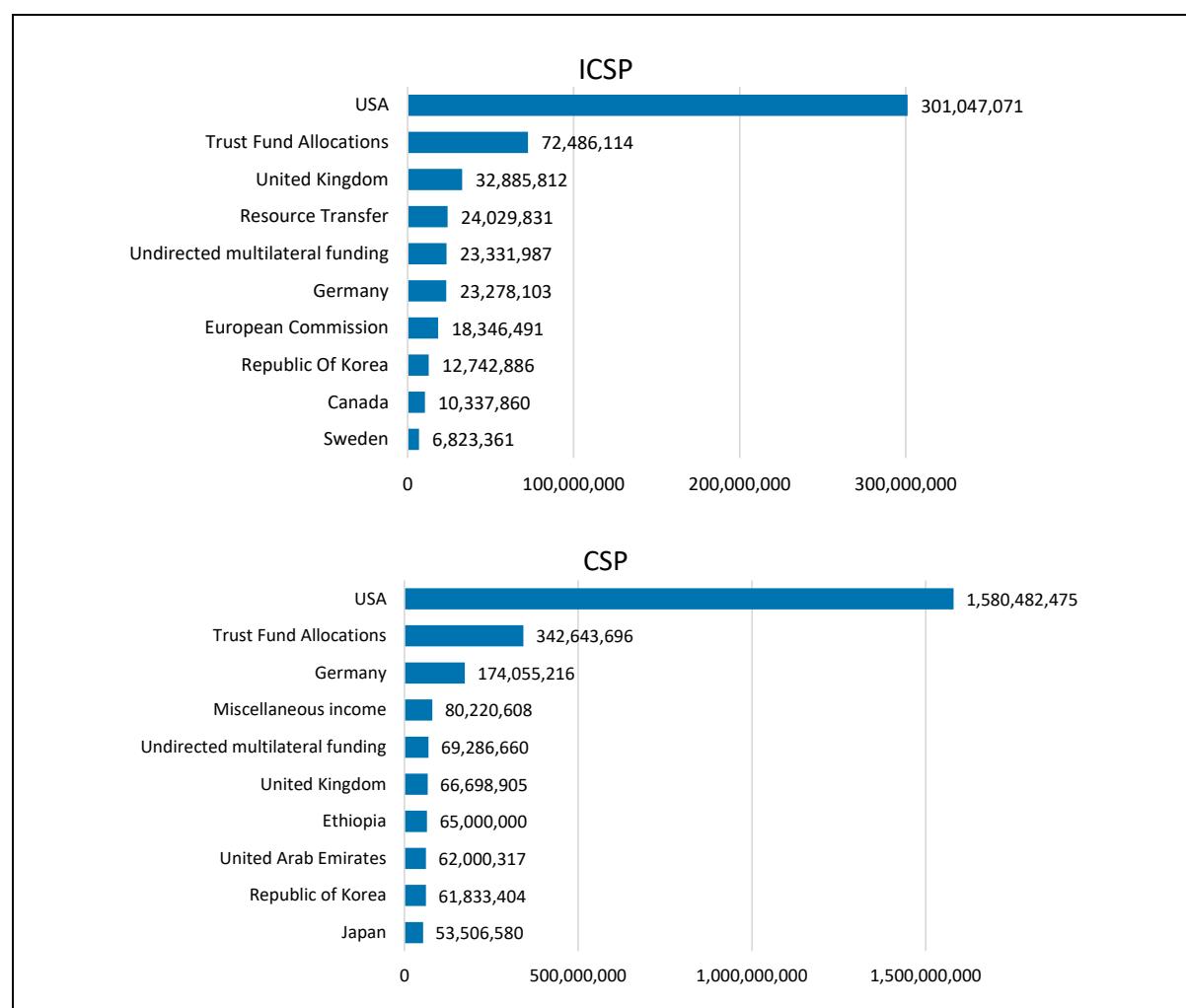
External assumptions: continuing donor commitment to adequate funding in all WFP programming areas; stable sociopolitical and economic context conducive to move from hum. to dev.; financial capacity of the gov't to sustain a large-scale social protection system; access to land for transition to resilience/development programming

Assumptions that are BOTH internal and external: effective needs analyses, targeting & monitoring of assistance (including oversight mechanisms) that informs implementation; continued access to vulnerable populations; ongoing commitment by gov't & other stakeholders to support activities and progressively take on more responsibility; strong partnerships (coordination) with key actors including the gov't, the UN system, international and national NGOs, M-D trust funds and the private sector; built capacities are put into practice

Source: Evaluation team. Note: Darker shading of activities/SO boxes represents crisis response ("saving lives" agenda) while the lighter shading represents resilience/preparedness ("changing lives" agenda).

52. Figure 9 illustrates the top funding sources for WFP Ethiopia during the period 2019-2024. The United States of America⁷⁸ was by far the largest donor (30.3 percent of the ICSP needs-based plan, 31.3 percent of the CSP needs-based plan), followed by trust fund allocations⁷⁹ as the second main funding source (7.3 percent of the ICSP needs-based plan, 6.8 percent of the CSP needs-based plan). The CSP saw a notable expansion of the donor base, with the United Arab Emirates and Japan becoming part of the top ten funding sources. Under the ICSP, 75 percent of the total funding was provided in the form of cash contributions and 25 percent provided in-kind. Under the CSP, the share of in-kind contributions slightly increased to 32 percent. Annex 6 presents more details on the share of in-kind versus cash contributions and on earmarking at activity level by donor.⁸⁰

Figure 9: Top ten funding sources for WFP Ethiopia under the ICSP and CSP (as of April 2024)



Source: WFP ICSP Ethiopia Resource Situation Report, 18.10.2021; WFP CSP Ethiopia Resource Situation Report, 03.04.2024.

53. Table 1 shows that flexibility of funding has slightly increased over the two plans but remains low

⁷⁸ Under the ICSP, 1.8 percent (5 million) of the total US funding came from the Department of Agriculture for school feeding. Under the CSP, the share decreased to 1.3 percent, while the total amount increased to 21 million, and 45 percent (715 million) of the total US funding came from the Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA), which had not existed during the previous ICSP. Source: WFP Distribution Contribution and Forecast Statistics, extracted on 2 April 2024.

⁷⁹ Trust fund allocations mainly comprise on-demand service for government wheat procurement and delivery. They also include allocations from headquarters for climate change and anticipatory action activities, plus various small activities like women economic empowerment and HIV/AIDs activities funded by UNDP, UNAIDS, IFAD etc. The government contribution under the trust fund allocations is separate from the Government's USD 65 million contribution under the CSP.

⁸⁰ Source: WFP Distribution Contribution and Forecast Statistics, extracted on 2 April 2024.

overall. While the share of multilateral contributions that were earmarked at the activity level did not notably change, funding at SDG and country levels and undirected multilateral funding that can be assigned more flexibly more than doubled between the ICSP and the CSP, however, it remained at a low level of 14.4 percent.

Table 1: Contributions by earmarking levels under the ICSP and CSP

Level of earmarking	ICSP		CSP	
	Contributions (USD)	% of total contributions	Contributions (USD)	% of total contributions
Activity	303,845,894	83.7%	1,912,069,229	82.1%
Country	21,103,918	5.8%	260,906,072	11.2%
Strategic outcome	37,957,175	10.5%	81,241,830	3.5%
SDG	-	-	30,243,618	1.3%
Flexible funding	-	-	45,210,544	1.9%
Total	362,906,987	100.0%	2,329,671,292	100.0%

Source: Source: Distribution Contribution and Forecast Stats 2024-04-02.

Performance overview

54. **Beneficiaries:** Figure 10 shows that the actual number of beneficiaries reported by WFP as assisted each year increased from 6.4 million beneficiaries in 2019 to 9.6 million beneficiaries in 2023. The numbers of beneficiaries across the 2019-2023 period were always below planned numbers. Overall, however, reported beneficiary achievement against targets (Figure 10) exceeded ICSP and CSP funding levels (Annex 6, Table 2) indicative of reduced spending per beneficiary. Women and girls represented slightly over half of planned and actual beneficiaries, ranging from 52-59 percent across 2019-2023. Children represented the largest share of actual beneficiaries reached by WFP over the years. In terms of residence status, residents represented the largest share of actual beneficiaries reached by WFP, followed by refugees, internally displaced persons and returnees.⁸¹

55. **Food transfers:** Across the 2019-2023 period, actual reported food transfers were generally, although not always, below planned values (between 26 and 100 percent), particularly for activities 4-6.⁸² In some instances, although less food was distributed than planned, beneficiaries reached still exceeded planned figures, indicative of reduced food assistance per beneficiary, explaining the reduced spending per beneficiary mentioned above. This was the case, for example, under Activity 1 in 2021.

56. **Cash transfers:** Across the 2019-2023 period, actual cash-based transfer (CBT) values were generally under-performing compared to planned values (between 17 and 23 percent).⁸³ This was particularly the case under Activity 1. More generally, the use of cash-based transfer in Ethiopia is significantly lower than in WFP operations on average and in other countries in the region.⁸⁴

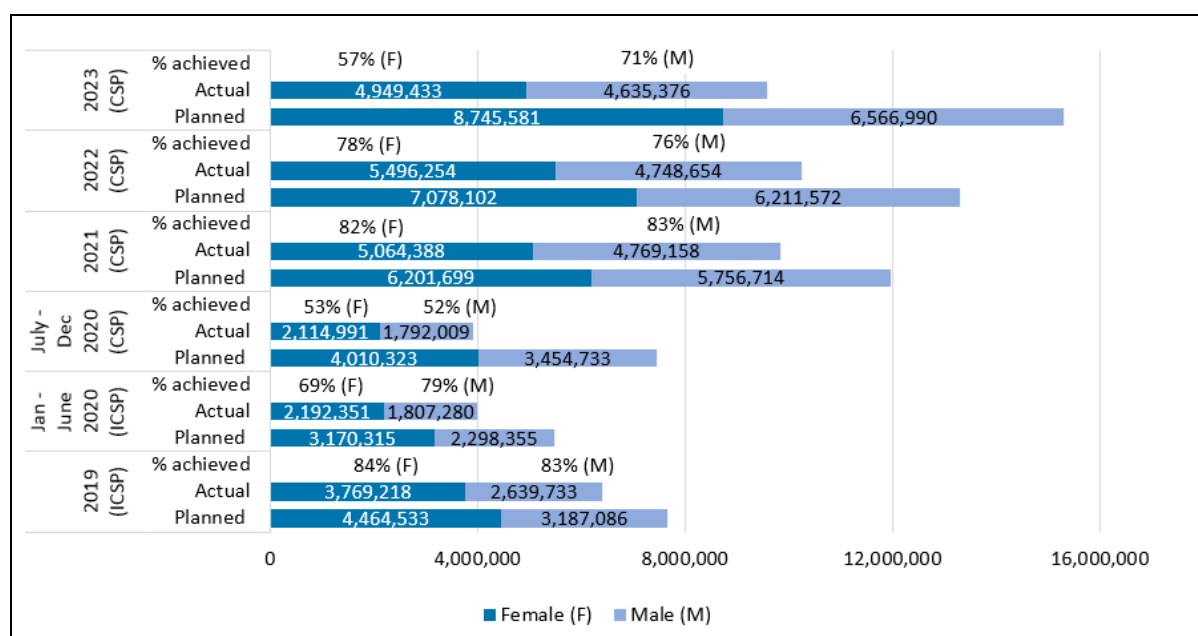
⁸¹ WFP Ethiopia annual country reports (ACRs) 2019-2023.

⁸² Ibidem.

⁸³ Ibidem.

⁸⁴ WFP Annual Performance Report 2023 states that on average CBTs accounted for 36 percent of total transfer costs in WFP operations in 2023.

Figure 10: Planned versus actual beneficiaries by gender, 2019-2023



Source: WFP Ethiopia 2019-2023 annual country reports (ACRs).

1.4. Evaluation methodology, limitations and ethical considerations

Methodology

57. The evaluation is structured around four main evaluation questions, which are approached through 15 sub-questions (see Annex 7 for more details):

- EQ1 – To what extent is the (I)CSP evidence-based and strategically focused to address the needs of the most vulnerable?
- EQ2 – What is the extent and quality of WFP's specific contribution to (I)CSP strategic outcomes in Ethiopia?
- EQ3 - To what extent has WFP used its resources efficiently in contributing to country strategic plan outputs and strategic outcomes?
- EQ4 – What are the factors that explain WFP performance and the extent to which it has made the strategic shift expected by the interim country strategic plan and country strategic plan?

58. Within these questions, the evaluation team paid particular attention to three identified key issues of interest:

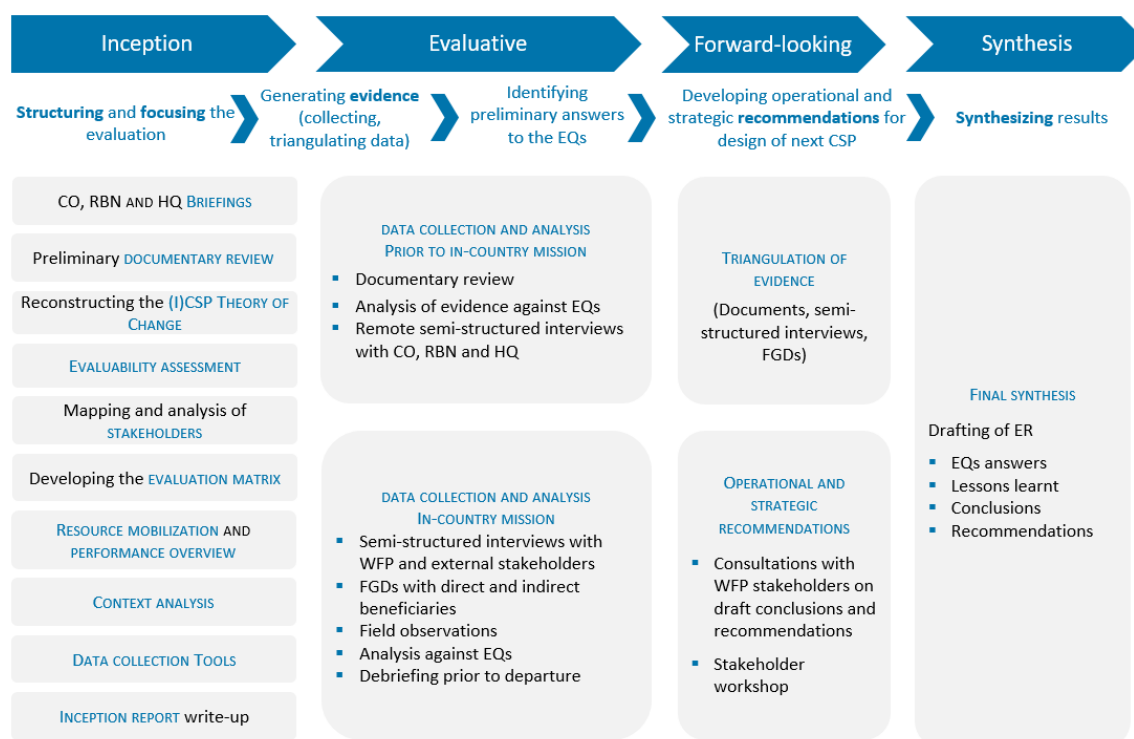
- i) **The northern Ethiopia response:** This involved a massive scale-up by WFP to meet emergency needs both in Tigray – where access was often very difficult – and increasingly in surrounding areas as people were displaced by the fighting. The response involved staff from the country office, the regional bureau in Nairobi and headquarters, and saw the scale of WFP operations in Ethiopia grow very rapidly.
- ii) **A transformative shift:** Since the introduction of the ICSP 2019-June 2020, WFP Ethiopia has aspired toward a transformative shift, moving beyond short-term humanitarian assistance toward medium- to long-term, structural and multidimensional resilience support. The evaluation assesses the adoption by WFP of humanitarian-development-peace nexus approaches⁸⁵ in addressing the root causes of various food insecurity crises.
- iii) **The aid diversion and resulting assurance project and related impacts upon programming:** Aid diversion triggered a suspension of relief assistance (activities 1 and 3) in May-June 2023, subsequent investigations (including by WFP, the Government of Ethiopia and the

⁸⁵ WFP. 2019. Triple Nexus: WFP's Contribution to Peace.

United States Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance), political pressure to initially stop and ultimately reduce contributions to the WFP budget from key donors and then the start of an assurance project to address gaps in WFP controls over targeting, monitoring and distribution. Relief assistance was subsequently resumed in a phased process with the new measures being tested and subsequently adjusted as rollout continued.

59. Figure 11 provides a summary of the CSPE key methodological elements. The evaluation's full methodology is described in Annex 8 and the accompanying evaluation matrix in Annex 7.

Figure 11: Overview of key methodological elements



Source: Evaluation team.

60. The evaluation covered the period up to the end of 2024, though outcome data were only available until the end of 2023. A theory-based approach was used, with the reconstructed theory of change as the main analytical framework for the evaluation, supported by an evaluation matrix (see Annex 7). Data collection relied on a mixed methods approach using a combination of primary and secondary data. The evaluation focused its collection of primary data on five purposefully selected regions of intervention in the country (Amhara (remote), Gambella, Oromia, Somali and Tigray, and Addis Ababa). This allowed local data collection from a broader range of stakeholders and deeper qualitative analysis, considering the specific context of each area and allowing the evaluation team to assess not only the relevance and effectiveness of different activities but also the synergies and complementarities between activities implemented in the same area.

61. Primary data collection included semi-structured key informant interviews (KIIs), focus group discussions and field observations. This was complemented by secondary data through a comprehensive desk review of existing documents (see Annex 14: Bibliography). The evaluation had a strong emphasis on community consultations to gain the perspective of communities on changing priorities and needs and whether responses have been adapted over time. Overall, 27 focus group discussions were conducted. Additionally, the methodological approach was gender-sensitive, ensuring proper representation of women and men during the stakeholders' consultations and providing women the space to speak. Of the 572 individuals consulted through key informant interviews and focus group discussions, 45 percent were women. Table 2 shows a detailed breakdown of stakeholders consulted (for further details see Annex 3: List of people interviewed).

Table 2: Stakeholders consulted during inception and field missions, by gender

<i>Stakeholder category</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Total</i>
Former and current WFP headquarters, regional bureau, country and field office staff	53	72	125
UN agencies	9	12	21
Donors	3	7	10
Cooperating partners	8	56	64
Government	1	35	36
Other	1	1	2
FGD beneficiaries	185	106	291
FGD non-beneficiaries	-	23	23
Total	260	312	572

Source: Evaluation team.

62. Quantitative and qualitative data were triangulated to validate findings by identifying recurring themes and patterns of responses across data sources and data collection methods. The evaluation team discussed preliminary findings and areas for reflection with the internal reference group during a debrief on 11 April 2024 and made a presentation of early draft findings, conclusions and recommendations at an internal CSP design workshop on 8 July 2024. Stakeholder workshops took place in September 2024 to further validate the evaluation findings and finalize the recommendations.

Limitations

63. Table 3 summarizes the limitations and mitigation measures undertaken during the evaluation process.

Table 3: Limitations and mitigation measures during the CSPE

<i>Limitation</i>	<i>Mitigation measure</i>
Remote approach in access-constrained Amhara region	The scope of Amhara's coverage in the evaluation was more limited and had a stronger focus on EQ 1 and EQ 4, due to challenges on strong evidence around EQ 2 and EQ 3. The evaluation team was transparent on the limitations of data gathering in the report.
High staff turnover and institutional memory limitations	To compensate, the evaluation team conducted interviews with former WFP employees who held key positions, staff at the regional bureau in Nairobi and headquarters, as well as national staff (where there was less turnover and greater institutional memory).
Limited reliability of reported output data, especially beneficiary and food transfers data for relief assistance, comprising general food assistance (GFA)	The evaluation team used reported beneficiary and food transfer data with caution and explicitly highlighted limitations or data issues. Qualitative interviews and FGDs with beneficiaries of GFA also provided mitigation. The evaluation team also consulted the country office monitoring team to understand how beneficiary data are collected and reported and inquired into disaggregated beneficiary and food data to receive a more granular overview of needs and response.
Limited disaggregation of quantitative data by region, particularly prior to 2021, and	The evaluation has therefore focused on national-level figures as reported in annual country reports (ACRs.)

<i>Limitation</i>	<i>Mitigation measure</i>
limited reliability of disaggregated data when available	
Inconsistent outcome data measurements and outcome data were only available until end 2023	Where applicable, the evaluation team employed qualitative data collection methods within communities to cross-reference the outcome data collected by the country office. The evaluation team specifically identified the relevant outcome indicators for further investigation across various programme activities.
Recently implemented assurance project measures	The evaluation team gathered initial data on the results, however, the evaluation team was transparent on the limitations of the analysis of WFP achievements.

Source: Evaluation team.

Ethical considerations

64. The evaluation conformed to the 2020 United Nations Evaluation Group ethical guidelines by:
- obtaining informed consent of stakeholders consulted;
 - protecting the privacy, confidentiality, anonymity and autonomy of stakeholders consulted;
 - ensuring compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation;
 - ensuring adequate representation of participants (including women and socially excluded groups);
 - considering cultural sensitivity;
 - ensuring that the evaluation resulted in no harm to participants or their communities; and
 - ensuring the independence of the evaluation team and avoiding stakeholder bias.
65. All team members were independent of WFP operations in Ethiopia and free from conflicts of interest. All consultations were confidential and used for the sole purpose of this evaluation.

2. Evaluation findings

2.1. EQ 1: To what extent is the (I)CSP evidence-based and strategically focused to address the needs of the most vulnerable?

EQ 1.1 To what extent was the (I)CSP informed by existing evidence on incidence and causes of food insecurity and malnutrition in Ethiopia, and on national capacity gaps, to ensure its relevance to needs?

Summary Finding 1. The (I)CSP was based on evidence in the areas of food security, school feeding, nutrition and agriculture (including the need for resilience and livelihood diversification, particularly in rural areas). The broad areas of action supported by WFP – continued relief for conflict-affected populations (many of whom were internally displaced persons) and refugees, nutrition, school feeding and resilience and livelihoods – were highly relevant to identified needs.

While high-level geographic targeting of support was in line with assessed food insecurity levels, areas of implementation for different actors were assigned by the Government. A major shift of WFP crisis-response support from southern to northern Ethiopia occurred as a result of needs emerging from the conflict in Tigray that broke out in November 2020 and soon spread further. The initial concentration on Somali was appropriate and WFP displayed flexibility in its ability to intervene in the north while maintaining interventions in the south, notably Somali.

The shift in emphasis from crisis response to resilience building foreseen by the (I)CSP was in line with the Government's optimistic vision of a robustly developing Ethiopia and appropriate at the time of design given recent strong economic growth and progress on human development indicators. When several large-scale crises occurred, the CSP became less relevant and WFP needed to resort to an ad hoc crisis-response mode for which it provided limited strategic guidance.

Federal and regional capacity gaps, as identified by an internal audit, were not sufficiently taken into consideration in implementation arrangements. Apart from the support to the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP), capacity strengthening activities were carried out on demand rather than based on a comprehensive capacity assessment.

66. The two (I)CSP strategies in Ethiopia were based on a solid foundation of food security and nutrition assessments produced by WFP, development and humanitarian partners, Ethiopian research institutions, the Central Statistics Agency and other government agencies. They included the Ethiopia Zero Poverty and Hunger Strategic Review, WFP periodic country- and regional-level food security assessments, country-level market assessments, regional seasonal assessments and focal studies on areas of special concern such as the drought and the impact of COVID-19. The broad areas of WFP intervention in Ethiopia – unconditional in-kind and cash assistance to crisis-affected populations and refugees, school feeding, nutrition and resilience building, were designed to respond to identified needs.

67. The (I)CSPs built on findings from the Country Portfolio Evaluation (2012-2017), which suggested that WFP should:

- focus on social protection in order to build resilience;
- specific to Somali, leverage humanitarian food assistance in order to improve access to water resources;
- increase use of cash-based transfers where feasible;
- strengthen integration between the PSNP and humanitarian food assistance;
- develop capacity in the areas of early warning, timely responses, early recovery, and food assistance and supply chain management;
- enhance accountability to affected people and mainstreaming of protection; and
- promote gender equality in the design and implementation of activities.

68. While the design of the CSP was consistent with these recommendations, by the time it was being drafted between late 2019 and early 2020 it was becoming evident that unfolding events (drought, COVID-19) would make some of the strategic recommendations of the earlier portfolio evaluation difficult to operationalize. Annex 9 contains an assessment of progress towards addressing the recommendations of the evaluation.

69. Despite progress made in Ethiopia (for example, declining rates of wasting and stunting, as well as increased agricultural yields)⁸⁶ both the ICSP and CSP recognized persisting problems of chronic food insecurity and malnutrition, especially in rural areas. Accordingly, they focused on some of the most vulnerable groups in the country, such as women and children, internally displaced persons and refugees (see paragraphs 16-25 above for a summary of national baseline conditions in food security, nutrition, and agriculture). WFP aimed to simultaneously support the Government's ambitious development goals (for example, achieving middle-income status by 2025 or expanding school feeding nationwide) while continuing to respond to acute and chronic humanitarian needs and vulnerability to shocks. This was appropriate at the time, given Ethiopia's record of strong economic growth and promising development progress.⁸⁷ The strategy intended to strike a balance between addressing "the immediate short-term needs of refugees, internally displaced persons and other food-insecure and undernourished people" while also foreseeing "a gradual expansion and intensification of resilience and livelihood diversification initiatives along the humanitarian-development-peace nexus."⁸⁸

70. The focus on resilience and livelihoods was linked to its anticipated potential for reducing long-term dependence on unsustainable levels of humanitarian assistance. WFP aimed to implement an approach that linked short-term food and humanitarian assistance ("saving lives") with longer-term sustainable interventions focusing on social protection, home-grown school feeding, diversification of livelihoods and food production at the household and community level ("changing lives").⁸⁹

71. The high-level geographic targeting foreseen by the CSP was relevant to needs.⁹⁰ Prior to November 2020 and the outbreak of the conflict in Tigray – which soon spread to neighbouring regions – WFP in-kind and cash relief assistance (Activity 1), reached over two million beneficiaries in 2019 and 2020 and was focused on Somali and eastern Oromia, the first suffering from periodic incidents of acute drought and the second hosting a large number of internally displaced persons.

72. Geographic targeting of activities addressing acute malnutrition (Activity 2), was based on a bi-annual government-led assessment and prioritization approach, which, given the collaboration on data analysis with partners, is overall regarded as reliable. The approach gives priority to areas with the highest level of acute malnutrition, with WFP targeting health centres in hotspot Priority 1 *woredas*. Nevertheless, WFP budget constraints occasionally prevented targeting of all hotspot Priority 1 areas as planned. In these cases, further prioritization was carried out in collaboration with the Government and the nutrition cluster. Another challenge in reaching hotspot Priority 1 areas was inaccessibility due to conflicts (western Tigray and parts of Amhara and Oromia). In pastoralist areas (Afar and Somali), WFP introduced mobile teams which, based on maps with pastoralists movements, were following the pastoralists. Under the ICSP, WFP had also targeted patients treated for HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis, but this support was discontinued under the CSP due to changes in donor and government priorities.

73. Geographic targeting of nutrition activities addressing chronic malnutrition (Activity 6) was based on prevalence of stunting and focused on Amhara, Afar and Somali regions. Within regions, *woredas* were selected based on Seqota classification or government priorities. In 2019, WFP launched the fresh food voucher (FFV) project in Amhara, which at that time had the highest stunting level in Ethiopia.

⁸⁶ CSP, p. 16.

⁸⁷ Ethiopia progressed steadily from 0.29 to 0.5 on the HDI between 2000 and 2019 – then made no further progress between 2019 and 2022, the last year of data availability. Source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1236824/human-development-index-of-ethiopia/#:~:text=In%202022%2C%20Ethiopia%20scored%20almost,was%20recorded%20from%202000%20onwards.>

⁸⁸ As stated in paragraph 43, the transition from ICSP to CSP represented more continuity than change. Virtually the same language is found on p. 2 of the ICSP. See also paragraphs 41-47 for a ToC perspective on WFP strategic positioning.

⁸⁹ WFP. 2023. Food Security at the Humanitarian-Development Nexus – A Bridging Strategy for People Transitioning from Food Aid to Resilience.

⁹⁰ Targeting at household and community levels is dealt with under EQ 2.1, as are issues of high-level geographic targeting related to school feeding, nutrition and resilience and livelihoods.

74. Geographic targeting of school feeding (Activity 4) was based on a government-led process that identified the regions with highest levels of food insecurity, gender disparities and school dropout. Within the regions identified, WFP then targeted the most food-insecure and conflict-affected *woredas*, among the EDRMC hotspot Priority 1 and 2 *woredas* based on a joint selection with state-level bureaux of education (BoE). School selection is done consultatively with the regional bureaux and their local-level structures, including the *woreda* education offices. One challenge in targeting is that donors often specify their regions of interest, which do not always align with government and WFP priorities. These geographic restrictions can prevent WFP and the Government from prioritizing regions or *woredas* that may be more in need than others. Apart from this, in general schools appear to be targeted based on their needs although there are also constraints at the school level as discussed under EQ 2.1.

75. Geographic targeting of resilience interventions was based on assessments carried out by the food security cluster, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ethiopia Disaster Risk Management Commission and the Ethiopia Central Statistical Agency, based on vulnerability and the recurrence of shocks (linked to climate change) and covered Oromia, the southern nations, the Nationalities and Peoples' region (SNNPR), Amhara, Somali, Tigray, Afar, and Gambella regions. Using guidelines only recently developed, geographic areas for intervention are determined in consultation with the Government, including the Ministry and Bureaux of Agriculture and Natural Resource Development (BoANRD). Some partner United Nations agencies felt that WFP supports production based on food needs but does not sufficiently assess all aspects of the value chain that is being supported.

76. Beginning with the COVID-19 pandemic and culminating with the outbreak of conflict in the north, the CSP provided limited strategic guidance. The number of people in need of humanitarian assistance increased dramatically in 2021 and, in response, WFP expanded its assistance for crisis-affected populations to reach approximately 6.3 million beneficiaries, adding Tigray as well as Amhara and Afar to the regions it focused on, while no longer providing assistance in Oromia, a decision based on the need to prioritize in view of shortage of resources. Similarly, the Ministry of Education requested that WFP re-engage in school feeding in Tigray and Amhara in response to the conflict. Geographic donor earmarking helped to ensure that relief assistance in Somali continued while the conflict in Tigray was at its peak, but it also somewhat limited the independence of WFP to decide where to shift assistance in the country based on relative needs (see paragraphs 175-176).

77. The assignment of geographical areas of implementation among different actors for crisis response (activities 1 and 3) was a government-led process, with the different operators (JEOP, WFP and the Government) having "traditional" areas of focus, such as WFP in Somali. In view of the need to expand relief assistance in new "non-traditional" regions in response to the northern Ethiopia crisis, the Government invited WFP into selected regions. The specific issue of reliance on needs estimates by the Government for crisis response and humanitarian assistance (Activity 1) is discussed under EQ 1.2 below. Food security assessments are WFP-led and analyse data collected from a sample of households within selected geographical areas. Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) was suspended in 2021 and interlocutors of the food security sector indicated that this was a weakness.⁹¹ Running throughout the needs estimation were data quality issues due to the Government's reliance on outdated harvest estimates and population data (the latest census dates back to 2007) and high, fluctuating rates of internal displacement.

78. Geographic targeting of refugees was decided by the Government and informed by discussions with WFP and UNHCR, with WFP providing assistance to all refugees based in camps in Afar, Benishanguli Gumuz, Gambella, Oromia, south Ethiopia, Somali and Amhara regions. Similarly, for internally displaced persons, the geographic areas for WFP to target were decided by the Government, informed by analysis from the food security cluster and, within that, discussions with WFP and JEOP. Targeting was particularly challenging when refugees and internally displaced persons moved, for example to different parts of Tigray during the conflict or from Somali to Oromia.

79. Despite some efforts to identify capacity gaps of partner government agencies at federal and

⁹¹ In 2021, the Global Steering Committee published, over the objections of the Government, the results of an updated food insecurity assessment in Tigray and the neighbouring regions of Afar and Amhara. This resulted in suspension of the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) process. See the FAO 2022 Evaluation of the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) Global Strategic Programme (GSP).

regional levels, important gaps remained related to activities 1 and 3, as reported in the 2020 internal audit. WFP did not take comprehensive steps to address them.⁹² WFP did actively participate in multilateral processes such as the clusters and meetings with JEOP and the Government. But in terms of moving toward action, WFP delivered assistance in certain areas or supported the government or JEOP via the On-Demand Services mechanism; for example, providing transport or procuring wheat when the Government itself had no capacity to do so. Apart from supporting PSNP, where WFP conducted a capacity needs mapping and created an inventory of the available staff and their skill sets, no other capacity assessments were carried out.⁹³

EQ 1.2 To what extent was the (I)CSP aligned and coherent with national policies and priorities, wider United Nations frameworks and response plans, and planned to include appropriate strategic partnerships based on WFP's comparative advantage in Ethiopia?

Summary Finding 2. Overall, the (I)CSP was closely aligned with government policies and priorities, United Nations frameworks and plans and WFP corporate strategies and policies. The division of roles and responsibilities between WFP and the Government, particularly in the area of crisis response and humanitarian assistance with the Government managing needs assessments, targeting and distribution of assistance and WFP procuring and delivering food led to high risks. This operational arrangement, which had been in place for many years, entailed inadequate controls to prevent aid diversion and impaired the ability of WFP to ensure that its assistance reached the most vulnerable.

WFP assistance built on strategic partnerships, including with other United Nations agencies, in areas such as nutrition and school feeding. Resilience activities were aligned with the ambitious development priorities of the Government and the United Nations system, however, while WFP presents itself in the ICSP as straddling humanitarian assistance and development support, it has not yet been able to convince donor partners. These see the comparative strength of WFP in humanitarian assistance and some expressed concerns that the agency's strategy of making the transition to resilience and livelihoods resulted in WFP spreading itself too thin.

80. Both the ICSP and CSP aligned, strategic outcome by strategic outcome, with multiple national policies and strategies and government geographic priorities.⁹⁴ The overarching government planning framework relevant to the ICSP was the second Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP II) 2015/2016 to 2019/2020.⁹⁵ At the time of drafting the CSP, the overarching government planning frameworks were the Ten-Year Perspective Plan 2020-2030 and the Three-Year Homegrown Economic Reform document (largely focused on private-sector development as an engine of growth). At a more disaggregated level, the CSP mentions the National Social Protection Strategy 2016 (implemented largely by the PSNP), the Disaster Risk Management Policy 2013 (through which it is hoped to use resilience as a way of reducing dependence on relief), the National Nutrition II Policy 2016-2020 covering multiple sectors, and the Climate-Resilient Green Economy Initiative of 2011. The (I)CSP strategic directions and planned activities were consistent with this policy environment. A remaining question is whether the (I)CSP's strong alignment with national policies and priorities was entirely appropriate, given the Government's optimistic vision expressed in those policies despite the fragility of the context (see also EQ 1.3).

81. In the area of crisis response (activities 1 and 3), there was strong alignment of the (I)CSP with national policies and priorities as well as wider United Nations frameworks and response plans, such as the annual joint Government-UN Humanitarian Response Plan (to which WFP contributes and which serves as the basis for initial WFP needs-based planning) and the related UNHCR Country Refugee Response Plans, as well as to the National Comprehensive Refugee Response Strategy 2018-2027 aiming at eventual integration of refugees into host communities. WFP has recently developed a transition strategy for Ethiopia: "Food Security at the Humanitarian-Development Nexus – A Bridging Strategy for People

⁹² Internal audit of WFP operations in Ethiopia, Internal Audit Report AR/20/05, February 2020.

⁹³ WFP 2023. ACR. Ethiopia.

⁹⁴ The CSP enumerates (pp. 11-12) nearly 20 government strategies, policies, and initiatives, with all of which the CSPs five strategic objectives are consistent. Referring again to paragraph 43, there are few differences in strategic direction between the ICSP and CS.

⁹⁵ National Planning Commission. 2016. Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia: Growth and Transformation Plan II (GTP II) (2015/2016-2019/2020). Available at <https://ethiopia.un.org/sites/default/files/2019-8/GTPII%20%20English%20Translation%20%20Final%20%20June%2021%202016.pdf>.

Transitioning from Food Aid to Resilience". Although the preparation of this transition strategy should be appreciated, it provides limited guidance on how the transition from food aid to resilience is to be achieved. Such guidance is particularly needed for the refugee camps, where refugees have received food aid for decades, for example, in the Gambella, Somali, and Oromia regions and where discussions between WFP, UNHCR and the Refugees and Returnees Service (RRS) have not yet led to an agreement on the way forward. WFP worked in close partnership with the Government (especially the EDRMC and RRS), for crisis response and refugees, respectively. This partnership was based on a mutual understanding that the comparative advantage of WFP lay in procuring and delivering food and the Government was better placed to assess needs, target beneficiaries under Activity 1, and distribute the food to the targeted households (with the notable exception of Tigray, where WFP conducted an independent assessment and distributed aid through non-government organizations). The uncovering of aid diversion raised the question whether the advantages in convenience, low implementation costs and harmony obtained from operating through government channels were not at the expense of effectiveness and donor trust in getting intended assistance to those who needed it most. While WFP provided training on vulnerability-based targeting to EDRMC at the national as well as at the regional and local levels, this was an insufficient measure to address any potential flaws of the implementation mechanism. The major partnership shift – from implementation of humanitarian assistance through the Government to cooperating partners following the discovery of aid diversion – was not a strategic decision but an assurance measure.

82. As documented in the recent inter-agency humanitarian evaluation (IAHE) of the response to the crisis in northern Ethiopia, the humanitarian country team was dysfunctional in the region.⁹⁶ Without singling out WFP for specific criticism, the evaluation reports on disputes within the humanitarian country team on the approach to take towards engagement with the Government, and the complex dynamics involved in engaging with different parties to the conflict.

83. Perceptions of the WFP comparative advantage between the organization and major international development partners interviewed diverge. WFP presents itself as in a "unique position in the United Nations system in straddling both humanitarian and development spheres." (ICSP, page 9). International partners view the comparative advantage of WFP in access, logistics and supply chain (Activities 8-12; critical to forging partnerships and contributing to almost all crisis response and humanitarian assistance activities), and in its ability to scale up implementation of unconditional food assistance (once government approval has been obtained) in a crisis – all areas more relevant to humanitarian assistance.

84. WFP nutrition activities (activities 2,3,6) are all coherent with and supportive of the national sector policies and priorities, specifically the Food and Nutrition Policy, the National Nutrition Programme, the Food System Transformative Agenda, and the Seqota Declaration Initiative. Nutrition activities were aligned with and embedded in the national health system, with provision of nutrition prevention and treatment in health posts. In line with the global UNICEF and WFP Partnership Framework,⁹⁷ there has been a strictly defined and well-functioning division of labour with UNICEF; WFP focusing on moderate acute malnutrition and UNICEF on severe acute malnutrition and related division of labour in the national health system (health posts) and in the nutrition centres in refugee camps. WFP contributed substantially to the national work on nutrition through extensive collaboration with government structures at federal and sub-regional levels. The collaboration with the Ministry of Health was pivotal as this is the main agency coordinating government sectors (health, agriculture, education, women and children affairs) under the Seqota Declaration. WFP furthermore established private-public partnership with the financial sector and fresh food suppliers in relation to the fresh food voucher.

85. School feeding under Activity 4 is implemented in close collaboration with the Ministry of Health and the regional bureaux, with WFP providing support to the most food insecure and conflict-affected areas, thereby significantly contributing to the national work on school feeding. The contribution to school feeding, including also the HGSP programme to which WFP has seconded a staff member, was highly appreciated by the Ministry of Education. WFP supported the Ministry of Education to launch school feeding in Ethiopia in 1994 and has maintained a very strong and collaborative relationship ever since, even before establishment of the secondment. WFP staff also highlighted the very strong partnerships with all regional bureaux of education.

⁹⁶ IAHE Report, Executive Summary, p. 8.

⁹⁷ UNICEF WFP Partnership Framework, Addressing Wasting in Children Globally, 2020.

86. WFP operations supporting resilience (Activity 5) were aligned with the ambitious development priorities of the Government and the United Nations system, as well as WFP corporate policy. The objective of transitioning people in need from humanitarian assistance to self-reliance is aligned with the humanitarian-development-peace agenda for Ethiopia calling for a different way of working in Ethiopia and for the consideration of climate change, drought and reducing vulnerability to shocks more sustainably, addressing root causes and drivers. For resilience building and climate change (Activity 5), WFP has sought to work in a complementary manner with other United Nations agencies such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the World Bank. WFP has good partnerships with government institutions and United Nations agencies for its resilience and capacity-building interventions, but these agencies have limited financial resources. WFP has focused on developing joint proposals with FAO, International Funding for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and UNDP. The four agencies developed a joint proposal for the Green Climate Fund based on the comparative advantage of each agency. For WFP this included its geographical presence, its logistics capacity and its ability to assemble quickly the right team of experts at the regional level. While stakeholders of the agencies confirmed increased collaboration over time, they also indicated that the collaboration was not well defined and that support from the management of the three Rome-based agencies would be helpful. While United Nations agencies have come together to identify gaps and assess complementarity, interviewees in-country reflected a perception that WFP does not sufficiently consult with others during design or implementation of some initiatives.

EQ 1.3 To what extent is the (I)CSP design internally coherent and based on a clear theory of change articulating WFP's role and contributions in Ethiopia in a realistic manner and duly considering assumptions and risk underlying intended change processes?

Summary Finding 3. While there was no explicit theory of change underlying either the ICSP nor the CSP, the evaluation team had no difficulty reconstructing this based on documentation and interviews. The implicit logical structure was consistent at the time the CSP was designed. However, several assumptions turned out to be over-optimistic; specifically, peace and stability (including macroeconomic stability), government financial capacity to sustain a large-scale social protection system and adequacy of monitoring and targeting systems. Risks were correctly identified, but their scale was underestimated, and the mitigation measures were insufficient.

87. As neither the ICSP nor the CSP contained a theory of change, this was reconstructed by the team based on document review and interviews (see Figure 8).

88. The internal coherence of the (I)CSP is strong in its articulation of the roles and contributions of WFP in humanitarian assistance. Where the underlying logic is weaker is in its weighting of assumptions and risks regarding humanitarian needs and potential further crises. Both the ICSP and CSP specify assumptions in their logframes and contain risk analysis sections setting forth mitigation measures. The CSP section on risk management identifies many of the risks that WFP was actually confronted with including: conflict and insecurity, large-scale drought, lack of sufficient and timely donor funding, structural and governance gaps that can undermine accountability for, and the transparency of, food assistance operations and government capacity gaps – especially to manage food distributions at the *woreda* level, and potential fraud and corruption. However, the risk of politicization of aid had not been identified.

89. At least three key assumptions proved, in the course of events, to be over-optimistic:

- The sociopolitical and economic stability necessary for the strategic transition from humanitarian to development support. “No one could have predicted ...” was a refrain in interviews, suggesting insufficient political economy analysis and failure to take into account the significant risk of extreme events.
- The financial capacity of the Government to sustain a large-scale social protection system: aspirations to develop a nationally funded comprehensive safety net have been challenged by the macro-economic crisis.
- Adequate targeting and monitoring systems (including oversight): Targeting and monitoring systems were found to be inadequate (see paragraph 2177 for more details).

90. The weakness was not the failure to identify risks, but to recognize their probability and impact,⁹⁸ and propose (and implement) appropriate avoidance or mitigation measures. The fact that risk-mitigation measures proposed in the CSP are generic and frequently begin with: “Continue to,” is an indication that WFP was not foreseeing any fundamental changes in its way of operating to address the anticipated risks.⁹⁹ On fiduciary risks (for example, fraud and diversion; a subject taken up in more detail under EQ 2.1), the CSP simply enumerates progress in mitigation measure so far, with no reference to further strengthening these in the future. This suggests a potential “business as usual” approach to risk.

91. The WFP division of responsibilities with the Government persisted, despite the fact that the risks were known. An internal audit of WFP operations in Ethiopia that focused on the period 1 January 2018 to 30 June 2019 made reference to the strong authority exercised, and commensurate deference expected, by the Government. It describes WFP assistance as “exclusively in partnership with government agencies, within defined boundaries, with strong implications for autonomy of action and enforcement of key standards of accountability and risk management.” A follow-up internal audit covering the period 1 June 2021 to 31 August 2022 also noted the central role of the Government in the humanitarian and development areas leading to “significant residual operational risks given that beneficiary targeting, registration and identity verification were outside WFP’s perimeter of control” showing that no significant progress had been made since the previous audit.

EQ 1.4 To what extent has WFP’s strategic positioning remained relevant throughout the implementation of the ICSP and CSP, and how well prepared was WFP to respond to consecutive and compounding crises in Ethiopia?

Summary Finding 4. While WFP demonstrated flexibility to respond to emerging needs and adjusted the (I)CSP through multiple budget revisions, the main thrust of (I)CSP strategy – the transition from humanitarian to development orientation – fell victim to unanticipated events, particularly during the CSP period. The (I)CSP did not prepare WFP to respond to these setbacks and crisis-mode ad hoc adjustments needed to be made.

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 crisis response and efforts to prepare for an eventual scale-up prior to the corporate emergency activation were insufficient.

92. WFP was largely prepared to respond to consecutive and compounding humanitarian crises when they did break out, which is a testament to its organizational adaptability including at regional and headquarter levels. WFP was able to adapt its strategic positioning over the course of the CSP, with the many budget revisions ensuring ongoing adjustments to the evolving situation in the country (see EQ 4.1 for budget revisions).

93. Nevertheless, at the early stages of the northern Ethiopia conflict, the country office did not anticipate, or prepare for, adaptation to a large-scale humanitarian crisis, as indicated in multiple interviews with WFP staff and other key stakeholders directly involved in the response. An exception is supply chain, for which contingency plans were in place when the decision to activate an emergency response was made.

⁹⁸ For example, the CSP anticipates (p. 16) that Activity 1’s beneficiary numbers will drop, between 2020 and 2025, by 600,000 “as investments in resilience increase and stronger linkages are made to livelihood intervention,” when in fact they rose dramatically. Similarly, the drafters anticipated a drop in Activity 3 beneficiaries due to anticipated benefits of resilience interventions for both refugees and host populations. Yet, as illustrated by the need for multiple budget revisions, beneficiary needs rose and, as underlined in multiple interviews, the anticipated decrease in need for GFA has not occurred. The Office of the Inspector General Internal Audit Report AR/23/07 noted that, even in the face of steadily rising humanitarian needs, CSP assumptions on a future decline in the number of persons in need of support were maintained.

⁹⁹ Examples on strategic risks (pp. 36-37 CSP): Maintain emergency preparedness and response capacity; Contribute to the strengthening of associated capacities among government counterparts; Contribute to contingency planning efforts by the humanitarian community; Continue to diversify its donor base and seek flexible and multi-year funding. Examples on operational risks: Continue to focus on strengthening government capacities at all levels (federal, regional, zonal and *woreda*) in programme management, performance monitoring and reporting; Continue to work closely with the Government, other United Nations agencies and NGOs with a view to engaging partners at the national, regional and local levels in the promotion of humanitarian access and the protection of staff and assets.

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 with the ensuing activation of the corporate emergency response, WFP did not sufficiently prepare for scaling up its operations in Tigray, for example, by deploying more emergency staff to what had been, until then, a small development-orientated office in Tigray. Nor did it increase crisis response staff capacities at the country office level or pre-position commodities or ensure sufficient storage capacities in neighbouring areas in anticipation of responding to the humanitarian crisis that subsequently unfolded in Tigray.

94. However, even given the magnitude of the conflict that transpired in Tigray, WFP was not able, according to its General Rules and Regulations,¹⁰⁰ to scale up its response before the Government had requested WFP to operate there. The IASC system-wide scale-up mechanism learning paper clearly highlights that, with the request in place, WFP was the first United Nations organization to scale up its response.¹⁰¹ Some partner agencies did declare some form of expansion of operations and became active in Tigray in an emergency mode soon after the outbreak of conflict in late 2020, though others waited until after the IASC scale-up activation.¹⁰² Some United Nations agencies interviewed critiqued WFP for a perceived lack of a more immediate scaled up response.

95. There are questions about the extent to which the (I)CSP reflected a realistic appraisal of the situation in Ethiopia (see also EQ 1.1 and EQ 1.3). It was ambitious, and described as “aspirational” by one external stakeholder. Unfolding events, specifically the northern crisis, overwhelmed these aspirations, forcing WFP to engage in a large-scale humanitarian response that the CSP was never meant to guide.

2.2. EQ 2: What is the extent and quality of WFP’s specific contribution to (I)CSP strategic outcomes in Ethiopia?

EQ 2.1 To what extent did targeting of assistance ensure that the communities and individuals most vulnerable to food insecurity and malnutrition were being reached and no one was left behind?

Humanitarian response, including nutrition and school feeding – saving lives

Summary Finding 5. Targeting of unconditional relief assistance failed to ensure that the most vulnerable were reached due to low reactivity of targeting to changing needs, WFP providing insufficient oversight of the government-led targeting process and the flawed nature of the process itself. The system put in place by the assurance project has largely corrected these weaknesses, but the process is ongoing. Treatment and prevention of malnutrition for crisis-affected children and pregnant and breastfeeding women and girls (PBWG) is well coordinated with the government-led assessment and prioritization of hotspot areas. Although insufficient funding prevents WFP from targeting all hotspot 1 areas, prioritization is agreed upon within the cluster and based on highest needs.

Targeting for unconditional cash-based and in-kind assistance to refugees was based on refugee status but, despite ongoing partner discussions, has not yet been further refined to focus on the most vulnerable refugees. Nutrition and school feeding were targeted at all schoolchildren, pregnant and breastfeeding women and girls and children under 5 in refugee camps; however, blanket supplementary feeding for moderate acute malnutrition prevention has been phased out based on resource constraints.

96. Under Activity 1, crisis response and humanitarian assistance, the targeting process for beneficiaries relied on a combination of administrative and community-based targeting. The targeting approach was multi-level and involved multiple actors, led by an EDRMC-headed joint committee. But the targeting committees were weak or even sometimes inactive, while there was a lack of oversight to prevent the targeting lists being manipulated at the *woreda* and *kebele* (village) levels. Final distribution was managed by regional government authorities at the *woreda* and *kebele* levels with weak independent

¹⁰⁰ WFP General Regulations, General Rules, Financial Regulations, Rules of Procedures of the Executive Board, June 2022

¹⁰¹ IASC system-wide scale-up mechanism, From protocol to reality: lessons for scaling up collective humanitarian responses, February 2024.

¹⁰² Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation of the Response to the Crisis in Northern Ethiopia, May 2024. As the report notes, WFP declared the crisis a corporate emergency in March 2021, so before the April 28 IASC decision but considerably after the outbreak of conflict (see page 58 of the report).

monitoring.¹⁰³ There were weaknesses particularly related to targeting the most vulnerable and especially internally displaced persons. Due to continued movements, there was great uncertainty regarding the number of internally displaced persons. As noted by the internal audit in 2023, the targeting and registration procedures meant that WFP had insufficient oversight and assurance about the accuracy of assessed needs and eligibility of recipients with the system being subject to high fraud and aid diversion risks.¹⁰⁴ Additional concerns raised in interviews included low reactivity of government targeting to changes in needs, which, given the dynamic nature of food insecurity, weakened WFP responsiveness to contextual shifts. The effectiveness of targeting could also be limited by the fact that those targeted may, depending on social and cultural contexts, have shared the assistance delivered with other, less vulnerable, households, or, conversely with excluded vulnerable households. This latter point was raised by multiple key informant interviews, especially in relation to Somali.

97. The evaluation was not able to establish the magnitude of the aid diversion in WFP operations and related inclusion or exclusion errors based on the available data and reports, and hence the overall magnitude of the problem.

98. The assurance project, triggered by the discovery of aid diversion, introduced a stronger targeting (as well as distribution and monitoring) approach. The new targeting approach is vulnerability-based and builds upon the Government's seasonal social safety net (PSNP) approach, in which beneficiaries are selected based on a number of vulnerability criteria (including gender) in order to qualify for assistance. Internally displaced persons in camps must satisfy at least 2 out of the 15 criteria established for vulnerability-based targeting.¹⁰⁵ The system is complemented by a digital identity management system that was still being rolled out at the time of data gathering for this evaluation. Several interviewees noted that the criteria were adapted to different implementation contexts within Ethiopia in order to take into account regional specificities. Importantly, the development of the targeting approach involved a community-led and participatory process, which increases buy-in to it. Overall, interviews with WFP and cooperating partners indicated that the system is now stronger and that targeting is greatly improved.

99. The targeting of Activity 2 treatment and prevention of malnutrition (MAM) for crisis-affected children and PBWG is based on screening of children and PBWG for moderate acute malnutrition in the targeted health centres and is thus appropriate. Some areas are inaccessible to humanitarian actors for security reasons. At the time of the mission, western Tigray, and a few areas in Amhara and parts of Oromia were inaccessible. When areas became safe, WFP started operating again.

100. Unconditional cash-based and in-kind food assistance to refugees (Activity 3) involved a blanket (that is, status-based) approach, with identification requiring ration cards as well as eye- and fingerprint scans that have been progressively rolled out over the period of the (I)CSP and are now in place in all camps. Interviews and field visits indicated that the system is strong at identifying refugees who, once identified, almost always receive assistance. There is a robust recourse process in place for those who feel they have been wrongfully denied refugee status. However, not all refugees are equally vulnerable (for example, some receive remittances). In a context of declining resource levels, WFP along with UNHCR has thus proposed that the Refugees and Returnees Service identify and target the most vulnerable refugees; that is to say, a needs- as opposed to status-based approach. Discussions have been ongoing over several years, but so far, no concrete progress has been made due to disagreements about if and how to move forward.

101. Targeting of nutrition support to refugees for moderate acute malnutrition prevention has been provided through blanket supplementary feeding (BSF) while moderate acute malnutrition treatment is provided through targeted supplementary feeding, where enrolment is based on screening. Critical funding shortages starting in 2022 forced WFP to prioritize children under 2, while excluding children aged 24-59 months. After discussion with UNHCR and the Refugees and Returnees Service, WFP decided to phase out blanket supplementary feeding assistance in all refugee camps and instead target participants based on

¹⁰³ Office of the Inspector General, Internal Audit Report AR/23/07, July 2023, p. 4: "Distribution rounds planning, warehousing and distributions to beneficiaries are also led by the Government. The insufficient segregation of duties between these processes resulted in increased vulnerabilities, including fraud risks, in the final distribution ('last mile') to beneficiaries. Because of the longstanding capacity and performance issues of regional government partners at distribution points and poor connectivity in the field, WFP's last mile application was not systematically used."

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 15.

¹⁰⁵ All vulnerable IDPs are covered under Activity 1, whether they are in camps or non-camp settings.

screenings, except for camps with newcomers (Sudanese and Somali refugees in Dolo Zone, Bokh area), who receive blanket supplementary feeding for two months upon arrival. This is expected to start mid-2024. Malnourished individuals in host communities in regions with a high prevalence of acute malnourishment, for example Somali, are expected to be targeted through Activity 2 screening. In areas with a low prevalence of malnourishment, moderately malnourished PBWG and children from host communities living in close proximity to the refugee camps are included in the moderate acute malnutrition programme in the refugee camps.¹⁰⁶

102. Activity 3 school feeding in refugee camps targeting is based on a blanket approach including all children attending schools located in the camps.

Resilience – Changing lives

Summary Finding 6. Targeting of school feeding is based on a joint selection of schools by WFP and bureaux of education, with a focus on reaching schoolchildren in the most food insecure areas. Nutrition interventions are designed to contribute to national efforts on prevention of malnourishment and target PBWG and children (6-23 months) in PSNP or relief-supported households in priority *woredas*. Activity 5 (resilience, including nutrition-sensitive social protection) targeted both transitory households and vulnerable and non-labour-constrained households through community-level participatory targeting, alongside government consultation – considerations for targeting relief beneficiaries have only been introduced with the assurance project.

103. The Activity 4 School feeding targeting is based on government-led geographic targeting strategies at federal, regional and *woreda* levels with a focus on reaching schoolchildren in the most vulnerable areas (see EQ 1.1). WFP and the bureaux of education jointly select the schools for WFP interventions in the targeted regions based on the food security situation, degree of community engagement, quality of *kebele* administration and road accessibility. A challenge encountered has been reaching targeted schools, particularly in Afar and Amhara, that are not accessible by motor vehicle. WFP has established alternative transport arrangements (for example, pack animals) for transportation of food and non-food items. However, monitoring and regular oversight of these schools remains difficult.

104. Activity 6 nutrition interventions to reduce stunting and prevent malnutrition are embedded in the national work on prevention of malnourishment by improving dietary diversity. Beneficiaries targeted with fresh food vouchers and social behaviour change communication (SBCC) in priority *woredas* are PSNP or relief-supported households with PBWG and children (6-23 months),¹⁰⁷ which is found to be appropriate. As a complementary measure, retailers are targeting with capacity strengthening to market nutrition-dense food to ensure these can be purchased with fresh food vouchers.

105. Activity 5 resilience targeted both transitory households and vulnerable and non-labour-constrained households to be supported on a path toward self-reliance. Groups targeted included smallholder farmers, agropastoralists and pastoralists. However, considerations for targeting relief beneficiaries under resilience have only been introduced as part of the assurance project, under which WFP has developed new targeting procedures for livelihood rehabilitation and self-reliance activities (see also paragraph 86). WFP and cooperating partner staff confirmed that the new guidelines were informed by lessons from resilience projects implemented so far including, but not limited to, the R4 Rural Resilience Initiative in Ethiopia;¹⁰⁸ the main difference with earlier periods is the more explicit link being made between transitioning of relief beneficiaries to resilient households, and seeking to foster synergies and complementarities with existing WFP and other stakeholders' interventions.¹⁰⁹ Emphasis is placed on those who can succeed, focusing on farmers, pastoralists, but also, for example, community members with the capacity to set up their own business, who then become part of the village savings and loan associations (VSLAs).

¹⁰⁶ Information from WFP.

¹⁰⁷ The FFV support consists of different interventions funded by different donors: 1) The KfW Development Bank (2018-2024) targeting PSNP and locust-affected households in Amhara, Afar and Somali regions; 2) France (2023) relief top-up in Somali; 3) Austria (2022-2023) relief top-up in Amhara; and 4) the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) (2023-2024) top-up for PSNP clients in Amhara.

¹⁰⁸ WFP. 2022. R4 Rural Resilience Initiative in Ethiopia. Mid-Term Review 2021. February 2022.

¹⁰⁹ WFP. 2024. Targeting Consideration for the Resilience Scale-up.

106. Livelihood resilience activities comprise two categories: those benefiting the entire community (for example, community assets, irrigation schemes, training) and those directly benefiting targeted households or individuals (for example, income-generating activities, provision of agricultural inputs). Selected participants for the latter must meet specific criteria to receive one of three packages: an agricultural package, a livestock package, or an income-diversification package. These packages serve as entry points to enhance livelihoods and establish sustainable, resilience-focused, climate-adapted food systems. Targeting and registration is a joint exercise carried out by the Government, the cooperating partners, WFP and communities. Participants within *kebeles* are selected based on the following criteria: i) vulnerability or food security; ii) willingness and motivation; iii) households that can't be enrolled in any other programme including PSNP; iv) households headed by women; and v) permanent residency.¹¹⁰ Community-level assets – for instance irrigation systems – are selected through a consultation process with authorities and communities. Beneficiaries participating in community asset-creation activities are identified through a community selection process based on transparent selection criteria. Feedback from site visits and focus group discussions indicated that community members perceived the selection process as fair, mainly when all vulnerable households in selected geographic areas were targeted.

EQ 2.2 To what extent did WFP activities and outputs contribute to the expected outcomes of the (I)CSP? Were there any unintended outcomes, positive or negative?

SO1. Shock-affected populations in targeted areas and refugees in camps are able to meet their basic food and nutrition needs throughout the year

107. Under SO1, WFP aimed at meeting short-term food and nutrition needs of crisis-affected Ethiopians (activities 1 and 2) and refugees living in camps (Activity 3), with a particular focus on children and PBWG. Foreseen activities comprised the provision of unconditional cash-based transfers and in-kind food assistance (under activities 1 and 3) and support for the treatment and prevention of acute malnutrition (activities 2 and 3) as well as crisis response school feeding (Activity 3). SO1 further aimed at strengthening the capacity and systems of national disaster risk management and health authorities.

SO1/Activity 1: General food assistance

Summary Finding 7. WFP provided significant levels of in-kind and, to a much smaller extent, cash assistance to crisis-affected populations, with a massive expansion of operations in the northern regions as needs rose dramatically in 2021 and 2022. However, limited oversight of the targeting and distribution process meant that WFP had poor overall visibility on whether the assistance reached intended beneficiaries, a concern that was further exacerbated when aid diversion was discovered.

In the face of pipeline breaks, WFP aimed to sustain coverage levels with reduced assistance, rather than opting to prioritize a lower number of beneficiaries with sufficient levels, with ration cuts leading to significant negative impact on beneficiaries. Challenges in delivering planned rounds of assistance were linked to severe access constraints in the northern Ethiopia response.

CSP aspirations for scaling up cash-based assistance were not realized, often remaining below 10 percent of planned levels, even in regions and settings with more conducive conditions.

WFP outcome monitoring shows that targets for improving food consumption were largely not achieved over the course of the (I)CSP, likely linked to the problems encountered. The suspension of relief assistance between June and October 2023 had notable negative impacts on food security. Despite shortcomings, recipients of assistance reported that it helped them to meet their food needs, particularly when combined with other forms of assistance, however, they also highlighted that a wider variety of food would be required and commodities needed to be better aligned to local diets.

108. Under Activity 1, WFP aimed at meeting short-term food and nutritional needs of crisis-affected populations, internally displaced persons, and transitory clients of the PSNP by providing unconditional cash-based transfers and in-kind food assistance. Activity 1 further aimed at strengthening the capacity and systems of the EDRMC at the federal, regional and local levels in order to increase the Government's share of the humanitarian response plan and to enhance the efficiency of relief interventions.

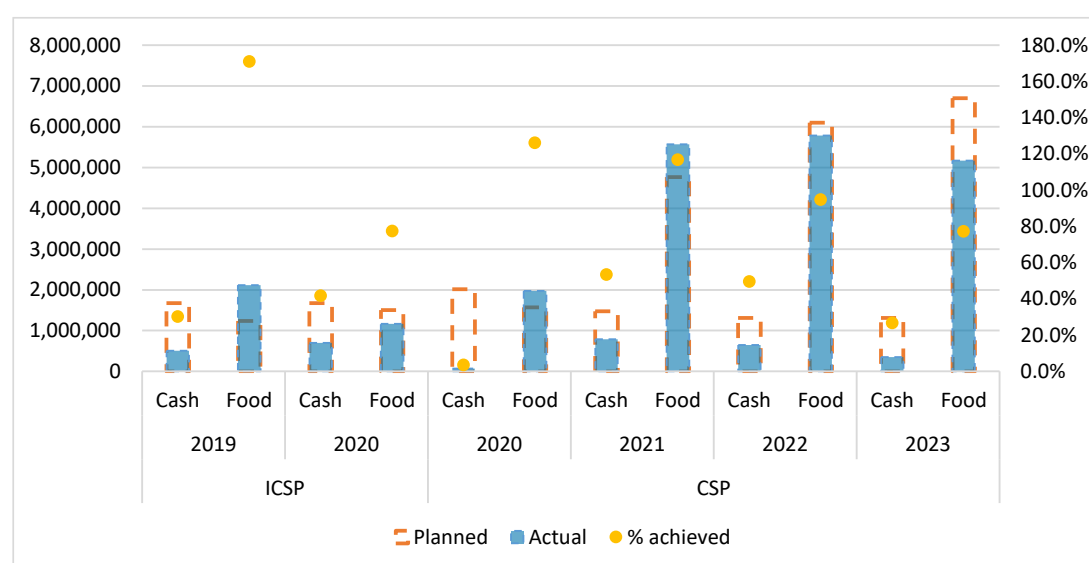
109. While WFP provided unconditional cash-based transfers and in-kind food assistance under the

¹¹⁰ WFP. 2024. Targeting and Registration Strategy.

(I)CSP, there are uncertainties and caveats attached to the extent to which this assistance systematically reached people in need. This is because of the inability of WFP to verify beneficiary identities at the household or individual levels and gaps in output reporting by government partners, as established by the 2023 internal audit.¹¹¹ Reported beneficiary figures and quantities of food distributed are thus not fully reliable. Additional data issues include concerns regarding: i) the limited disaggregation of WFP quantitative data by region, particularly prior to 2021; and ii) the reliability of data disaggregated by region when available. The evaluation was therefore constrained to rely on national-level figures as reported in annual country reports, supplemented with qualitative information gathered through key informant interviews and focus group discussions.

110. The reported number of actual versus planned beneficiaries reached by WFP by year is shown in Figure 12 by modality.¹¹² No significant inequalities between numbers of men and women reached were observed (see Annex 6 for gender disaggregated figures). WFP deserves credit for continuously delivering assistance to respond to multiple crises during the period, from COVID-19 to natural disasters including drought, flooding and insect infestations, which increased beneficiary numbers and impacted negatively upon access (for flooding) and its ability to rapidly scale up, especially in 2021 and 2022. This scale-up was driven by the trebling of estimated persons in need from the levels in 2019/2020, and the expansion of the WFP relief assistance to new geographic areas in the north of the country due to the outbreak of conflict, where it was frequently faced with access challenges. Simultaneously WFP continued to deliver assistance in large quantities in its other regions of focus and particularly Somali.

Figure 12: SO1/Activity 1 planned versus actual beneficiaries by modality, 2019-2023



Source: ACRs 2019-2022 and COMET reports R020 and R030 for 2023 figures. Note: the figures for ICSP 2020 correspond to the months of January to June, while the figures for CSP 2020 correspond to the months of July to December.

111. While in-kind assistance showed a trend of strong though declining overachievement in terms of number of beneficiaries reached versus plans since 2019, for cash-based assistance, shares of beneficiaries reached fell far behind plans. Yet these data must be treated with caution in light of concerns about targeting mechanisms ensuring assistance was reaching the most vulnerable (see also EQ 1.1) and concerns about quality of needs estimates underlying planned beneficiary numbers (see paragraph 77).

112. In 2019 and 2020, actual quantities of in-kind assistance delivered met or exceeded plans (see Figure 13), but since 2021, quantities delivered have fallen short of plans despite high funding levels, with donor geographic earmarking and late confirmation of contributions reported proving contributory factors (see EQ 4). In response, WFP reduced the amount of in-kind assistance (that is, the ration size) per beneficiary from late 2021 onwards. In addition, WFP often managed to achieve only six to seven rounds of assistance out of eight scheduled distributions of relief assistance per year, and even less in Tigray during

¹¹¹ WFP. 2023. Internal Audit of WFP Operations in Ethiopia. Office of the Inspector General, Internal Audit Report AR/23/07.

¹¹² There may be double-counting because some beneficiaries received both forms of assistance.

the northern crisis due to severe access constraints and in recent years due to late release of official figures on needs. A further drop to only around 20 percent of planned food assistance delivered in 2023 is linked to the suspension of distributions in June (see also EQ 4.1).

113. In the face of pipeline breaks, WFP aimed to sustain coverage levels of beneficiaries while providing reduced rations, rather than opting to prioritize a lower number of beneficiaries with higher levels of assistance. Key informant interviews and focus group discussions in Gambella and Somali regions indicated that ration cuts had a significant impact on beneficiaries leading them to adopt coping strategies. Some of these coping strategies were positive, for example, supplementing assistance with employment income to “top up” WFP assistance (or, the other side of the coin, perhaps demonstrating that assistance was not needed in the first place). However, others were negative, including sharing (especially in Somali), taking children out of school to seek work or supplement household production, incurring high levels of debt and begging). Thus, even those receiving these lower volumes of assistance did not benefit from increased food security. The unpredictability of assistance, and delays in its delivery, in particular related to the conflict context in Tigray, also impeded results.

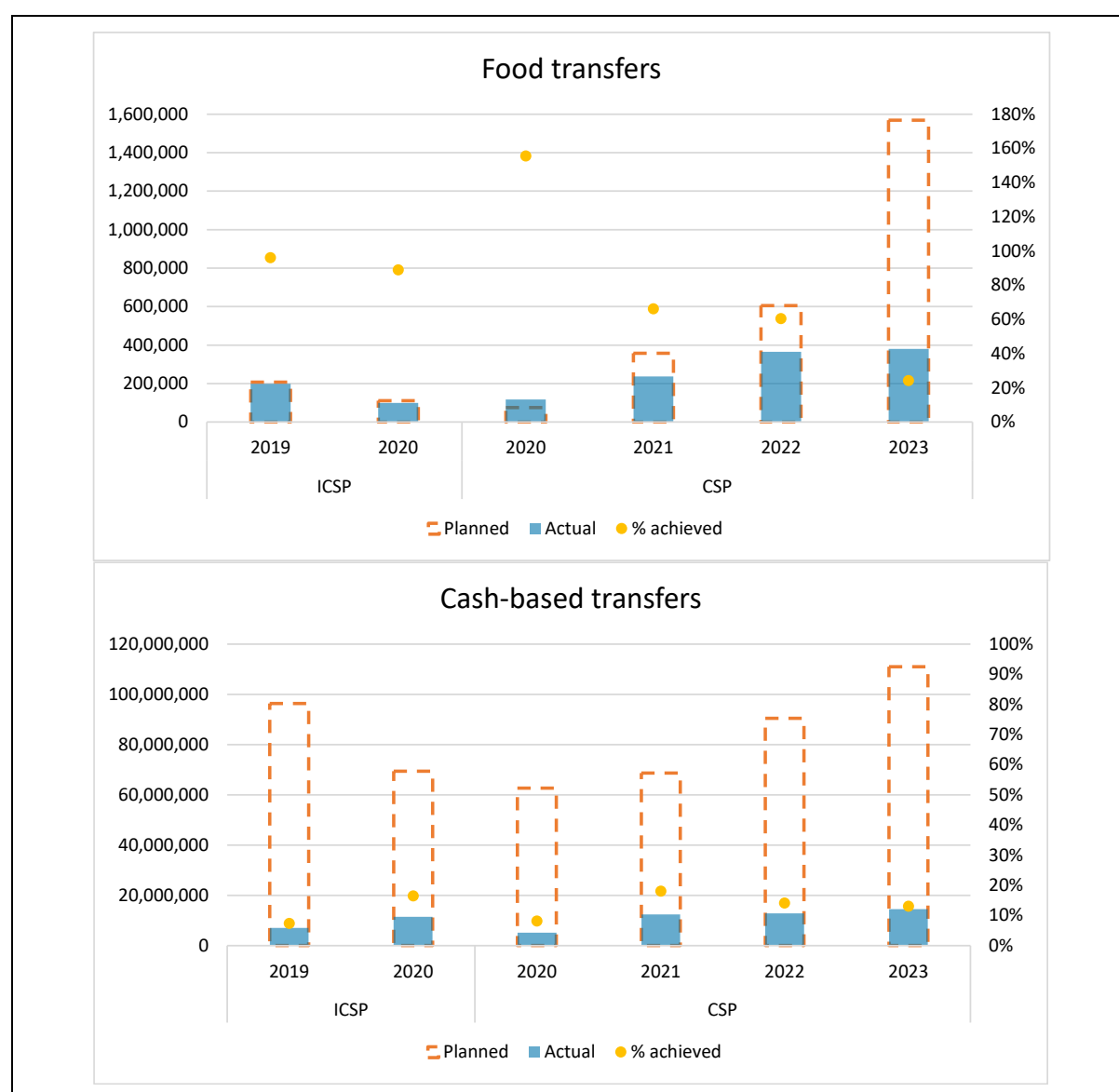
114. Key informant interviews and focus group discussions in Tigray, Somali and Gambella as well as country-level interviews with WFP and government actors, showed that despite the challenges encountered, assistance was perceived to help shock-affected populations in targeted areas to meet their basic food and nutrition needs. Beneficiaries, many of whom were internally displaced persons, in all regions where data were gathered by the evaluation team (Tigray, Gambella, Oromia and Somali), indicated in focus group discussions that the quality of the food assistance was positively assessed. However, beneficiaries were critical about the mix of food commodities provided, with some observing that they needed a wider variety of foods; and key informant interviews with WFP and government stakeholders pointed out that the food basket often included wheat grain, which is not a food typically consumed by Ethiopians and which furthermore had to be milled by the recipients.¹¹³

115. As shown by Figure 13, CSP aspirations for scaling up cash-based assistance were not realized, with actual versus planned only once (in 2021) exceeding 20 percent and often remaining below 10 percent, even in those regions and settings where this would be feasible (reasonable access to mobile telephony, ATMs, access to markets, etc.). Many donors voiced support in-principle for the move toward cash assistance, though some preferred to retain the in-kind modality – including the CSP’s largest donor.

116. WFP underestimated the time required for the transition toward this modality. The ambitious goals in the CSP were also not supported by a feasibility study, and the country office, long rooted in in-kind assistance, had little exposure to the options and opportunities for cash-based transfers. COVID-19-related disruptions in WFP and partners’ work also impeded modality change and, according to interviews, WFP also encountered some resistance to cash from beneficiaries due to the amount provided being less than the resale value of in-kind food assistance. The need for registration and beneficiary identity management through the corporate system SCOPE, despite significant progress on digitalization, also led to delays in the intended modality switch. SCOPE registration remained largely at the pilot stage in selected areas for switching to cash and was not sufficient for the national rollout anticipated by the CSP. Efficiency consequences of the difficulties encountered in scaling up cash are discussed under EQ 3.2.

¹¹³ An observation that relates to the dominance of wheat provided by the WFP principal donor, as observed in multiple KIIs with WFP and other partner organizations.

Figure 13: SO1/Activity 1 planned versus actual food (mt) and cash-based (USD) transfers, 2019-2023



Source: ACRs 2019-2023. Note: the figures for ICSP 2020 correspond to the months of January to June, while the figures for CSP 2020 correspond to the months of July to December.

117. Outcome monitoring and reporting by WFP for Activity 1 indicators was not consistent across the ICSP and CSP period and hence little can be said about trends in achievement. Data show persistent underachievement of food consumption score targets (see Table 4), likely linked to the reduced volumes of assistance provided and their lack of consistency.

Table 4: SO1/Activity 1: Food consumption scores for Ethiopia, 2019-2023, and for Afar, Amhara, Somali and Tigray, 2021-2023

	Target	Follow up	% Achieved	Target	Follow up	% Achieved	Target	Follow up	% Achieved
	2019 (ICSP)			Jan - Jun 2020 (ICSP)			Jul - Dec 2020 (CSP)		
Ethiopia	≥86.90	73.3	84%	>86.9	56.6	65%	≥70	37.2	53%

	Target	Follow up	% Achieved	Target	Follow up	% Achieved	Target	Follow up	% Achieved
	2021 (CSP)			2022 (CSP)			2023 (CSP)		
Afar	>65.3	75.2	115%	>65.3	17.9	27%	≥25.7	17.6	68%
Amhara	>92.5	82.4	89%	>92.5	90.9	98%	≥73.6	28.8	39%
Somali	≥65	27.5	42%	≥56.6	10.2	18%	≥36.4	34.8	96%
Tigray	>83.1	17.6	21%	>83.1	9.7	12%	≥27.9	44.6	160%

Source: ACRs 2019-2023. Note: the figures for ICSP 2020 correspond to the months of January to June, while the figures for CSP 2020 correspond to the months of July to December.¹¹⁴

SO1/Activity 2: Crisis-affected populations malnutrition prevention and treatment

Summary Finding 8. Though the scale of nutrition activities increased during the ICSP-CSP, coverage could not keep pace with the sharply increasing needs triggered by the prolonged severe drought in southern and south eastern Ethiopia, food price inflation and the conflict in the north. While available funding more than doubled, between 2019 and 2022 this was not sufficient to fully meet the increased needs. Further rising needs in 2023 and a decline in funding, as compared to 2022, meant that WFP was forced to reduce the number of beneficiaries assisted and withdraw from certain *woredas*, significantly decreasing programme coverage and discontinuing malnutrition prevention activities. WFP managed to adapt the provision of nutrition assistance in response to the northern Ethiopia crisis and, while assistance was seen to have positive effects, maintaining nutrition status was seen as challenging given overall poor food security.

Overall, recovery rates of treated individuals demonstrated that the treatment of moderate acute malnutrition was effective.

118. Under Activity 2, WFP aimed at meeting the short-term nutrition needs of crisis-affected Ethiopian children aged 6-59 months and PBWG by supporting the treatment and prevention of acute malnutrition. Activity 2 was further aimed at supporting the implementation of integrated management of acute malnutrition in the Government's health system by targeting health posts in hotspot 1 *woredas* by providing prevention and treatment for moderate acute malnutrition clients and conducting capacity strengthening for the Ministry of Health and its partners.

119. Under the ICSP, WFP provided specialized nutritious food to malnourished PBWG and children aged 6-59 months and ready-to-use-supplementary food and fortified blended food to other malnourished people, including patients undergoing antiretroviral therapy (ART) treatment and tuberculosis directly observed therapy (TB-DOT). Caregivers received SBCC. With the launch of the CSP, the support to PBWG and children and SBCC were continued, whereas the support to HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis patients was discontinued (see paragraph 99 in EQ 2.1 for more details). WFP provided nutrition capacity strengthening to the Ministry of Health and other partners over the course of the ICSP and CSP. This included training to Ministry of Health and non-governmental organization staff on the new national protocol for managing acute malnutrition (widening the admission criteria for children 6-59 months and extending the treatment duration for PBWG to six months). In 2021, WFP together with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) provided capacity strengthening to the Ministry of Health on integrated management of wasting at health centres.¹¹⁵

120. Figure 14 shows the planned versus actual number of beneficiaries under Activity 2 during the ICSP and CSP, disaggregated by gender (but aggregated for women and children).¹¹⁶ As seen from the figure, the targets were met (or exceeded) during the ICSP, except for girls and women in 2020. In contrast, targets

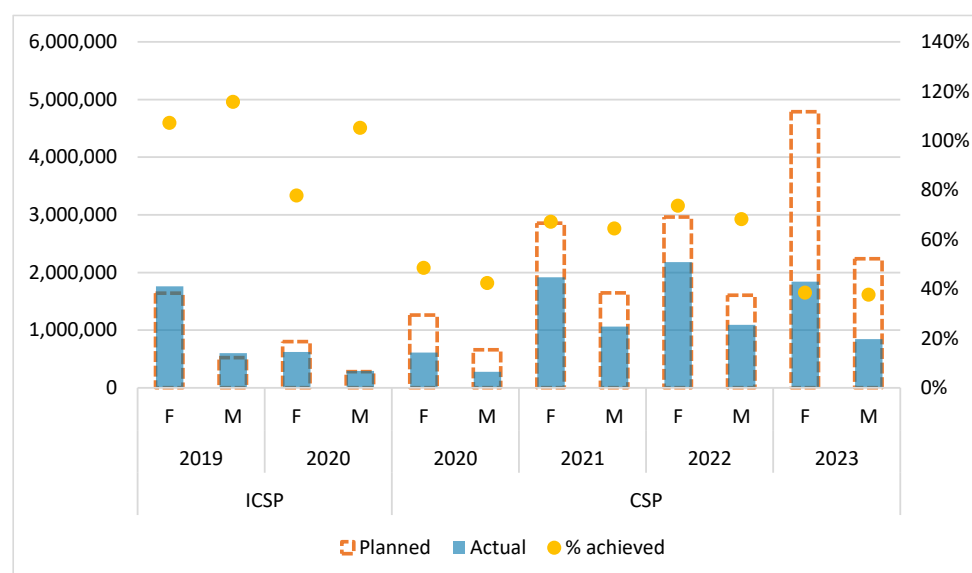
¹¹⁴ Note: no disaggregated data were available for other regions, including for the other regions visited by the evaluation team (Gambella and Oromia).

¹¹⁵ WFP. 2019- 2022. ACR Ethiopia.

¹¹⁶ Disaggregated data for ART and TB-DOT clients in ICSP are not available.

were not met for any of the years of the CSP; for some years (2020 and 2023), achievement was below 50 percent. This underachievement is largely due to a more than three-fold increase in planned beneficiary numbers; from 2.16 million in 2019 to 7.03 million in 2023.¹¹⁷ This increase was due to worsening nutrition indicators triggered by the prolonged severe drought in southern and south eastern Ethiopia, food price inflation, and the conflict in the north (see section 1.2. While available funding for Activity 2 more than doubled, from USD 81 million in 2019 to USD 207 million 2022 (see Annex 6, Table 8), this was not sufficient to fully meet the increased needs.

Figure 14: SO1/Activity 2: Planned versus actual beneficiaries by gender, 2019-2023



Source: ACRs 2019-2023. Note: the figures for ICSP 2020 correspond to the months of January to June, while the figures for CSP 2020 correspond to the months of July to December.

121. Nutrition needs continued to increase in 2023 and WFP provided nutrition support in seven regions: Afar, Amhara, Oromia, SNNPR, Somali, Sidama and Tigray. A decline in funding as compared to 2022, meant that nutrition activities were only funded at 47 percent against the annual requirement in 2023 (see Annex 6, Table 8). In consequence, WFP was forced to reduce the number of beneficiaries assisted and withdraw from certain *woredas*, decreasing programme coverage of the population in need of malnutrition treatment by 35 percent and discontinuing malnutrition prevention activities. Annual country reports provide clear evidence that the percentage of moderate acute malnutrition cases reached by treatment services (coverage) decreased during the evaluation period.¹¹⁸ The reduction in programme coverage was clear in Somali, where the visited health post in Barisa had not received specialized nutritious food for treatment of moderate acute malnutrition since August 2023, since other *woredas*, primarily in Amhara, had been prioritized due to experiencing higher levels of acute malnutrition due to drought and conflict. Health officials and cooperating partners in Oromia stated that delays in starting moderate acute malnutrition treatment were causing children and women to become severely acutely malnourished.

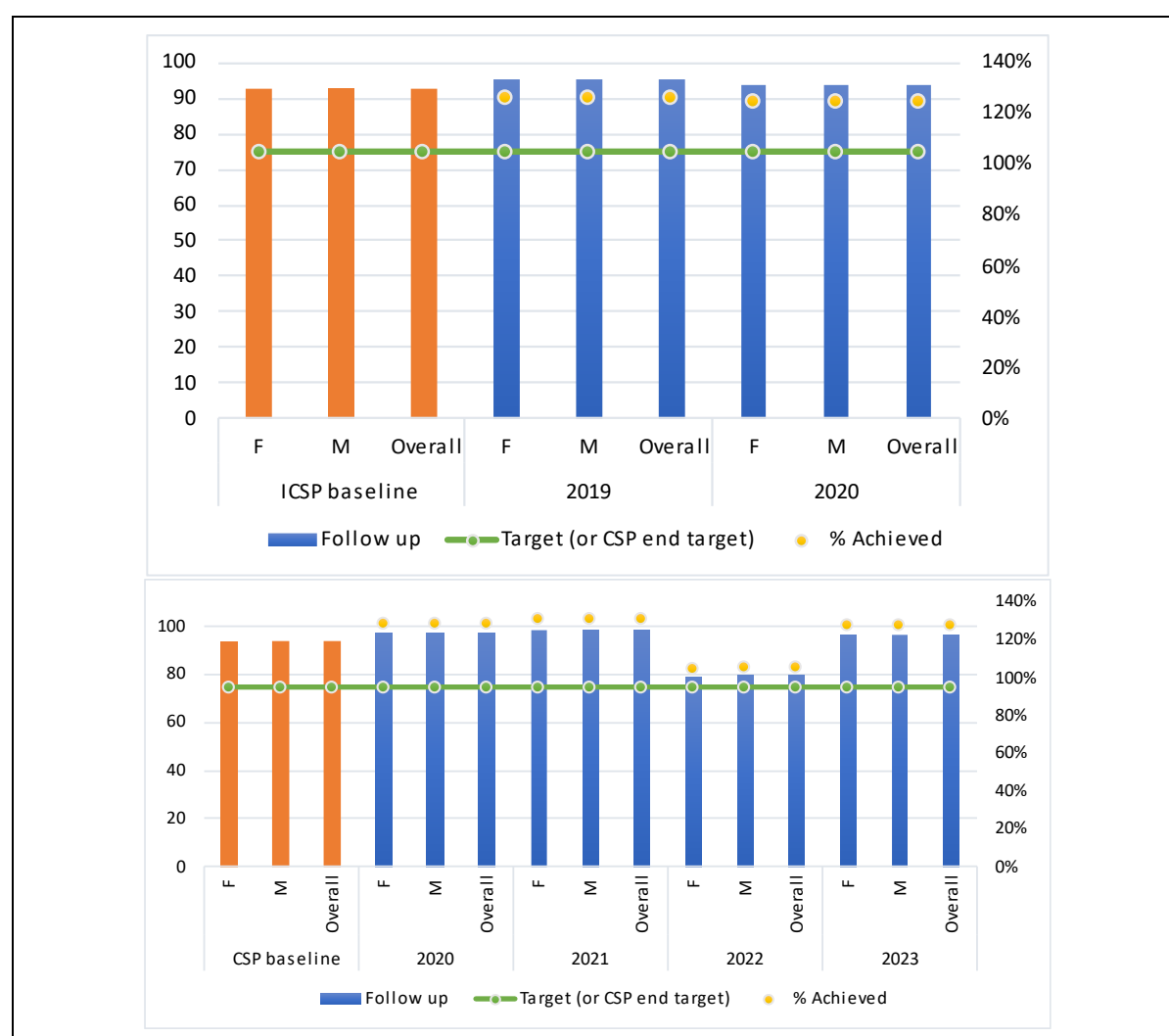
122. The Tigray case (see Annex 10, Box 1) illustrates how WFP adapted the response from working through the public health system, which had collapsed due to the conflict, to contracting non-governmental organizations in order to provide assistance and how WFP managed to bring in nutrition supplies through convoys and airlifting to overcome access challenges. Nevertheless, interruptions and delays in providing assistance occurred and the generally poor food security situation posed a risk of relapse after successful treatment.

123. As shown in Figure 15, the recovery rate from the moderate acute malnutrition treatment overall was good during both the ICSP and the CSP. The target for all years was more than 75 percent, which is relatively low. Nevertheless, for all years (except 2022 where the follow-up rate was only 79.7 percent), the actual recovery rate was considerably higher, ranging from 93.6 to 98.6 percent.

¹¹⁷ WFP. 2019-2023. Ethiopia ACR.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

Figure 15: SO1/Activity 2: Moderate acute malnutrition treatment recovery rate, 2019-2023



Source: ACRs 2019-2023. Note: The figures for ICSP 2020 correspond to the months of January to June, while the figures for CSP 2020 correspond to the months of July to December.

SO1/Activity 3: Unconditional food assistance, malnutrition prevention and treatment and school feeding for refugees

Summary Finding 9. Between 2019 and 2023, WFP supported rising numbers of refugees with unconditional food assistance reaching increased shares of planned beneficiaries, with a dip in 2021 attributable to limited access to displaced refugees in Tigray. However, insufficient levels of assistance per beneficiary due to funding constraints and insufficient frequency of assistance limited the ability of WFP to fully meet short-term food and nutrition needs and also gave rise to some negative coping strategies among the beneficiaries. Ambitions to improve self-reliance of refugees, in line with their strongly expressed desire to be able to earn their livelihoods instead of depending on assistance, were hindered by legal barriers.

The nutrition interventions (prevention and treatment of moderate acute malnutrition) in the refugee camps were effective, with good coverage and effective treatment, however, admissions of malnourished children and PBWG increased after general food assistance ration cuts were introduced, and food assistance was suspended.

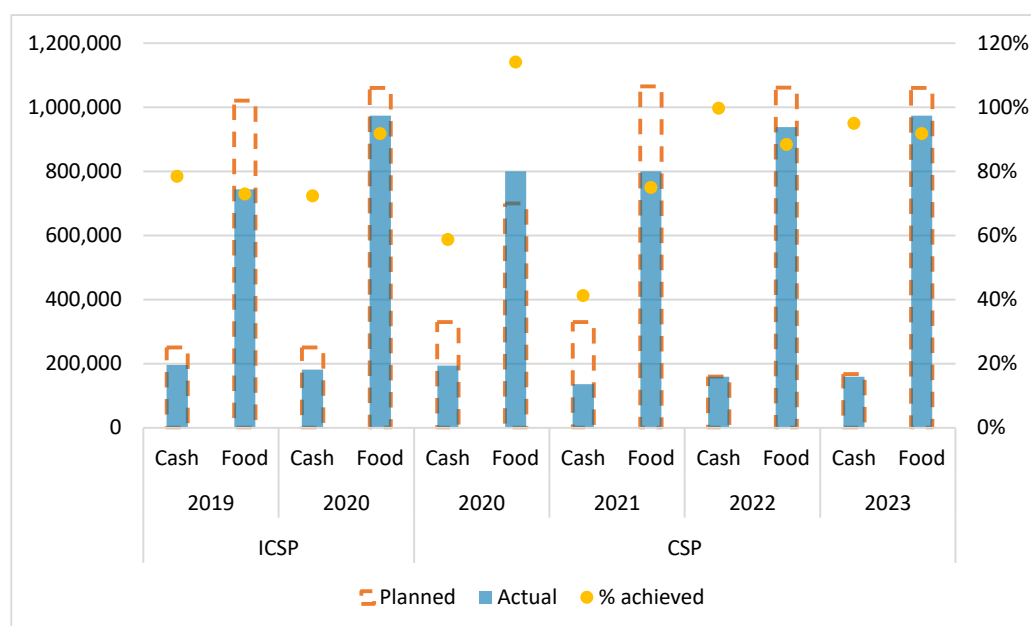
School feeding in refugee camps was successfully implemented prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing closure of schools. School feeding was affected by the temporary suspension of assistance in 2023, which reduced enrolment and increased dropout rates as children were put to work instead of going to school.

124. Under Activity 3, WFP aimed at meeting the short-term food and nutrition needs of refugees by providing unconditional cash-based transfers and in-kind food assistance, school feeding and nutrition support. Activity 3 further aimed at contributing to increasing refugees' self-reliance through the implementation of the Government's new refugee response framework ("the Refugee Proclamation"). Outcome results monitored include the dietary diversity score, food consumption scores and livelihood coping strategies for food security.

125. Assistance was provided through food transfers, cash-based transfers, provision of school meals in primary schools, interventions for the prevention and treatment of moderate acute malnutrition among children (aged 6-59 months), PBWG and other nutritionally vulnerable refugees with special nutrition needs, and provision of SBCC. Support under Activity 3 was provided in partnership with the Agency for Refugee and Returnee Affairs (later renamed Refugee and Returnee Services) and UNHCR.

126. Through in-kind assistance, WFP assistance reached some 690,000 refugees in 2019, in 26 camps across six regions. By 2023, slowly at first and then due to an influx of refugees from Sudan, South Sudan, and Somalia in that year, this number had climbed to almost 1,000,000.¹¹⁹ Despite the increase, the proportion of actual versus planned beneficiaries supported rose from 73 percent in 2019, to 92 percent in 2023 (see Figure 16). A dip in 2021 to 75 percent is attributable to the limited access for WFP to the many refugees located in Tigray who were further displaced by the conflict. Interviews with WFP, government stakeholders and UNHCR indicated that coverage was well coordinated among the partners.

Figure 16: SO1/Activity 3: Planned versus actual beneficiaries by modality, 2019-2023



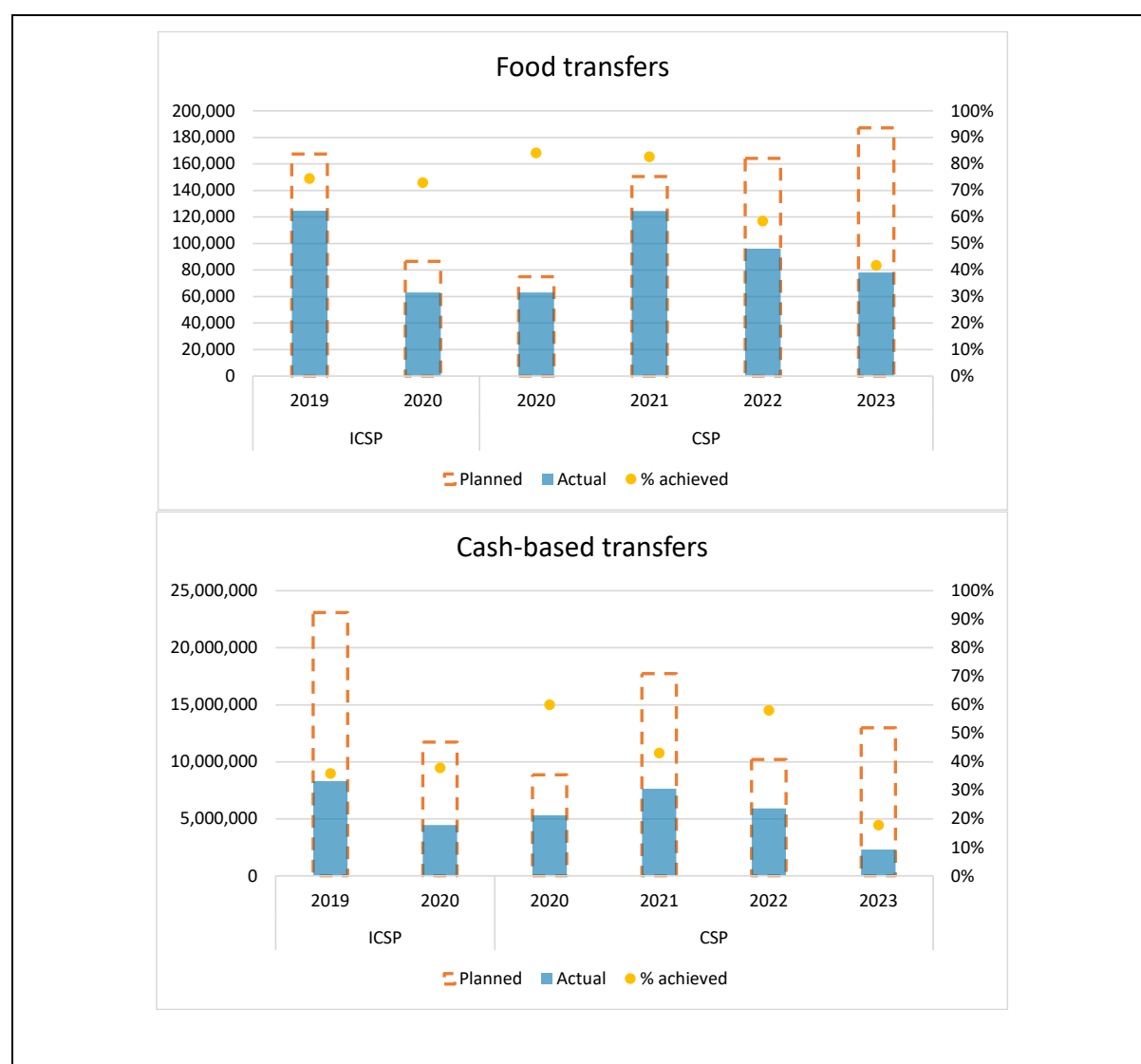
Source: ACRs 2019-2022 and COMET reports R020 and R030 for 2023 figures. Note: the figures for ICSP 2020 correspond to the months of January to June, while the figures for CSP 2020 correspond to the months of July to December. Please note that the figures may contain double counting of beneficiaries benefiting from several modalities.

127. The positive observations on beneficiary achievements are tempered, however, by the data on planned versus actual tons of in-kind assistance provided (see Figure 17), which held roughly steady at around 73-84 percent in 2019-2021 of planned levels, dropped sharply to 58 percent in 2022 and to 42 percent in 2023. Low tonnages distributed can be explained by WFP budget constraints and, in 2023, by the suspension of unconditional food assistance. The shortfall in food distributed led to a reduction in calories per beneficiary. The trend over the period of the (I)CSP is of a continual shortfall in ration size, with beneficiaries receiving 82 percent of the recommended daily kilocalorie count in 2019, 84 percent in 2020, 84 percent again in 2021 though dropping to 60 percent in November and December of that year, and then dropping further in 2022 as WFP cut food rations to 50 percent of the daily calorie requirement. In 2023,

¹¹⁹ ACR 2023, p.15.

WFP had to adjust the ration size to 60 percent from May onwards.¹²⁰ As in the case of Activity 1, beneficiaries reported in focus group discussions in Somali and Tigray as well as Gambella that the quality of the food assistance given was good but insufficient in quantity and the timing of distributions was unpredictable. They expressed the desire for a wider range of foods and dissatisfaction with the WFP non-retroactivity policy, by which missed distributions are not compensated. Yet, as also in the case of Activity 1 beneficiaries, they were unanimous in saying that the assistance – supplemented by other resources and coping strategies – was an important contributor to being able to meet their food needs. Despite the appreciation for the assistance received, refugees interviewed in camp site visits (for example, in Oromia) strongly expressed the desire to be able to earn their livelihoods instead of depending on assistance. This is hindered by legal barriers to acquiring land and accessing formal employment, even for refugees with out-of-camp higher education.

Figure 17: SO1/Activity 3: Planned versus actual food (mt) and cash-based (USD) transfers, 2019-2023



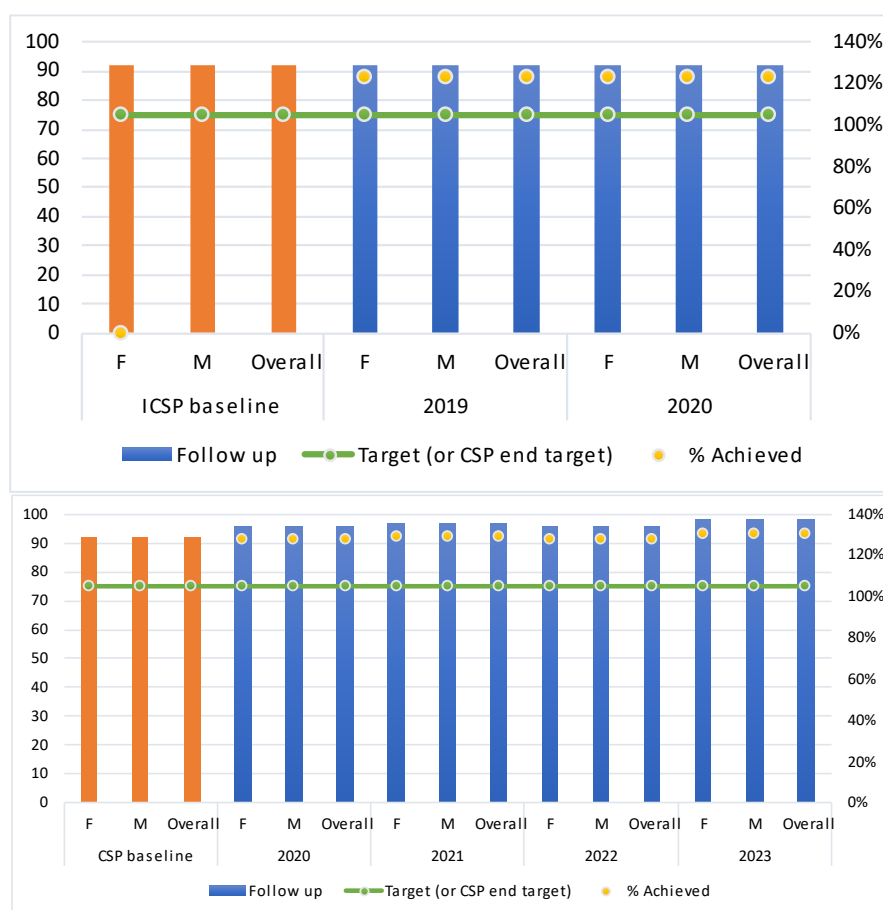
Source: ACRs 2019-2023. Note: the figures for ICSP 2020 correspond to the months of January to June, while the figures for CSP 2020 correspond to the months of July to December.

128. As shown in the above figures, cash-based assistance reached a comparatively small number of refugees and planned levels were not achieved. Actual versus planned amounts of cash-based assistance distributed were mediocre throughout the evaluation period (between 18 and 60 percent). Similar challenges were encountered as for Activity 1.

¹²⁰ Ethiopia ACRs 2019-2023.

129. As part of Activity 3, WFP provided specialized nutritious food to prevent and treat moderate acute malnutrition among refugee children aged 6-59 months and PBWG. The coverage rate for the eligible population participating in the WFP moderate acute malnutrition prevention and treatment programmes as reported by WFP was above 85 percent for most years.¹²¹ However, according to the annual country report for 2023, admissions of malnourished children and PBWG increased after general food assistance ration cuts were introduced, and food assistance was suspended.¹²² As shown in Figure 18, recovery rates were good during both the ICSP and the CSP. As for Activity 1, the target for all years was more than 75 percent and for all years the actual recovery rate was considerably higher, ranging from 92 percent to 98.2 percent. Field visits to refugee camps in Gambella and Somali regions showed that the nutrition centres in the four camps visited functioned well and were well-equipped, with good collaboration reported between UNICEF and WFP, and reportedly reliable services provided.

Figure 18: SO1/Activity 3: Refugee moderate acute malnutrition treatment recovery rate, 2019-2023



Source: ACRs 2019-2023. Note: The figures for ICSP 2020 correspond to the months of January to June, while the figures for CSP 2020 correspond to the months of July to December.

130. Under the ICSP, school feeding was provided both as emergency school feeding to crisis-affected, non-refugee populations and in refugee camps. Emergency school feeding was replaced by a non-emergency modality under the CSP, while school feeding in refugee camps in Benishangul, Afar, Gambella, and Somali continued.¹²³

131. Figure 19 shows the number of refugee primary schoolchildren receiving food transfers (on-site

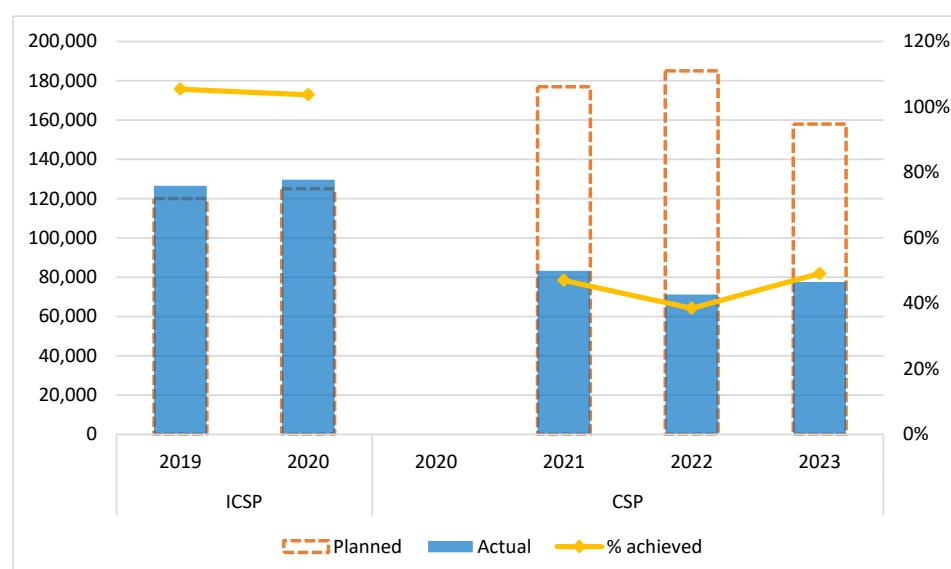
¹²¹ Source: ACRs 2019-2023. Coverage was below 85 percent in 2019 for both treatment (71 percent) and prevention (77 percent) and in 2022 for prevention only (74 percent).

¹²² This was confirmed by several informants in the field; for instance, staff in refugee nutrition centres in the Gambella and Somali regions.

¹²³ WFP. 2019-2023. ACR Ethiopia.

school feeding) during the ICSP and CSP.¹²⁴ Targets were slightly exceeded during the ICSP. In 2020, at the start of the CSP, no school meals were provided due to COVID-19 restrictions and the closure of schools. School feeding restarted in 2021; however, in the years following the COVID-19 pandemic (2021-2023), school feeding was only provided for 39-49 percent of the planned schoolchildren. Reasons for low numbers of children reached included limited numbers returning to school after the closure.¹²⁵ Key informants reported a similar effect to the unconditional food assistance suspension that led some children to drop out of school to earn income for the family or contribute to domestic production. Following the aid diversion discovery and subsequent suspension of the activity, the responsibility for implementation of school feeding in refugee camps was transferred from the Refugees and Returnees Service to cooperating partners. In some locations, for example, in Gambella, this delayed the start of planned school feeding activities due to the time needed to finalize field-level agreements, as reported by cooperating partners.

Figure 19: SO1/Activity 3: Beneficiaries receiving school feeding on-site food transfers



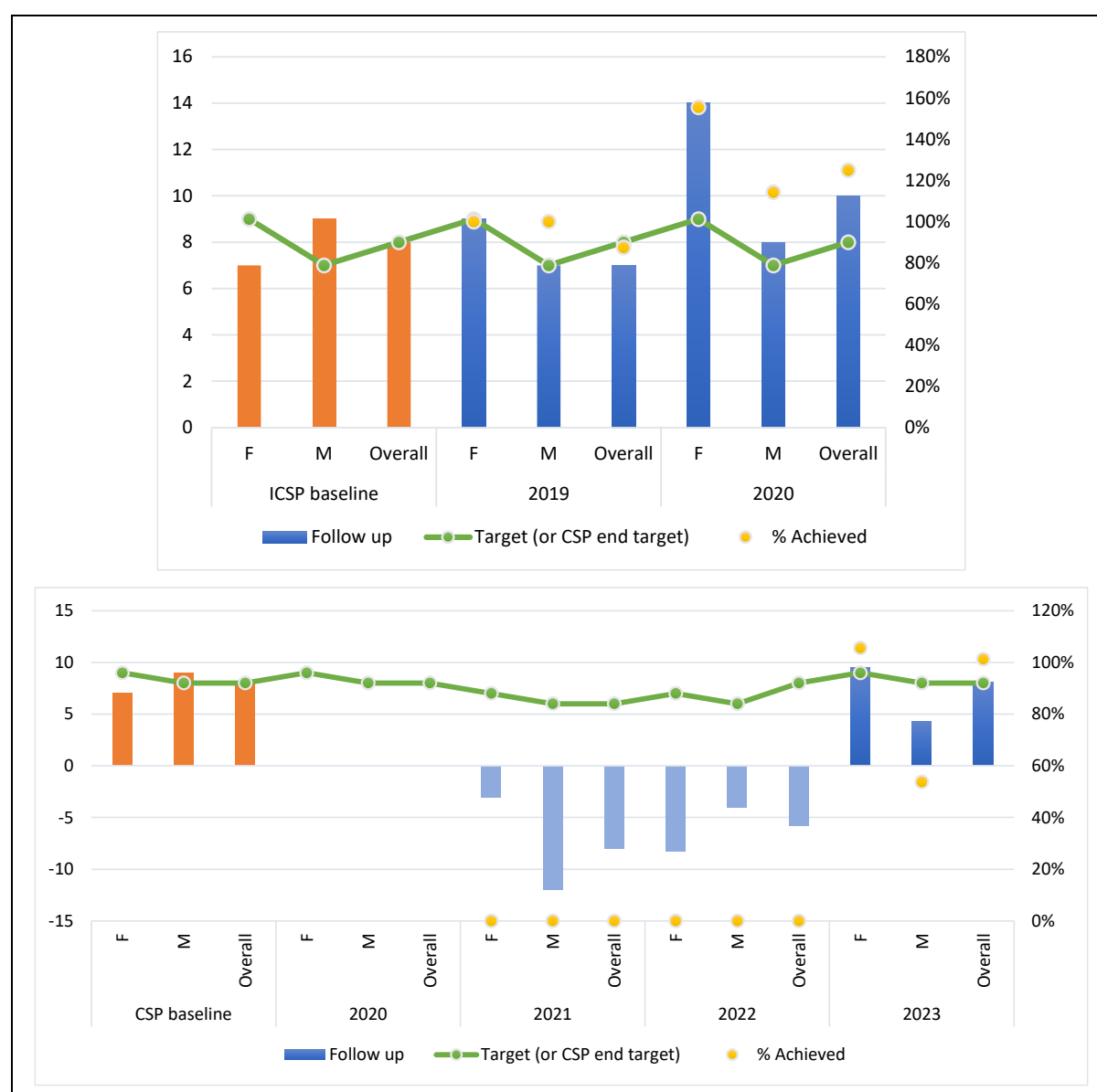
Source: ACRs 2019-2023. Note: The figures for ICSP 2020 correspond to the months of January to June, while the figures for CSP 2020 correspond to the months of July to December.

132. Interviews with school directors and parents in camps indicated a strong conviction that provision of school meals increased the enrolment rate and prevented drop-out. Figure 20 presenting enrolment rates during the ICSP and CSP shows that enrolment rates decreased in the years following the COVID-19 pandemic but increased between 2022 to 2023.

¹²⁴ in the ICSP this also included pre-primary children.

¹²⁵ WFP. 2021. ACR Ethiopia.

Figure 20: SO1/Activity 3: Annual change in enrolment rates (percentage points)¹²⁶



Source: ACRs 2019-2023. Note: The figures for ICSP 2020 correspond to the months of January to June, while the figures for CSP 2020 correspond to the months of July to December.

SO2. Vulnerable and food-insecure populations in targeted areas have increased resilience to shocks by 2025

133. Under SO2, WFP supported social protection, safety nets and livelihoods in order to increase food and nutrition security and build households' resilience to shocks. Foreseen activities comprised providing school meals to primary schoolchildren and supporting the Government in scaling up nutrition-sensitive school feeding programmes (under Activity 4) and support to livelihood diversification for smallholder farmers and pastoralists, climate risk management and weather-indexed livestock and crop insurance (under Activity 5). Both activities 4 and 5 are placed under the "changing lives" framework, which seeks to address the root causes and drivers of food crises and food insecurity.

¹²⁶ All enrolment rates cited here are gross, not net. Hence, they do not account for the fact that, due to repetitions and interruptions, they include students lagging behind national and international education standards.

Summary Finding 11. School feeding under Activity 4 provided a key safety net in conflict-affected and food-insecure areas as shown by cases from Tigray and Afar and Oromia. Throughout the country, school feeding was, however, affected by funding shortages and the school closures due to COVID-19. WFP contributed through capacity strengthening to the HGSF programme under the Ministry of Education by improving monitoring and evaluation (M&E), developing nutrition-dense menus and procurement guidelines for fresh food, and mainstreaming health, nutrition, gender and disability-related dimensions throughout the programme.

134. Under Activity 4, WFP aimed at providing safe, nutritious and reliable daily meals to primary schoolchildren through in-kind food assistance and cash transfers to schools for HGSF and through supporting relevant national authorities with implementing school feeding capacity strengthening activities. These activities further aimed at improving school health and nutrition through supporting the ongoing HGSF under the Ministry of Education. Outcome results monitored include enrolment, drop-out rates and attendance rates.

135. Under the ICSP, WFP provided school feeding to primary schoolchildren, both in the form of meals based on in-kind donations and HGSF, in Afar, Amhara, Oromia, southern Ethiopia (previously SNNPR) and Tigray. Changing menus were introduced to encourage smallholders to diversify production. When schools were closed from April to June 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, WFP provided take-home rations, consisting of a family ration to serve as safety net for vulnerable families.¹²⁷ WFP continued the HGSF approach under the CSP in collaboration with the Government. WFP provided cash transfers to the regional bureaux of education to allow them to purchase locally sourced food such as grains, pulses and vegetable oil. To improve dietary diversity for schoolchildren, WFP introduced a fresh food component in the HGSF in SNNPR in 2022.¹²⁸ The fresh food (fruit, vegetables, goat meat, etc.) was purchased from the local market. According to WFP, the model was scaled up from 12 schools in SNNPR to 45 schools across the country in 2023-2024.

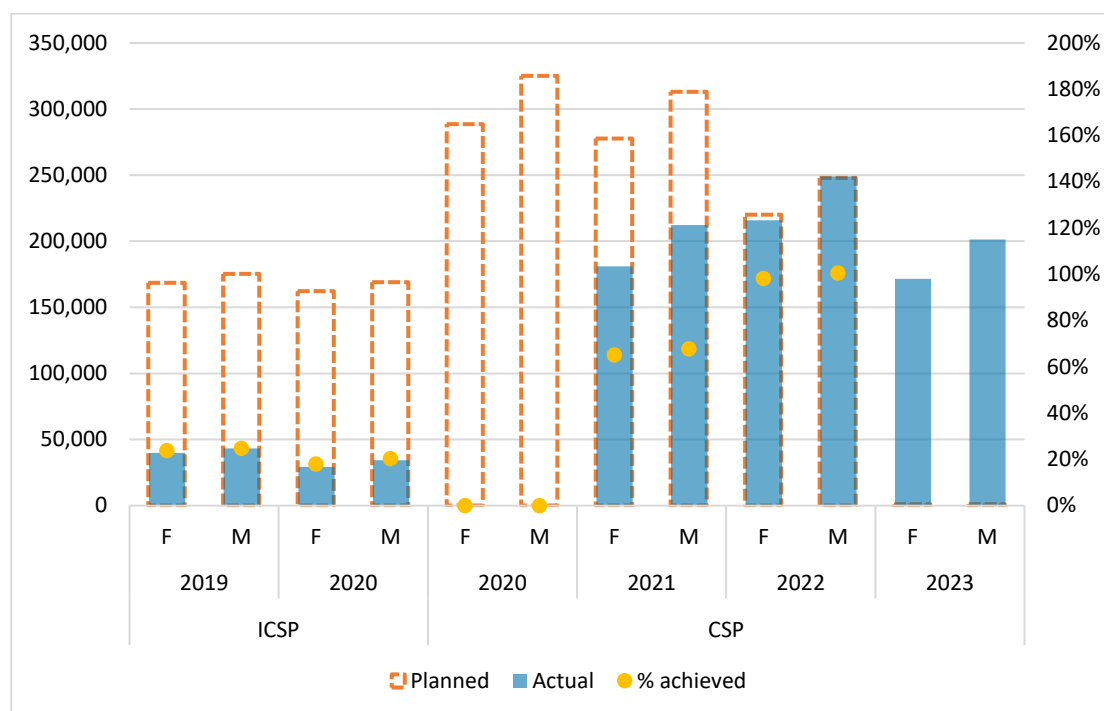
136. The implementation of Activity 4 was irregular during the ICSP and CSP due to the COVID-19 pandemic, access and security challenges. The difficulties of the COVID-19 crisis are reflected in the number of planned versus actual number of children as seen in Figure 21. During the ICSP, WFP only managed to achieve a quarter of the target for 2019 and even less in 2020, when the COVID-19 crisis started. Under the CSP, no on-site school feeding took place in 2020. In 2021, two thirds of the planned beneficiaries were reached, and in 2022, virtually all. However, the number of total planned beneficiaries was adjusted down from 590,000 in 2021 to 468,000 in 2022. In 2023, the number of planned beneficiaries plummeted to only 2,000 beneficiaries; nevertheless, WFP provided school feeding to a total of about 370,000 children. These figures, however, do not reflect the increase in available resources, which almost doubled between 2021, 2022 and 2023 (see Table 8 in Annex 6) – though expenditure rates were low.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ With the support of the regional governments, WFP provided take-home rations to over 63,000 children (27,000 families) in the HGSF targeted regions, Oromia and SNNPR. Source: WFP.2020. ACR Ethiopia (ICSP).

¹²⁸ WFP. 2019-2023. ACRs Ethiopia.

¹²⁹ As shown by the low expenditure rates in the ACRs 2021-2023.

Figure 21: SO2/Activity 4: Planned versus actual beneficiaries by gender, 2019-2023



Source: ACRs 2019-2023. Note: the figures for ICSP 2020 correspond to the months of January to June, while the figures for CSP 2020 correspond to the months of July to December.

137. Particular difficulties were encountered in the provision of school feeding in conflict-affected schools. The case from Tigray (Annex 10, Box 2) illustrates the challenges of encouraging children to return to school.

138. The importance of school feeding as a safety net is illustrated through the Food for Education and Child Nutrition Programme in the Afar and Oromia regions (2019-2024), which targets pastoralists and which had substantial benefits for food insecure pastoralist households during the pandemic.¹³⁰ Drop-out rates are also 4 percent lower in supported schools than the national average of 14 percent (13 percent boys and 15 percent girls).¹³¹

139. Unlike school feeding in refugee camps (Activity 3), school feeding under the Ministry of Education (Activity 4) includes considerable capacity strengthening interventions. WFP works with the Ministry of Education to enhance the efficiency of the HGSF programme by improving monitoring and evaluation, developing nutrition-dense menus and procurement guidelines for fresh food, and mainstreaming health and nutrition, gender and disability-related dimensions throughout the programme. WFP has seconded a technical staff member in the Ministry of Education to assist with the HGSF programme; according to the Ministry of Education this contributed significantly to HGSF programme implementation. WFP also provided policy support in the preparation of the school feeding strategy in 2021.¹³²

SO2/Activity 5: Nutrition-sensitive social protection, climate risk management services and capacity strengthening support for smallholder farmers, pastoralists, refugees and returnees most vulnerable to climate shocks

Summary Finding 12. Interventions focusing on livelihoods diversification, food systems, climate change and financial inclusion were an essential step towards a gradual shift toward more sustainable approaches to addressing food insecurity. However, despite increased funding and well-defined strategic goals, the ambition to expand geographic coverage of resilience activities to more areas, support a scale-

¹³⁰ WFP. 2022. WFP Evaluation. Baseline: and Endline Evaluation of WFP's McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Programme's Support in Afar and Oromia regions in Ethiopia 2019 to 2024. Decentralized McGovern-Dole Baseline Evaluation Report.

¹³¹ WFP. 2023. ACR Ethiopia.

¹³² WFP. 2019-2023. ACR Ethiopia.

up and shift over 1 million relief beneficiaries to resilience building could not take place as planned. Stakeholders indicated gaps in technical capacity among country office and cooperating staff, and difficulties in translating clear concepts and frameworks into implementation plans in the different geographic locations across Ethiopia.

There are insufficient targeting linkages between beneficiaries supported with relief assistance and those targeted through resilience initiatives to enable beneficiaries to transition sustainably from relief to self-reliance. Despite predominantly positive beneficiary perceptions on the results of interventions, a lack of systematic data collection and inconsistent outcome measurement constrained reporting on results.

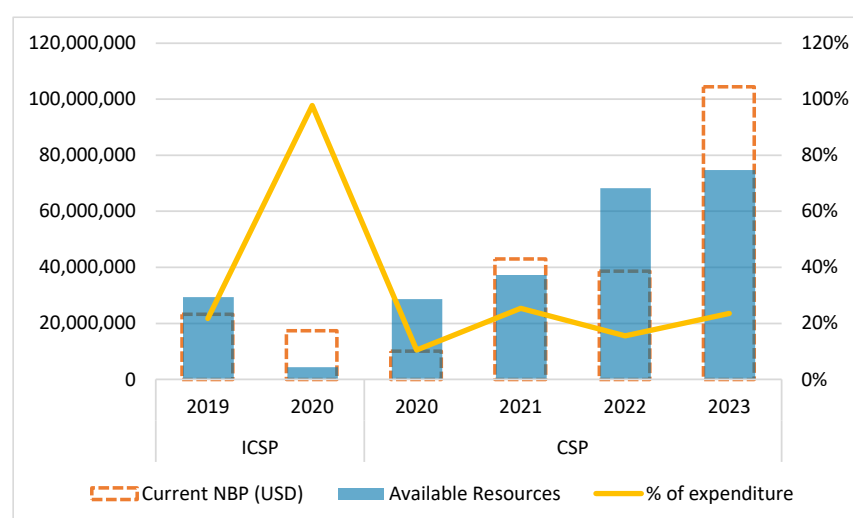
140. Under Activity 5, WFP aimed at providing nutrition-sensitive social protection, climate risk management services and capacity strengthening support to smallholder farmers, pastoralists, chronically food-insecure people in rural and urban areas, refugees and host community households and returnees most vulnerable to climate shocks. The focus was on resilience building through public works, especially: social and water management infrastructure; weather-indexed livestock and crop insurance; financial services; and livelihood diversification for smallholder farmers and pastoralists. Activity 5 further aimed at enhancing climate risk management tools and systems through capacity strengthening of government and private sector partners.

141. Climate change was introduced as an area of intervention in 2019 and included integrated community-level climate risk management and weather risk insurance for pastoral and agropastoral communities to manage drought risk. The Satellite Index Insurance for Pastoralists (SIPE) pilot programme impact evaluation indicated heightened insurance awareness among pastoralists, with a relatively high willingness to pay for livestock insurance. Communities reported benefits from the SIPE public work activities, which improved water and pastureland availability. The Rural Resilience Initiative (R4) focused on providing access to climate risk insurance combined with improved natural resource management. Over half of the households that benefited from the SIPE project were headed by women with little access to insurance. However, the country office has reviewed progress under the insurance schemes and concluded that a rethinking needs to be done on insurance, because after ten years of engagement on insurance, the scheme has not scaled up, and many beneficiaries still cannot pay their premium.¹³³

142. Figure 22 provides an overview of the needs-based plan, available resources and expenditures for Activity 5. The needs-based plan increased significantly from the ICSP into the CSP period, by nearly five-fold, while allocated resources increased nearly ten-fold. In 2019, 2020 (CSP) and 2022, available resources even exceeded the needs-based plan. Under the ICSP, Activity 5 was funded at 26 percent of the latest needs based-plan and under the CSP, it was cumulatively funded at 50 percent up to December 2023 (see Annex 6, Tables 2 and 3). However, in absolute terms, the available resources under the current CSP for Activity 5 remain relatively limited as compared to relief, amounting for between 2 percent (in 2020) to 7 percent (2023) of the total needs-based plan (see Annex 6, Table 8). However, over the period, in-year expenditures remained low, reportedly due to external crises and accordingly long lead times required for preparation, contracting and procurement.

¹³³ WFP. 2023. ETCO Rethinking on Insurance. PPT.

Figure 22: SO2/Activity 5: Needs-based plan, available resources and expenditure (as percentage of available resources), 2019-2023



Source: ACRs 2019-2023. Note: the figures for ICSP 2020 correspond to January to June, while the figures for CSP 2020 correspond to July to December.

143. Planned versus actual beneficiary numbers for Activity 5 in Figure 23 show that in most years WFP experienced a significant underachievement in terms of beneficiaries reached. The noticeable difference in the number of planned and actual beneficiaries throughout the evaluation period is explained by annual country reports and the 2023 internal audit report¹³⁴ as arising from the scaling-down of activities due to the pandemic and the need to shift attention towards addressing the challenges posed by the conflict in northern Ethiopia and COVID-19. These events disrupted implementation processes such as preparation, contracting and procurement and delayed onboarding of cooperating partners.¹³⁵

144. At output level some of the achievements reported by WFP include:

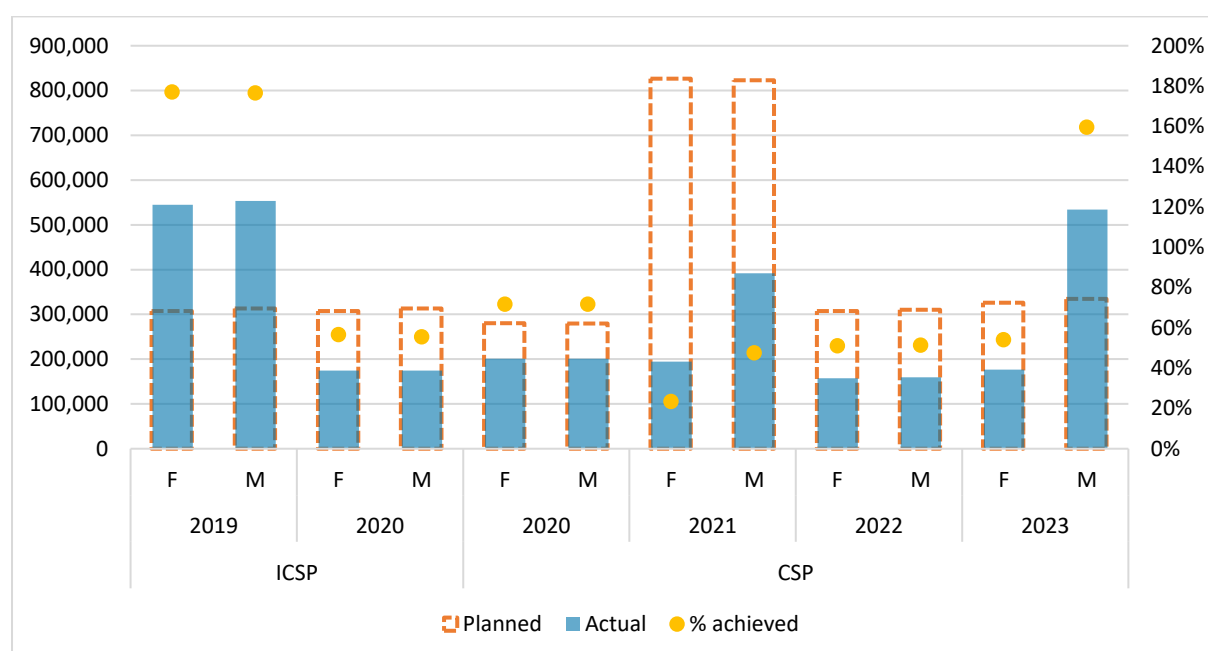
- 2,117 VSLAs established, saving 3.4 million Ethiopian Birr in Amhara and Gambella regions;
- in Somali, 561 hectares of land cultivated with crops, horticulture, and animal fodder through solar and diesel-empowered irrigation systems, benefiting 4,625 households;
- cumulatively 300 hectares of land covered with “half-moons”¹³⁶ in Somali; and
- in Amhara, WFP and its partners facilitated planting of 4 million tree and fruit seedlings and rehabilitated 365 hectares of land.

¹³⁴ WFP. July 2023. Internal audit of WFP operations in Ethiopia.

¹³⁵ WFP. ACR. 2022.

¹³⁶ These are semi-circle structures that conserve surface water during the rainy season, which helps in the regeneration of vegetation.

Figure 23: SO2/Activity 5: Planned versus actual beneficiaries by gender, 2019-2023



Source: ACRs 2019-2023. Note: the figures for ICSP 2020 correspond to January to June, while the figures for CSP 2020 correspond to July to December.

145. At the outcome level, targets were not met for many indicators,¹³⁷ except in 2023, where planned targets were overall achieved. However, the evaluation found through site visits, focus group discussions, and community consultations, that the interventions supported fostered a move towards self-sufficiency, enabling beneficiaries to increase agricultural production and improve water resource management,¹³⁸ as well as expand cultivated land and increase areas under irrigation and cultivation. Communities reported in fieldwork that interventions focusing on increasing irrigation and agricultural production were considered positive because they resulted in increased food availability. The Buraminao irrigation scheme in Somali had a clear positive effect on the livelihoods of communities as stated by local stakeholders. Similar positive feedback was received on the village savings and lending schemes, which supported both men and women to invest and diversify their livelihoods.

146. Moreover, the evaluation for the R4 Rural Resilience Initiative found that the integrated climate risk management approach led to a significant increase in dietary diversity and a reduction in negative coping responses for R4 Rural Resilience participants in Ethiopia as compared to non-participating households and reduced the impacts of extreme weather events on farming households.¹³⁹

147. Overall, however, outcome data suffered from inconsistent measurement¹⁴⁰ as well as unclear rationales for target setting. Current indicators and data collection practices applied do not adequately capture the impact of WFP resilience interventions on local food production and beneficiaries' transition to sustainable activities. WFP has not systematically collected data on the effects of increased productivity on food availability and affordability in vulnerable communities, and the effects on food security and number of beneficiaries transitioning to self-reliance. To achieve this, additional performance indicators will need to be developed to accurately reflect changes in local food production and the beneficiaries' move away from reliance on assistance programmes to more sustainable activities. Interviews with WFP staff confirmed that steps are being taken to have more systematic data collection on the sustainability of changes in household income or agricultural production.

¹³⁷ WFP. November 2023. Mid-Term Review of Ethiopia CSP.

¹³⁸ Vector of change included in the theory of change.

¹³⁹ WFP. 2024. The Impacts of WFP's Integrated Climate Risk Management Approach on Farmers' Resilience to Climate Change. Tetra Tech.

¹⁴⁰ For example, the measurement of the indicator relating to the effect of food assistance for assets (FFA) on the Livelihood-based Coping Strategy Index are incomplete for all regions.

148. At a strategic level, the integration of climate risk management, financial inclusion and support for agricultural production has helped lay the foundations for combining crisis response with longer-term resilience building. This dual-track approach demonstrates a clear commitment to fostering both immediate relief and sustainable development for vulnerable communities in Ethiopia. However, the shift has not been without its challenges. The ambition to expand geographic coverage of Activity 5 to more areas, support a scale-up and shift over 1 million food aid beneficiaries to resilience building¹⁴¹ could not take place as planned due to the external conditions that required a continued focus on emergency assistance. Stakeholders also indicated gaps in technical capacity among country office and cooperating partner staff, and difficulties in translating clear concepts and frameworks into implementation plans in the different geographic locations across Ethiopia. Field visits to Somali noted that the installation of new irrigation assets, for example, required more time than initially anticipated, as did procurement, community sensitization and training.

SO3. Nutritionally vulnerable populations in targeted areas have improved consumption of high-quality, nutrient-dense foods to prevent all forms of malnutrition through to June 2025

Summary Finding 13. Over the course of the ICSP and CSP the fresh food voucher interventions expanded from reaching 60,000 women and children in 2019 to 165,000 in 2022. Further, WFP contributed to the expansion of the fresh food voucher from Amhara to Afar and Somali as an integrated part of the Seqota Declaration. Fresh food vouchers contributed to an increase in the proportion of children (6-23 months) who received an acceptable diet and, at the community level, the fresh food voucher was reported to boost the production of fresh food in the targeted areas. Nevertheless, conflicts in the north, the limited amount and short duration of the voucher, and the imperfect complementarity with PSNP, negatively affected results.

149. Under SO3/Activity 6, WFP aimed at complementing the treatment of acute malnutrition (under activities 2 and 3) through interventions aimed at chronic malnutrition. WFP aimed at promoting a healthy and diversified diet to children aged 2-23 months and PBWG using the PSNP and the humanitarian system, targeting temporary food insecurity as the platform for delivery. Outcome results monitored include the dietary diversity score, food consumption scores and the proportion of children receiving an acceptable diet.

150. In partnership with national health authorities and other United Nations organizations, WFP adopted five approaches under Activity 6:

- provision of fresh food vouchers to PBWG and children aged 6-23 months enrolled in the PSNP;
- SBCC to enhance demand for nutrient-dense food;
- support to market retailers to stimulate the supply of nutrient-dense food;
- government capacity strengthening, including evidence generation to inform nutrition policies; and
- integration of nutrition across the portfolio (Activity 1, 3, 4 and 5).¹⁴²

151. In 2019, WFP launched the fresh food voucher project in Amhara (see Annex 10, Box 3), which at that time had the highest stunting level in Ethiopia. The fresh food voucher was designed to complement the PSNP and provided mobile money vouchers to buy fruit, vegetables and animal protein for PBWG and children aged 6-23 months. Transfer amounts were determined by the cost of the diet analysis undertaken by the Federal Ministry of Health and Ethiopian Public Health Institute with technical support from WFP and based on household size.

152. Accompanying SBCC activities had the objectives of increasing consumption and knowledge about fresh food and improving cooking skills. In 2023, full funding of Activity 6 enabled the expansion of the fresh food voucher operations from Amhara to Afar and Somali regions. WFP prioritized Afar, Amhara and Somali due to the high prevalence of stunting in these regions (41, 43 and 21 percent respectively) as compared to the national average of 37 percent. Across the three regions, WFP contracted over 300 fresh food retailers in 19 *woredas* to supply fresh food to targeted PBWG. For arid and semi-arid *woredas* in Afar and parts of Amhara where sourcing of fresh food remains a challenge, WFP has conducted a feasibility study to pilot an

¹⁴¹ Approved CSP document.

¹⁴² WFP. 2019-2023. ACR Ethiopia.

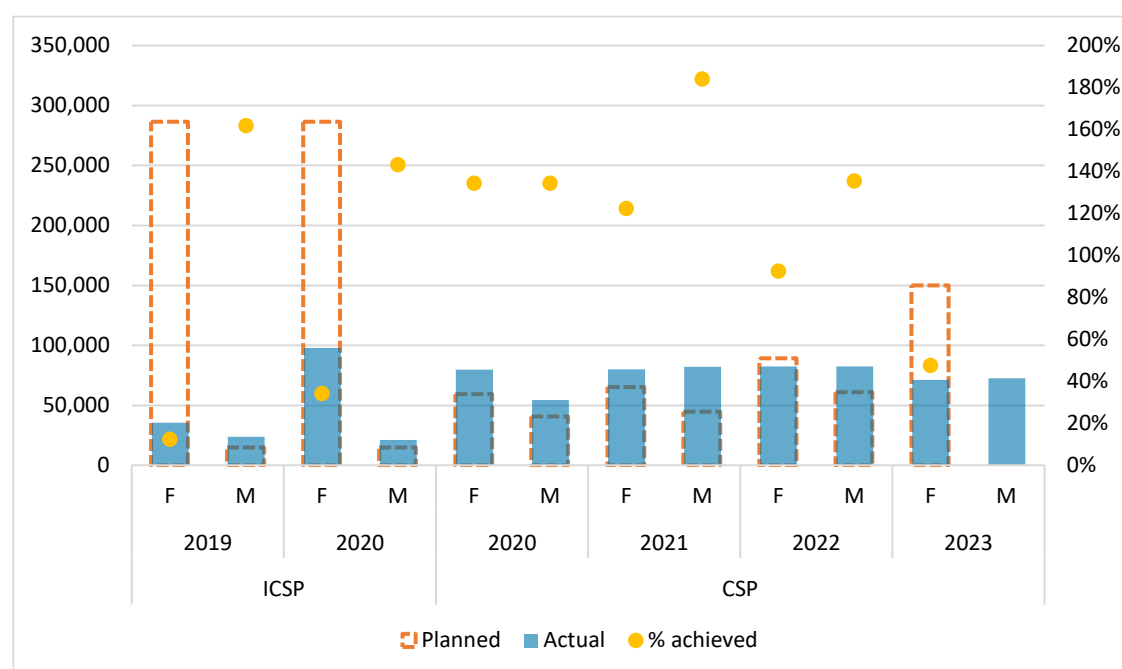
innovative food preservation approach.

153. WFP provided substantial capacity strengthening to government actors involved in tackling malnutrition. For example, WFP supported the government with a Fill the Nutrient Gap analysis¹⁴³ and collaborated with the Ethiopia Public Health Institute on producing quarterly bulletins on the costs of healthy diets. WFP is moreover closely involved in the work with the Seqota Declaration and in 2022 seconded a WFP staff member to the Ministry of Health to assist with setting up and improving data and information systems.¹⁴⁴ According to the Ministry of Health this contributed significantly to the monitoring of the work in the Seqota *woredas*.

154. Data on the proportion of eligible population that participates in programme (coverage) are only available for the period 2019-2021. For the ICSP, the relatively high target of more than 95 percent of the eligible population was met for 2019 (95 percent), but only partially met for 2020 (86 percent). The target was adjusted downwards for the CSP (more than 70), and was exceeded for 2020 (96 percent), but not met for 2021 (53 percent).

155. Overall beneficiary numbers under SO3 are presented in Figure 24. Actual beneficiaries reached under the ICSP increased from 60,000 in 2019 to around 120,000 in 2020 while under the CSP between 134,000 in 2020 and 165,000 people in 2022 were being reached. Generally, the targets were not met for the ICSP, whereas the targets were mostly met or exceeded under the CSP. According to WFP key informant interviews, a hybrid approach with cash and fresh food vouchers was planned for pastoralists (for purchasing milk with cash), however, this never materialized due to the capacity limitations of the financial providers.

Figure 24: SO3: Planned versus actual beneficiaries by gender, 2019-2023



Source: ACRs 2019-2022 and COMET reports R020 and R030 for 2023 figures. Note: the figures for ICSP 2020 correspond to the months of January to June, while the figures for CSP 2020 correspond to the months of July to December.

156. Concern regarding limitations of the fresh food voucher was raised in the endline evaluation of the 2018-2020 fresh food voucher programme under the ICSP. Though the fresh food voucher was meant to be a top-up of the PSNP transfers, only 20 percent of beneficiaries had actually received PSNP transfers the previous year, due to budget limitations. Hence, the full potential of complementarity with PSNP could not be achieved. Another major bottleneck was the limited reliability of the mobile phone network, which led to irregular and delayed disbursement, with only 60 percent of beneficiaries receiving regular monthly

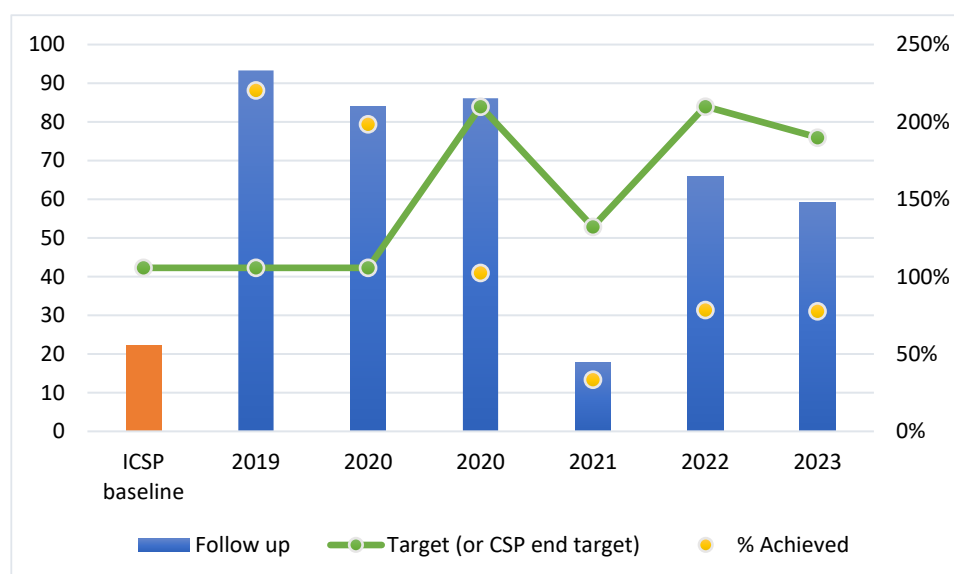
¹⁴³ The Fill the Nutrient Gap analysis is a nutrition assessment conducted by the Ministry of Health and WFP, providing an analysis of the nutrition situation and identifying the barriers faced by the most vulnerable in Ethiopia.

¹⁴⁴ WFP. 2022. Lessons learned from the Ethiopia Fresh Food Voucher programme. Report. September 2022.

disbursements. Missed transfers were disbursed retroactively (in contrast to the approach with in-kind assistance). A further shortcoming was the fact that voucher amounts were in line with household size at enrolment but not updated when additional children were born.¹⁴⁵

157. Data on nutrition indicators for Amhara¹⁴⁶ across the period under evaluation present a positive trend, as shown in Figure 25. WFP targeted a high percentage of children 6-23 months who receive a minimum acceptable diet, except for the year 2021, and also achievement rates were high for most years, with lower achievement rates following the outbreak of the crisis in 2021.

Figure 25: SO3: Proportion of children 6-23 months of age with a minimum acceptable diet, Amhara, 2019-2023



Source: ACRs 2019-2023. Note: the figures for ICSP 2020 correspond to the months of January to June, while the figures for CSP 2020 correspond to the months of July to December.

SO4. Capacity strengthening in the areas of early warning and emergency preparedness systems, safety net programme design and implementation, and supply chain management

Summary Finding 14. Efforts on capacity strengthening were aligned with government priorities but were hindered by the lack of clear targets and comprehensive strategy. Capacity strengthening for the PSNP has been a constant, with WFP facilitating training for PSNP staff on targeting, monitoring and community feedback mechanisms, supporting the cash transfer modality for relief beneficiaries and technical support to digital management information systems and payments to drought and conflict-affected populations. The effectiveness of this capacity strengthening work has been affected by government funding cutbacks for the PSNP due to the macroeconomic crisis, which constrained the ability of the PSNP to function as an effective social safety net

Supply chain capacity strengthening for the Government contributed to better planning and delivery of food assistance. Support provided to national early warning systems contributed to the institutionalization of anticipatory actions within existing disaster risk management and early warning systems. Partnerships with key organizations facilitated the development and activation of anticipatory action plans, which demonstrated positive results, although evidence remains largely anecdotal.

158. Under SO4/Activity 7, WFP aimed to strengthen national, regional and local capacities in the areas of early warning, emergency preparedness and response, contingency planning and forecast-based

¹⁴⁵ Sources: WFP. 2019-2023. ACR Ethiopia; WFP. 2021. Decentralized Evaluation. Support for Strengthening Resilience of Vulnerable Groups in Ethiopia: The Fresh Food Voucher Programme Expansion in Amhara region. January 2018-December 2020. Evaluation Report (February 2021).

¹⁴⁶ Only data for Amhara are presented here as this is the only region that can give a full picture of progress during the evaluation period. The FFV intervention was launched in 2023 in the other regions.

financing, shock-responsive and inclusive safety net programmes and supply chain management. Through these actions, WFP aimed at contributing to the provision of: i) adequate assistance and services to chronically food- and nutrition-insecure populations; ii) more effective and efficient delivery of food assistance to vulnerable populations; and iii) provision of timely and effective humanitarian action to crisis-affected populations. Under Activity 7, WFP also aimed at supporting the implementation of the National Logistics Strategy.¹⁴⁷

159. Within these ambitions, WFP placed emphasis during the evaluation period on three areas: i) emergency preparedness, response and early warning systems; ii) social protection systems; and iii) supply chain management. While focus areas were discussed with the Government, the evaluation team noted that Activity 7 lacked clear targets regarding what WFP aimed to achieve and a strategy to achieve these.

160. The results measured by WFP for Activity 7 primarily focus on output achievement rather than on the changes resulting from capacity support. Reporting focuses on the initiatives for which specific funding has been received or allocated. Funding for Activity 7 as a stand-alone initiative has been minimal under the ICSP at 8 percent but improved during the CSP, reaching its highest in 2021 at 163 percent but dropping to 49 percent in 2023 (see Annex 6, Table 8). For output indicators, planned targets were mostly achieved during the period under review.

161. **PSNP.** Capacity strengthening for the PSNP has been a constant under Activity 7. With funding from the World Bank, in 2023, WFP focused on resuming PSNP V, which had been discontinued in Tigray due to conflict. WFP facilitated training for PSNP staff on targeting, monitoring and community feedback mechanisms. WFP has also continued to support government capacity on the PSNP cash transfer modality for relief beneficiaries. WFP provided technical support focusing on digital management information systems and payments to the drought- and conflict-affected populations, extending coverage to 325 *woredas*.¹⁴⁸ The effectiveness of this capacity strengthening work has been affected by government funding cutbacks for the PSNP due to the macroeconomic crisis, which constrained the ability of the PSNP to function as an effective social safety net.

162. **Supply chain management.** The largest component under Activity 7 was supply chain capacity strengthening for the Government to improve food management and critical supply chain functions supporting emergency response and development. WFP provided technical support through seconded expertise to EDRMC for the coordination of food response to ensure effective planning and delivery of cash and in-kind commodities and to key ministries of the logistics sector, namely the Ethiopian Maritime Authority (EMA), Ministry of Transport and Logistics (formerly Federal Transport Authority (FTA)) and the EDRMC. The emphasis by WFP on supply chain management and emergency preparedness contributed to better planning and execution of food and aid delivery. This was supported by a number of initiatives including but not limited to: WFP bag marking solutions, which improved traceability of commodities; a commodity allocation and tracking system (CATS), which assisted EDRMC in tracking food commodities; a real-time shipment monitoring platform, which captured live location and condition information; and assisting the Government with the implementation of the adoption of global positioning system (GPS).

163. **Emergency preparedness and response.** WFP provided training and technical support to the disaster risk management bureaux in humanitarian food assistance planning, implementation, monitoring and reporting. As part of digitizing the national early warning system, WFP selected a digital platform for SMS-based early warning data collection. The digital data collection assisted WFP in obtaining early warning information in place of the existing paper-based approach. Site visits and key informant interviews in Somali confirmed that these early warning systems provided the necessary information to inform insurance schemes to de-risk agricultural and livestock investments. The information enabled the bureaux to undertake anticipatory actions in Gambella and Somali regions in terms of land rehabilitation, irrigation canals and flood prevention.

164. WFP supported the review and finalization of the drought and flood anticipatory action plans for Somali, and the development of a draft drought anticipatory action plan for Oromia. WFP reports that these efforts contributed to the institutionalization of anticipatory action within the existing disaster risk management and early warning systems.¹⁴⁹ To what extent these efforts have contributed to

¹⁴⁷ WFP. Institutional Capacity Strengthening for Zero Hunger. Fact Sheet. November 2022.

¹⁴⁸ WFP ACR 2023.

¹⁴⁹ WFP ACR 2023.

institutionalization could not be verified, but what was evident is that anticipatory actions and early warning are integrated in the agricultural activities supported by WFP (see Annex 10, Box 4). This was confirmed through the site visits in both the Somali and Gambella regions. The digitization of early warning systems and integration of anticipatory actions into agricultural activities demonstrated positive results, although evidence remains largely anecdotal.¹⁵⁰

SO5. Government, humanitarian and development partners in Ethiopia have access to and benefit from effective and cost-efficient logistics and engineering services, including air transport, common coordination platforms, improved commodity supply chains and information technology

Summary Finding 15. Key services provided by WFP under often challenging and volatile conditions, such as reliable air transportation, strong supply chain services, effective logistics support through the logistics cluster, on-demand food procurement to the Government over three years and emergency telecommunications support for six months in Tigray, supported the work of WFP and its partners, including the Government. Services provided responded flexibly to the needs and requests of relevant stakeholders in line with shifts in the context.

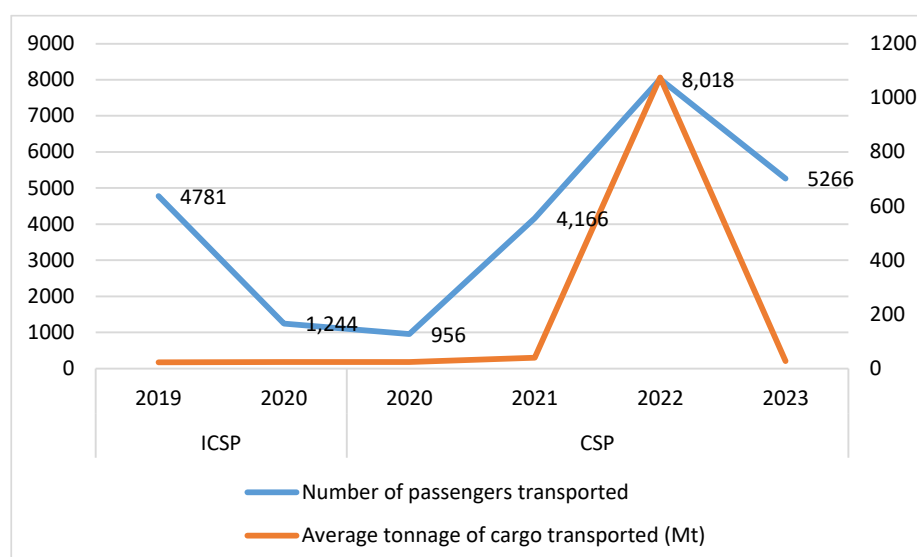
165. Under SO5, WFP aimed at supporting logistics and supply chain services through: i) providing safe and timely WFP air services to humanitarian actors; ii) providing medical and security evaluation services to vulnerable populations and the humanitarian community; iii) enhancing emergency preparedness and climate risk management services through the use of new technologies; and iv) providing supply chain services to government and humanitarian partners. Activities 8 to 12 under SO5 are the foundation for much of direct WFP assistance and support to affected populations since they focus on such elements as procurement, storage, transportation, communications and coordination, all of which are essential to delivering assistance. They also support the work of partners including the Government and other humanitarian and development actors.

166. For Activity 8 (aviation and air operation services), the WFP-led United Nations Humanitarian Air Services (UNHAS) transported passengers and cargo and undertook medical evacuations in 2019. In 2020, services were reduced due to COVID-19 but continued despite the challenges linked to operating during a pandemic. Services were scaled up in 2021, with rising demand linked to the response to the conflict in the north of Ethiopia, and rose further in 2022 before dropping back considerably in 2023, especially in terms of volume of cargo transported, linked to the partial suspension of assistance (see Figure 26). Yet, numbers do not fully capture the importance of UNHAS services during the period of the (I)CSP to humanitarian and development partners.

167. What is notable is the consistency and general reliability of the service despite the challenges highlighted above, including the ability to scale up and scale back in response to changes in demand. This is seen by stakeholders as a central part of the ability of UNHAS to deliver support in locations where there are no commercial air travel or transportation options, an observation that emerged in interviews and that can be linked to user satisfaction ratings of UNHAS services: 94 percent in 2020, and 94.4 percent in 2022 (based on UNHAS passenger satisfaction surveys).

¹⁵⁰ ACR 2023 p.22. Support for EDRMC to develop a shock-responsive dashboard; support for the Ethiopian Statistics Agency to develop an E-MIS; Drought anticipatory action plans for the Somali and Oromia regions.

Figure 26: SO5/Activity 8: Passengers and cargo transported (2019-2023)



Source: ACRs 2019-2023. Note: the figures for ICSP 2020 correspond to the months of January to June, while the figures for CSP 2020 correspond to the months of July to December.

168. Under Activity 9 (supply chain services), in 2019 WFP provided transport, warehouse management and technical assistance. In 2020 it expanded its services, supporting the Government in responding to increased needs linked to desert locust infestation and floods. The same year, 2020, also saw the setting up of the humanitarian air hub in Addis Ababa to serve the continent of Africa more generally. Activity 9 support included air transport, storage services and coordination, information management and advocacy support. Support was further expanded the following year, including providing fuel to Tigray when shortages impeded the ability of humanitarian actors to deliver assistance. In 2022, WFP provided a similar set of services and increased volumes of fuel transported given national shortages (1.4 million litres to 47 partners in Benshangul-Gumuz, Somali and Tigray). In addition, it transported fertilizer and provided engineering services to WHO. For the year 2023, WFP provided less services, as demand dropped, though still provided 500,000 litres of fuel and ongoing warehousing services.

169. Overall, between 2020 and 2023, the humanitarian air hub delivered significant and rising levels of assistance across Africa. Interviews with WFP staff at country office and field levels as well as government respondents indicated that supply chain services responded well to ongoing and shifting needs over the period, including balancing demands from different areas of the country. The main challenge faced was meeting the generally high level of demand for services because of the conflict in the north of Ethiopia, with the provision of fuel being a key part of this, given the scale of need relative to clearances granted for bringing in fuel as well as significant problems related to access and relatedly, difficulties for partners to collect their required fuel.

170. Under CSP BR01 (December 2020), WFP formally included the logistics cluster as Activity 10 (coordination and logistics services). This was in response to the pandemic, with subsequent extensions to its mandate linked to the conflict in the north of the country and more generally to high levels of needs. According to data in the annual country reports and key informant interviews, the cluster was significantly underfunded in 2020,¹⁵¹ which impeded its ability to offer services. Nonetheless, it facilitated storage of relief items, offered some air and land transport services and established the hubs and clearance arrangements to support humanitarian operations. The provision of these services, as well as coordination, information sharing and logistics under the activity, expanded significantly over 2021 and 2022, in line with expanding needs, especially related to the conflict. In 2023, the cluster focused on providing coordination and airlift services, as well as storage space and transport services, training to humanitarian organizations related to logistics and producing various information management products such as maps and concept of operations (CONOPS).

¹⁵¹ The ACR 2020 states that “under Activity 10, only 9 percent of funds needed were available by end-December”. According to the financial data presented in the ACR, Activity 10 was funded by 64 percent.

171. This overview of the components of Activity 10 during the period of the CSP underlines the extent of WFP activities and their adaptations to shifting needs on the ground. The cluster took the lead on clearance of cargo going into Tigray, thus benefiting more than 60 organizations and indirectly, their beneficiaries. Stakeholders interviewed indicated that the cluster was well funded and that partner and donor participation was enthusiastic. Notable, as well, is the scale-down of the cluster in 2023 and 2024, which as detailed in the annual country reports was in line with decreasing needs based on gap and needs analyses. This was an appropriate adjustment given shifting needs and reflects strong linkages between the cluster's activities and contextual conditions. Stakeholder perception surveys found that 94 percent of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the cluster's activities in coordination, information management and common services in 2021, and 95 percent of users were satisfied with the quality and timeliness of the services used in 2022.

172. Activity 11 (on-demand food procurement services) was also activated in September 2020 to meet rising food assistance needs, notably supporting the Government to transport in-kind assistance to those in need. Under the activity, WFP procured wheat on behalf of the Government to supply government-led food assistance interventions, procuring up to 700,000 mt in 2021. Activity 11 thus supported the Government in meeting surging needs of vulnerable populations linked to conflict, internal displacement, flooding, drought and insect infestations.

173. Finally, Activity 12 (coordination and Information and communications technology services) was activated for six months from May to November 2021. During that period, the WFP-led emergency telecommunications cluster provided emergency communications services in Tigray, helped to create and expand radio services in two emergency communications centres along with its partners, and provided training to humanitarian workers in communications procedures. Multiple interviews indicated that the initial lack of communications capacity in northern Ethiopia very significantly hindered the ability of humanitarian actors to deliver assistance, contributing to much greater complexity in the work of WFP and its partners and adding a further dimension of insecurity in that it was not possible to ascertain the safety of colleagues. Within this highly challenging context, the services under Activity 12 were a strong contributor to the ability to deliver assistance more effectively.

EQ 2.3 To what extent did WFP adhere to the humanitarian principles and contribute to achievement of cross-cutting aims of protection, accountability to affected populations, gender equality and women empowerment?

Humanitarian principles

Summary Finding 16. In Ethiopia, WFP has been confronted with stark ethical dilemmas. The close operational partnership and implementation arrangements for relief assistance, with targeting of beneficiaries, registration and distribution managed by the Government, risked compromising the principles of operational independence, impartiality and humanity as WFP had no assurances that assistance reached those most in need and without discrimination. While the close operational partnership with the Government was well aligned with the WFP objective to strengthen the national emergency preparedness and response capacities, limited controls proved problematic in a situation of conflict-driven humanitarian crisis and risked WFP being perceived as siding with a party to the conflict and potentially compromising the neutrality principle. The suspension of relief assistance to people in need following the uncovering of aid diversion impeded adherence to the humanity principle.

174. The four humanitarian principles guiding WFP emergency response and relief assistance work are: humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence.¹⁵² The close operational partnership and implementation arrangements in place for relief assistance under the ICSP and the main part of the CSP,

¹⁵² The humanitarian principles as applied by WFP encompass that: WFP will seek to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it is found and respond with food assistance when appropriate. It will provide assistance in ways that respect life, health, and dignity (*Humanity*); WFP assistance will be guided solely by need and will not discriminate in terms of ethnic origin, nationality, political opinion, gender, race, or religion. In a country, assistance will be targeted to those most at risk, following a sound assessment that considers the different needs and vulnerabilities of women, men, and children (*Impartiality*); WFP will not take sides in a conflict and will not engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious, or ideological nature; Food assistance will not be provided to active combatants (*Neutrality*) and; WFP will provide assistance in a manner that is operationally independent of the political, economic, military or other objectives that any actor may hold with regard to areas where such assistance is being provided (*Operational independence*).

until April 2023, with targeting of beneficiaries, registration and distribution managed by the Government, risked compromising the principles of operational independence, impartiality and humanity as WFP had no assurances that assistance reached those most in need and without discrimination. While the close operational partnership with the Government was well aligned with the objective of WFP to strengthen the national emergency preparedness and response capacities, limited controls proved problematic when situations of humanitarian crises arose. Given that the Government was one of the parties to the conflict in Tigray the close relationship entailed the risk of WFP being perceived as siding with the central Government, and potentially compromising the neutrality principle.

175. Upon the discovery of the aid diversion, WFP faced pressure from some key donors to stop all relief assistance and to make no further distributions of any commodities (with similar pressure also applied to JEOP and the Government of Ethiopia) while investigations were ongoing and oversight mechanisms being reviewed. While the request for an investigation and improved oversight by WFP was in line with strengthening WFP adherence to the principles of impartiality and operational independence, the pausing of assistance conflicted with the principle of humanity by interrupting food assistance to vulnerable populations. However, the blame for this conflict with humanity must be shared between WFP, who acceded to, and those donors who demanded, the pause. The consequences of the five-month suspension of relief and school feeding assistance which intensified the risk of malnutrition, were reported in site visits, focus group discussions and interviews,

176. While recognizing the pressure WFP was facing, many stakeholders – including from WFP, from other United Nations agencies, from cooperating partners and from the Government of Ethiopia – commented that WFP should have found ways to continue distributing assistance while the investigation was underway rather than suspending assistance to vulnerable populations. Given heavy donor earmarking, limited flexible funding, and those providing flexible funding resisting having their funds used for distributions through government channels in light of the diversion scandal, this would not have been an easy task. Nonetheless, the evaluation did not find evidence that WFP had either concertedly advocated with the Government for access, or launched a special appeal among donors who did not support the suspension.

177. As presented in the IAHE report¹⁵³ covering the collective response of IASC member organizations to the crisis in northern Ethiopia, WFP, among other key humanitarian actors, made significant efforts to advocate with the federal Government – a party to the conflict – for humanitarian access while balancing the pressure it could levy with the need to keep a good working relationship to successfully operate in the rest of the country, and in line with its dual mandate, including in pursuit of the development and resilience agenda. Nonetheless, the IAHE report found that “the response was not underpinned by the humanitarian principles and the UN failed to reframe the relationship with the Federal Government in line with international humanitarian law, at the outset of the conflict.”¹⁵⁴ Moreover, these advocacy efforts did not always realize humanitarian access, which was routinely blocked or limited, directly affecting the lives of vulnerable populations who needed assistance.¹⁵⁵ The perceived lack of concerted efforts by WFP and other humanitarian actors to advocate with the federal Government to lift access restrictions was seen as a breach of neutrality by the IAHE, and is supported by the findings of this evaluation.

Protection and accountability to affected populations

Summary Finding 17. While WFP has taken steps to strengthen protection and community feedback mechanisms, in particular as part of the assurance project, further efforts are required in terms of capacity and resources to identify and mitigate protection risk and strengthen accountability through systematic case management and follow-ups. Direct interaction between WFP staff, beneficiaries and communities can be further strengthened in line with beneficiary preferences.

178. Protection risks in communities where WFP operates are high, as continuously highlighted in annual country reports. Concerning the system-wide response to the crisis in northern Ethiopia the IAHE noted massive protection issues in the active conflict zones, in particular gender-based violence and conflict-related sexual violence.

¹⁵³ IAHE Ethiopia, 2023.

¹⁵⁴ IAHE Ethiopia, 2023.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

179. WFP is not protection-mandated, unlike UNHCR, though it does have a commitment to the principle of protection in its protection and accountability policy.¹⁵⁶ The fact that it relied on government mechanisms for targeting, distribution and monitoring of the larger part of the assistance provided has constrained WFP awareness and leverage to address protection risks.

180. As protection was regarded as a second-tier concern, WFP commitment, budget and training were limited. While the country office protection officer organizes regular meetings with field officers to provide guidance, protection coverage gaps remain because these focus on the main activities. At community and field levels, there was no dedicated team to monitor and act on protection and accountability to affected population concerns. This meant the direct interaction between beneficiaries and WFP was not sufficiently robust for protection issues to be identified and tracked.

181. Annual reporting¹⁵⁷ and the CSP mid-term review¹⁵⁸ indicate that, in some years, protection targets regarding “being treated with respect” or “no barriers to accessing food and nutrition assistance” were not met.¹⁵⁹ For instance, in 2023 only 60 percent (90 percent target) of beneficiaries reported being treated with respect, while only 87 percent (100 percent target) reported experiencing no barriers to accessing assistance.¹⁶⁰

182. Evidence from field observations in Tigray, Oromia and Somali regions that was also triangulated with cooperating partner interviewees suggests that distributions were orderly, dignified and well-run. Appropriate measures were in general in place to ensure that the most vulnerable could access assistance and services, including with: communication immediately before distributions about what would be distributed, when, and to whom; reasonable and well-organized waiting areas; and an orderly and secure process for identifying beneficiaries and then distributing assistance.

183. Regarding accountability to affected populations, the IAHE of the response to the crisis in northern Ethiopia found that effective channels for communities to express their needs and participate in the response were lacking. The report also noted that, because community feedback mechanisms were not incorporated into needs assessment and service delivery, the northern Ethiopia response could not be adjusted based on concerns raised by the affected populations.

184. Across the CSP, as part of its community feedback mechanism system, WFP has supported a central call centre, community sensitization, and help desks at the food distribution points. As part of the assurance project, WFP has sought to strengthen the accessibility of community feedback mechanisms by affected populations across the CSP activities. This included increasing the number of call centre operators from two to five, a revision of intake forms, the appointment of case handlers, and the monitoring of due dates for case resolution based on the digital SugarCRM platform, which is being used to enable the capture, prioritization, escalation and resolution of beneficiary feedback. Information received from country office staff working on the community feedback mechanism indicate that the majority of the calls are linked to a need for information about eligibility for inclusion and reporting delays. Operations of community feedback mechanisms were particularly challenged during the shutdown of both landline and mobile networks, along with internet services, as this made it impossible for communities or partners to contact WFP call centres or to quickly escalate issues from the field to the area office and country office.

185. Consultations with WFP staff, feedback from beneficiaries, and site observations indicate that further steps could be taken to strengthen accountability, mainly regarding case management and follow-ups. Standard operating procedures for community feedback mechanisms are in place but, so far, they are insufficiently implemented to ensure timely follow-up on concerns raised through the hotline or the helpdesks. Key informant interviews also indicated that feedback received from beneficiaries through the community feedback mechanisms or underperformance against targets did not sufficiently trigger programme adaptations.

186. WFP reporting has highlighted communities' preference for in-person contact to voice their

¹⁵⁶ WFP protection and accountability policy, 2020.

¹⁵⁷ E.g., ACR 2023.

¹⁵⁸ WFP. November 2023. Mid-Term Review of Ethiopia CSP.

¹⁵⁹ A shortcoming of WFP's corporate accountability indicators is that these are limited to measuring whether accessible information was provided and access was unhindered, which does not sufficiently reflect the depth of accountability required.

¹⁶⁰ ACR 2023.

feedback.¹⁶¹ To cater to this preference, WFP set up helpdesks managed by cooperating partners during targeting and registration and at food distribution points. Feedback from beneficiaries and interviews with cooperating partners indicate that the help desk service – set up for relief and nutrition assistance – varies in quality, with only some of the cooperating partners having sufficient protection experience. While WFP staff provide capacity strengthening and training to the cooperating partners, it does not have the human resources to regularly monitor cooperating partner performance, which is of concern in view of the potential for moral hazard (cooperating partners controlling complaints over their own performance).

187. Finally, interviews with WFP staff at the country office and regional level indicated a disconnect between protection and accountability to affected populations due to insufficient interaction between staff assigned to the respective topic. For example, community feedback mechanism data – mainly obtained through the hotline or the helpdesks – does not always trigger timely follow up and actions from the protection team.

Gender equality, women's empowerment and inclusion

Summary Finding 18. The (I)CSP was found to be partly aligned with the objectives of the WFP Gender Policy 2022. Many activities explicitly target women, gender-based violence mitigation actions were integrated into malnutrition prevention activities, and the R4 initiative employed a transformative approach to social inclusion while economic empowerment of women was supported through VSLAs and the targeting of women retailers under the fresh food voucher programme.

Significant progress has been made on providing capacity strengthening and guidance on gender mainstreaming and gender equality to cooperating partners and WFP staff, but there are still challenges in mainstreaming gender at the field level and monitoring gender-related results at the community level, mainly related to shortages of staff and budget. Inclusion principles (for example in terms of disability) have only been mainstreamed into activities to a very limited extent.

188. While WFP does not have a country-level gender strategy for Ethiopia, it is developing an action plan to contextualize the corporate Gender Policy 2022.¹⁶² The three objectives spelled out in the policy are: i) equitable access to and control over food security and nutrition; ii) addressing root causes of gender inequality; and iii) advancing economic empowerment of women and girls in food security and nutrition. Regarding Objective 1, although not all WFP activities explicitly target women, many of them do, including nutrition activities targeting PBWG (activities 2, 3, 6). In 2022, gender-based violence mitigation actions were integrated into malnutrition prevention activities.¹⁶³ Aligning to the second objective, the R4 initiative employed a transformative approach to social inclusion, the Family Life Model, aiming to address the root causes of inequality at both household and village levels and promote women's economic empowerment. Yet, engaging directly with women-led non-governmental organizations – an objective in the Gender Unit work plan – has not yet been realized. According to country office gender staff, these non-governmental organizations often do not meet WFP standards for cooperating organizations because of weak internal financial systems and operational capacity. The (I)CSP has partially covered Objective 3 of the gender policy. Examples of activities promoting economic empowerment are the support to VSLAs under Activity 5 and the targeting of women retailers under the fresh food voucher programme (Activity 6).

189. Gender staff in the country office have developed guidance notes and provided technical support to programme staff on integrating gender throughout the programme cycle (including in terms of design and targeting). The guidance notes were based on thorough gender analyses of the different activity areas including, for example, analyses of the R4 initiative, school feeding, fresh food vouchers, nutrition and relief.¹⁶⁴ To support operations, gender staff are also involved in reviewing and appraising the performance of the cooperating partners. While significant progress has been made in providing technical guidance, WFP staff consulted during the evaluation confirmed that there are still challenges in fully operationalizing the guidance notes at the field level and monitoring gender-related results at the community level. The main

¹⁶¹ WFP. ACR. 2023.

¹⁶² WFP. 2022. WFP Gender Policy (2022-2026).

¹⁶³ WFP. 2019-2023. ACR Ethiopia.

¹⁶⁴ Alyalew Abebe. 2021. Final Report. Gender Analysis of Rural Resilience Initiative (R4) in Amhara region, Alyalew Abebe. 2022. Gender analysis of Fresh Food Voucher. Final Report, Alyalew Abebe. 2022. Gender Analysis: Relief and Nutrition Programmes. Final Report, and Ministry of Education/WFP/UNICEF. No date. Gender Analysis of School Feeding in selected locations of Ethiopia.

challenges reported are the shortage of gender and protection staff in WFP and cooperating partner field offices and the shortage of budget, particularly for gender-specific interventions.

190. The country office has engaged with gender in the United Nations coordination system. It is part of the Gender Results Network (GRN), chairs the inter-agency level's Leaving No One Behind network, and leads on the progress report on the Beijing Declaration.¹⁶⁵

191. Based on key informant interviews with WFP staff at country office and regional bureau levels, procedures and processes for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) issues are clearly established, and staff and cooperating partners are familiar with the measures. The evaluation team verified PSEA process knowledge from both women and men staff members during field visits with staff confirming the existence of a confidential reporting line to the deputy country director (DCD) at the country office level.

192. Limited progress has been made with regard to inclusion, in particular relating to people living with disability. The document review revealed that the attention to disability and inclusion has been limited to a few cases such as specific aspects of the Education and Child Nutrition Programme in Afar and Oromia (under Activity 4).¹⁶⁶ Disability was not systematically included in monitoring efforts but improvements are noted. These include references to disability in community feedback mechanism data, questions around disability in post-distribution monitoring questionnaires and inclusion of disability as a criterion within the vulnerability-based targeting (launched as part of the assurance project).¹⁶⁷ None of the interventions reviewed during the field mission included specific measures for targeting people with disability.

EQ 2.4 To what extent are the achievements of the (I)CSP likely to be sustainable, in particular, from financial, institutional and humanitarian-development-peace nexus perspectives?

Summary Finding 19. While the CSPs emphasize long-term, sustainable solutions to address food insecurity, funding was not aligned to the dual-track approach of supporting humanitarian assistance and resilience and it was also insufficiently reflected in the line of sight. In line with the approach, WFP aimed to transition beneficiaries from unconditional relief assistance to self-reliance by providing them access to sustainable livelihoods opportunities. However, the absence of an operational strategy, which is evident in the lack of cohesion in geographical targeting between relief and resilience and livelihood activities, undermined progress.

Resilience projects have achieved promising results but sustainability remains a concern due to limited local community and government capacity to sustain benefits and the lack of exit strategies.

At the national level, WFP has taken appropriate measure to work through government systems and strengthen their capacities, but the continuation of assistance is heavily dependent on continued donor funding, with very little financial capacity of the Government to take over implementation.

In its humanitarian interventions in Ethiopia, WFP was conflict-responsive without having carried out the necessary analyses to understand the role the assistance was playing in the dynamics of the conflict to support a conflict-sensitive approach. In contrast in the resilience and livelihoods activities, WFP aimed to ensure that interventions reduce, and do not inadvertently exacerbate, existing tensions, thereby demonstrating conflict-sensitivity.

193. The 2019 Country Portfolio Evaluation (CPE) 2012-2017 proposed that sustainability can be considered from two perspectives: the durability of benefits experienced by recipients of assistance (including increased resilience to future shocks), and the capacity of national systems to operate with less external support. The CPE found, among other things that:

- WFP efforts to strengthen national systems and institutional capacity, particularly in development of the EDRMC and national logistics systems, had resulted in progress contributing to sustainability, but persisting weaknesses required continuing support;

¹⁶⁵ The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was adopted by 189 countries and is considered the key global policy document on gender equality.

¹⁶⁶ WFP. No date. WFP Evaluation. Baseline: Evaluation of Ethiopia Food for Education and Child Nutrition Programme 2019-2024.

¹⁶⁷ The only exception is the ACR 2023, which includes disability data though based on secondary data.

- funding constraints were characterized as “a threat to adequate humanitarian support for refugees” and the CPE simultaneously expressed hope that resilience support could reduce the need for humanitarian support but concern that this would not happen quickly;
- on nutrition, capacity-building was found to have been “sporadic” and continued dependence on food imports was negative for sustainability. It warned that the continuing benefits of school feeding were dependent on funding and that the Government’s financial capacity to implement a national school feeding programme was insufficient.

194. The sustainability issues have remained largely the same into the CSP, while the context has become rather less conducive for achieving sustainability along the above defined lines. The CPE was conducted at a time when Ethiopian economic growth continued to be strong and significant political reform was being undertaken. Due to the combined impact of COVID-19, the outbreak of conflict in the north, the surge in refugee and internally displaced person populations, the macroeconomic crisis and food price inflation, accelerating effects of climate change, and scarcity of development and humanitarian funds, the issues highlighted by the CPE have become more pressing to address.

195. While WFP has taken appropriate measures to work through government systems and strengthen their capacities, overall the continuation of assistance is heavily dependent on continued donor funding, with very little financial capacity of the Government to take over implementation. Additionally increasing insecurity and accessibility pose challenges for scale-up, and could affect the further scale-up of fresh food vouchers and the rollout of HGSE.

196. Resilience projects have achieved promising results but, as confirmed by site visits to agricultural and irrigation projects in Somali, for community members, sustainability remains a concern due to limited community and government capacity at the local level to sustain benefits and the lack of exit strategies for activities. For instance, village savings and loan associations could have been linked with government structures to continue obtaining the necessary support post-WFP engagement. WFP is taking steps to engage communities in water resource management, which would enhance the sustainability of livelihood interventions. Interviews with cooperating partners highlighted the importance of staying with the communities for an extended period to ensure communities are well equipped technically to use and maintain community assets. Members highlighted the sustainability of the mechanism in helping women access sustainable alternative income sources.

197. While WFP aimed to transition beneficiaries from unconditional relief assistance to self-reliance by providing them access to sustainable livelihoods opportunities, there is no operational strategy in place to achieve this, which is evident in the lack of cohesion in geographical targeting between relief and resilience and livelihood activities and was also remarked upon by WFP staff.

198. While the CSPs emphasize long-term, more sustainable approaches to address food insecurity, funding is not aligned to this dual-track approach of supporting humanitarian assistance and resilience. Some key donors prefer WFP to remain in the humanitarian domain. The dual-track approach and the transition between humanitarian assistance and resilience are also not fully reflected in the lines of sight of both strategic plans.¹⁶⁸

199. Concerning the link between humanitarian interventions and peace, a strong conflict-responsiveness is evidenced by the extent to which WFP actions responded to a rapidly shifting conflict situation in the context of the northern Ethiopia crisis. This included adapting access routes to deliver assistance to particular vulnerable populations in WFP’s geographical areas of responsibility. Cooperating partners and WFP staff also highlighted the fact that distributions were preceded by a local conflict analysis to assess whether beneficiaries and humanitarian actors would be safe from ongoing conflict during the distribution. This, in some cases, prompted distributions to stop when conflict came closer. However, the WFP conflict-sensitivity, through an analysis of the complex interactions between its emergency assistance and the conflict, is less apparent.

200. In the area of resilience and livelihoods, the CSP explicitly aims to make the link to peace by implementing a conflict-sensitive approach, ensuring that interventions reduce, and do not inadvertently exacerbate, existing tensions.¹⁶⁹ Resilience activities supporting community-level actions addressing natural

¹⁶⁸ WFP. 2023. ACR Ethiopia.

¹⁶⁹ Scaling-Up Transformative and Resilient Local Food Systems in Ethiopia 2023-2026.

resource scarcity have the potential to support social cohesion and reduce tensions. Reducing tensions is closely linked with efforts to ensure that no section of the community is left behind. Under Activity 5, focusing on vulnerable *woredas* and supporting community asset creation (for example, irrigation channels) benefiting entire communities has reduced tensions and competition over water resources. An example of this is in Somali, where asset creation activities focused on restoring degraded environments and enhancing water resources management, supporting both pastoral and farming communities. Another example of the potential of WFP resilience interventions to limit conflict potential is the SIPE programme.¹⁷⁰ Although conflict reduction is not an explicit objective of SIPE, the programme can potentially decrease inter-communal conflict, as insurance payouts allow herders to buy fodder or water for their herds within their communities, limiting the need to move outside their home *woredas* in search of water and pasture, thus alleviating the risk of inter-communal conflict over pasture and water resources.

2.3. EQ 3: To what extent has WFP used its resources efficiently in contributing to country strategic plan outputs and strategic outcomes?

EQ 3.1 To what extent was assistance delivered within the intended timeframe?

Summary Finding 20. Delays in delivery due to access constraints and volatile security, administrative red tape, Ethiopia's vast geography and late contributions have been frequent. To address challenges with late confirmation of funding, WFP has used internal mechanisms, such as the Internal Project Lending (IPL) mechanism, the Global Commodity Management Facility (GCMF), and the Immediate Response Account (IRA), which all helped reduce delays, however, without fully mitigating negative consequences for people in need, which led to loss of trust in the humanitarian community.

201. The timeliness of the WFP crisis response, including the northern Ethiopia response, faced difficulties, with assistance often arriving later and less frequently than planned. General contextual challenges faced by WFP that led to delays included:

- access-related delays (especially related to the northern Ethiopia response, but also in other parts of the country);
- the challenges of the northern response, requiring WFP to navigate between combatants in an active combat zone;
- logistical challenges (often widely dispersed distribution points and physical access constraints such as flooding, which disrupted access in Somali);
- challenges with contracted transporters' fleet positioning given high risks and movement challenges to cross internal borders, which prompted WFP to begin to scale up its own fleet early in the (I)CSP period and especially as the northern response, which gave it greater autonomy to reliably deliver, developed;
- in the case of cash-based transfers, bottlenecks in the banking system, which led to delays of up to two months for recipients to receive transfers (as reported in Amhara); and
- late receipt of donor contributions.

202. More specific factors leading to delays in providing humanitarian crisis relief (not limited to the northern Ethiopia response), included delays in translating humanitarian response plan intentions into actual deliveries given variable funding levels, lengthy government procedures and a need for ministerial approval of final data on humanitarian needs. Linked to measures taken under the assurance project, government representatives interviewed, in particular in Tigray, expressed dissatisfaction with delays caused by the new, more stringent and time-intensive, targeting procedures.

203. To address late confirmation of contributions, the country office utilized the WFP Internal Project Lending mechanism.¹⁷¹ Over the 2019-2022 period, it was among the top five country offices globally receiving the largest Internal Project Lending advances, withdrawing an annual average of USD 127.1

¹⁷⁰ SIPRI. 2022. The World Food Programme's Contribution to Improving the Prospects for Peace in Ethiopia.

¹⁷¹ IPL is "revolving advance financing that enables country offices to incur financial commitments and make expenditures before contributions for CSP activities are confirmed." Source: WFP. 2024. Report on the utilization of WFP strategic financing mechanisms (1 January-31 December 2023).

million (Table 5). This vital tool helped WFP maintain the flow of resources and mitigate delays in delivery of assistance. For instance, in 2019 the Internal Project Lending advances allowed the Ethiopia country office to initiate aid delivery an average of 20 days before contributions were confirmed.

204. The country office has also relied on Global Commodity Management Facility strategic food stocks,¹⁷² which mitigated some of the challenges in timely procurement of food needed in-country and allowed for a lead time gain of 49-88 percent over the 2019-2023 period. Advance financing was particularly utilized during the northern Ethiopia response. In 2022, the Ethiopia country office relied almost completely on the reliable and fast supply of food from the GCMF inventory.

205. In 2021, to kick-start the emergency response, the Ethiopia country office received an Immediate Response Account¹⁷³ allocation to support its response in Tigray. This type of funding flexibility was regarded as a significant source of WFP added value by donors interviewed.

Table 5: WFP Ethiopia advance financing, 2019-2023

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
IPL (USD million)	108.4	139.2	100.8	160.0	11.7
IRA (USD million)	-	5.4	22.1	-	-
GCMF total food value (USD million)	121.5	132.8	143.4	335.8	59.1
GCMF lead time gain (%)	84	88	69	74	49

Source: WFP. 2020-2024. Reports on the utilization of WFP strategic financing mechanisms.

206. For school feeding (activities 3 and 4), informants in several regions reported occasional delays of the delivery of assistance. For Activity 3, the main reason for the delay was the transfer of responsibility from the Refugees and Returnees Service to cooperating partners following the food aid diversion.¹⁷⁴ For Activity 4, government staff in Amhara reported delays related to constraints in transporting food procured by the bureaux of education at the regional level to the *woreda* level due to limited road access or the security situation. Other reasons included delays in transferring funds from WFP to the bureaux of education or the ingredients from the merchants not arriving according to plan. In the McGovern-Dole project implemented in Afar and Oromia, delays in the rollout of school feeding were likewise reported, this was particularly the case in Afar due to logistic challenges.¹⁷⁵

207. Nutrition (activities 2, 3 and 6) was generally described by partners as being more timely and better coordinated and resourced than unconditional food assistance. However, when delays did occur, they were of particular concern because children being treated for moderate acute malnutrition are at risk of slipping into severe acute malnutrition. Persons under treatment who experience a gap in assistance cannot simply pick up where they left off but risk a loss of the progress made.

208. Delays in distribution of nutrition rations were reported for Amhara, Tigray and Somali regions caused by security and road access problems and delayed transportation, limited cooperating partner storage capacity and delays in cash transfers for fresh food voucher recipients.

209. For resilience, no significant delays have been reported in terms of delivering of agricultural inputs.

210. The effects of delays for beneficiaries were significant. When a distribution was missed or delayed, the principle of non-retroactivity applied; this meant that there was no compensation for the missed assistance provided in the next distribution. Not only has this had direct negative consequences for beneficiaries, but it has led to a loss of trust in the humanitarian community in general, and also the

¹⁷² GCMF is "a strategic financing mechanism through which WFP purchases food in anticipation of country office operational needs and confirmed contributions". Source: Ibid.

¹⁷³ An IRA "enables WFP to provide immediate assistance through the allocation of funds in the IRA reserve for critical life-saving activities in the absence of forecast contributions." Source: Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ This happened in a visited school in Gambella and was related (according to a previous CP in the region) to delay in finalization of the field-level agreement and the fact that the CP was new to the context.

¹⁷⁵ World Food Programme. No date. WFP Evaluation. Baseline: Evaluation of Ethiopia Food for Education and Child Nutrition Programme 2019-2024.

Government and cooperating partners, as reported in Somali key informant interviews and focus group discussions with beneficiaries. There is a functioning informal credit market through which beneficiaries pledge future food assistance receipts as collateral for buying food in the present, but this places them at risk of falling into a debt spiral, with potentially dire personal consequences if distributions are cancelled. This was a problem of special concern during the extended suspension of assistance, and also post-suspension, because many beneficiaries exhausted their resources to cover needs during the suspension and turned to negative coping strategies.

EQ 3.2 How cost-efficient was WFP assistance and to what extent were alternative, more cost-effective measures considered?

Summary Finding 21. The measures introduced under the assurance project are seen to have increased effectiveness but have at the same time led to higher implementation costs given the higher cost of operating through non-governmental organizations rather than government entities and increased monitoring and reporting requirements. The much lower than planned increase in the use of cash-based assistance has reduced the ability of WFP to reap potential cost efficiency and effectiveness gains of cash assistance in those locations where necessary conditions were met.

211. According to interviews with WFP senior staff, government officials and international partners, there are strong indications that the measures implemented under the assurance project, such as increased monitoring coverage and household-level targeting, have helped ensure that aid reaches the intended beneficiaries. However, this has led to higher financial costs¹⁷⁶ in several ways. First, it involved the substitution of local government for targeting, distribution and monitoring by non-governmental organizations, which are more expensive, leading to an increase in implementation costs. Second, there was the need to strengthen oversight, including through higher numbers of monitoring staff. These aspects have increased implementation costs.

212. While the context for cash assistance has been challenging, WFP has largely failed to make the (I)CSP looked-for shift towards cash-based assistance, even in those regions and settings where conditions were more conducive (see also EQ 2.2). This has reduced the ability of WFP to reap potential cost efficiency and effectiveness gains of cash assistance in those locations where necessary conditions (for example, food markets, banks, money transfer outlets, mobile telephony) were met. Moreover, both cost efficiency and effectiveness of cash were impaired by the fact that, while the market prices of food and other goods reflected the parallel market exchange rate, WFP had to convert USD to Ethiopian Birr at the official rates when distributing cash to beneficiaries, which resulted in higher costs of cash operations and the ability to reach less beneficiaries than an exchange at market rates. In a context where markets are often thin and households can face impediments accessing markets due to high costs of transportation or insecurity, not uncommon in parts of Ethiopia, a rollout to new locations requires more in-depth feasibility and cost effectiveness analysis.

2.4. EQ 4: What are the factors that explain WFP performance and the extent to which it has made the strategic shift expected by the interim country strategic plan and country strategic plan?

EQ 4.1 To what extent has WFP been able to mobilize adequate, timely, predictable and flexible resources to finance the (I)CSP?

Summary Finding 22. While WFP has mobilized unprecedented levels of resources as humanitarian needs rose, these have persistently lagged behind estimated needs. Funding constraints have resulted in consecutive cuts in food rations. While the CSP saw a notable expansion in funding sources, as compared

¹⁷⁶ A full assessment by the country office on the increase in implementation costs as a result of measures introduced under the assurance project was still ongoing in May 2024. However, an idea of the extra costs is contained in the December 2023 Country Office Resourcing Plan for 2024: "Meanwhile, as a result of the assurance project (AP), the costs per mt to deliver food assistance in 2024 is expected to increase by up to 11 percent for CSP activities. Under Activity 1, it will cost USD 465/mt more to deliver food assistance, while under Activity 2 and Activity 3, the increase is estimated at USD 505/mt and USD 301/mt respectively. The school feeding programme is expected to cost WFP USD309/mt more."

to the ICSP, it remained heavily reliant on a few very large donors. Some major donors, while funding other actors' early recovery, risk reduction and resilience interventions, continue to perceive the role of WFP in Ethiopia mainly as a humanitarian actor to contribute to the country's emergency response capabilities, which has slowed progress on the WFP goal of strengthening its development focus.

213. The ability of WFP to raise money has been impressive, being funded at an overall 57 percent for the ICSP and for the CSP at the end of 2023 (see paragraph 50). While the CSP saw a notable expansion in funding sources, as compared to the ICSP, from 19 to 37 sources, activity delivery remained heavily reliant on a few very large donors: the top five donors of the ICSP represented 84 percent of allocated contributions and this only slightly decreased to 78 percent for the CSP with the allocations from the United States of America making up 22.6 percent.¹⁷⁷

214. As highlighted in section 1.3, crisis response (SO1, SO4-5) has consistently had the largest share of the needs-based plan (approximately 90-94 percent) under both the ICSP and CSP, while resilience (SO2) and root causes (SO3) remained a smaller portion (approximately 6-10 percent). Allocated resources as a proportion of the needs-based plan varied significantly by strategic outcome under the ICSP. The ongoing CSP shows relatively higher resourcing levels for the strategic outcomes focusing on resilience and root causes, ranging from 50 percent for resilience (Activity 5) to 90 percent funding for school feeding (Activity 4) and 92 percent under root causes SO3. Crisis response under SO1 has been funded at 58 percent. Reflecting the success in obtaining project-based funding, allocated resources for resilience activities SO2 reached 59 percent of needs-based plan as of December 2023.

215. A persistent constraint on WFP is that, under both the ICSP and CSP, over 80 percent of donor funding has been earmarked at the activity level (see Table 1 in Section 1.3) and this mostly for crisis response activities (see Table 6). Some major donors perceive the WFP role in Ethiopia mainly as a humanitarian actor to contribute to the country's emergency response capabilities, while funding other organizations to support early recovery, risk reduction and resilience activities. Some donors also finance cash-based transfers by other organizations, preferring to support WFP assistance by in-kind donations. This has slowed progress on the WFP goal of moving not only strategically, from an overall humanitarian to an overall development focus, but also tactically, within its humanitarian focus from in-kind to cash-based transfer support.

216. A number of international donor partners expressed a view that WFP was slow in candidly and proactively reporting problems. Some of this may reflect the aftertaste of the diversion scandal, but not all of these conversations were about aid diversion; some were about far less consequential issues, including at the project level. This can only work to weaken partnership relations.

¹⁷⁷ Source: WFP ICSP Ethiopia Resource Situation Report, 18.10.2021; WFP CSP Ethiopia Resource Situation Report, 03.04.2024.

Table 6: ICSP and CSP activity-level earmarking

Focus area	Activity	ICSP		CSP	
		Contributions (USD)	% of total contributions	Contributions (USD)	% of total contributions
Crisis response (SO1)	Act1	124,098,597	41%	960,957,296	50%
	Act2	77,534,755	26%	432,693,917	23%
	Act3	87,957,818	29%	301,741,766	16%
Resilience building (SO2)	Act4	5,125,702	2%	40,368,918	2%
	Act5	1,237,734	0.4%	72,170,125	4%
Root causes (SO3)	Act6	1,528,647	1%	21,306,927	1%
Crisis response (SO4 and SO5)	Act7	3,380,579	1%	3,184,891	0.2%
	Act8	2,982,061	1%	21,485,328	1%
	Act9	-	-	25,017,959	1%
	Act10	-	-	32,727,165	2%
	Act11	-	-	-	-
	Act12	-	-	414,938	0%
Total		303,845,894	100.0%	1,912,069,229	100.0%

Source: WFP Distribution Contribution and Forecast Statistics, extracted on 2 April 2024.

EQ 4.2 To what extent has WFP used evidence to inform management decisions and ensure the application of global assurance standards?

Summary Finding 23. Weaknesses in monitoring have been a long-standing issue in Ethiopia. Notably, but not only through the assurance project, monitoring systems have improved, particularly for unconditional relief assistance. Despite significant improvements, weaknesses remain in the monitoring of resilience activities and accountability to affected populations. The emphasis of monitoring frameworks on producing standard quantitative data for end-of-year donor reporting purposes, not sufficiently complemented by qualitative data with higher explanatory power that could be used for real-time learning and programme adjustment, remains largely unaddressed.

217. Operations in Ethiopia have been chronically affected by weak monitoring. The 2019 portfolio evaluation and both internal audits identified areas that needed strengthening. The 2019 portfolio evaluation found that WFP learning from experience “was hampered by serious deficiencies in monitoring and reporting and by weaknesses in managing and responding to evaluations”. The use and analysis of data beyond obligatory corporate reporting were found to be weak and available outcome indicators had little explanatory power. A specific recommendation was towards ensuring adequate staffing for monitoring and evaluation at the country office. The internal audits criticized the limited monitoring coverage of distribution sites through internal and third party monitoring based on insufficient resources, except in the Somali region. They highlighted inadequate escalation processes for ensuring fast action on high-priority issues and poor reporting by cooperating partners and the Government. The 2023 internal audit also found that WFP had struggled to produce credible donor reports on resilience activities due to limitations in existing monitoring and evaluation systems. A specific problem in the northern Ethiopia crisis was limited internet and mobile telephony coverage, making remote approaches to monitoring difficult.

218. Monitoring and evaluation staffing has been increased and upgraded, including through the creation of a P4-level evaluation officer position to manage the high numbers of decentralized evaluations led by the country office, of which the majority were mandated by donors. Further steps have been taken in the context of the assurance project to strengthen process and output monitoring, however, problems persist, especially with monitoring progress at the outcome level. Outcome monitoring continues to be

essentially a late-year exercise aimed at producing data for annual donor reports incorporating only indicators specified at the corporate level, with a focus on accountability, not learning, and this has led to an emphasis on quantitative data. Qualitative data that can be used to better explain programmatic results are underrepresented in WFP monitoring frameworks. The 2023 mid-term review of the CSP that focused on the analysis of highly aggregated annual country report data was a missed opportunity for triangulation with qualitative information and other monitoring reports.

219. Weak outcome-level monitoring has been specifically noted concerning Activity 5 with data focusing on changes in livelihood coping strategies. This is not sufficiently reflecting changes achieved in terms of sustained increase in income or in terms of effects on local food availability. Although “graduating” from humanitarian assistance to resilience building support is a keystone of (I)CSP strategy, the monitoring framework does not actually track the number of persons “graduating.”

220. Similar deficiencies exist in the outcome indicators used by WFP for protection and accountability. These provide a view on the share of people reached with information, but do not give a qualitative view on whether the information was received, was found useful, or whether people felt that the concerns raised were adequately addressed. The evaluation moreover found that monitoring and reporting are not sufficiently capturing the results of gender mainstreaming and women’s empowerment efforts in the communities.

221. Country office-led decentralized evaluations also point to weaknesses. The 2022 decentralized evaluation of the McGovern-Dole school feeding project in Oromia and Afar cited gaps in the quality of monitoring data presented and urged that they be urgently addressed, not only to enable a credible final evaluation, but also for real-time adjustment in project implementation. The 2019 decentralized evaluation of the SIPE programme covered only the first year of the project pilot, during which the index insurance had not yet been triggered. The SIPE evaluation pointed, as well, to weaknesses in monitoring data and its recommendation to conduct a follow-up data collection in 2020/2021 to capture the full (including longer-term) programme effects has not been implemented.

EQ 4.3 How did the partnerships and collaborations with other actors at the national- and field-level influence performance and results?

Summary Finding 24. Although the collaboration between WFP and cooperating partners in activities 1 and 3 was generally characterized as positive by all partners, issues such as delays in finalizing the field-level agreements affected implementation. Partnerships with cooperating partners for resilience building were characterized as not sufficiently engaging the cooperating partners strategically and being based on field-level agreements that were too short.

222. WFP collaboration with cooperating partners was characterized by the latter as constructive and strong. One of the reasons for this was because cooperating partners’ roles have expanded with their recently increased responsibilities related to targeting, distribution and monitoring. WFP provides capacity building and technical advice when needed. In cooperating partner interviews, partners perceived communication to be good, albeit often not timely on the WFP end, with WFP having a tendency to expect cooperating partners to react and respond quickly without advance warning. This negatively affected results, according to interviewees, because urgent requests for response disrupted cooperating partners’ normal workflow. Cooperating partners also characterized budgets as tight relative to WFP’s level of expectations; but it is not clear to what extent this had a negative effect on results.

223. One challenge is that field-level agreements can take months to finalize, with many back-and-forth exchanges needed for what is usually a quite short-term contract (6 to 12 months for general food assistance, with the reasons for that short timing not made clear in interviews). Multiple cooperating partners reported, in interviews or focus group discussions, that they felt pressured to start delivering assistance before contracts were finalized and expressed the view that this required them to use their own resources or dip into resources from another funder on the promise that arrangements with WFP would eventually be worked out. The WFP perspective, expressed in country office key informant interviews, is that WFP will not advise, encourage, or pressure cooperating partners to start implementation prior to signature. A potential lost opportunity from the cooperating partners’ perspective is that the partnerships do not have a strategic component that might draw them in to work collaboratively with WFP on more than service provision in distribution of assistance.

224. Cooperating partners for resilience building interventions could implement the activities, but the partnerships were narrowly subcontractual, did not sufficiently engage the cooperating partners strategically and, for some interventions, the duration of the field-level agreements was too short to remain engaged with the communities until completion. A short duration of field-level agreements also meant that in some instances the cooperating partners were not able to remain with the communities for a sufficiently long time to ensure that the capacity and ownership at the community level was sufficiently in place to ensure sustainability of results.

EQ 4.4 To what extent did the country office have appropriate human resources capacity and management structure to deliver on the (I)CSP and how well did headquarters and the regional bureau support the emergency response in northern Ethiopia?

Summary Finding 25. WFP built up strong “changing lives”-related human resource capacities and management structures during the (I)CSP period, but the “saving lives” capacities were stretched in responding 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; the experience levels of staff; and limited staff capacities for crisis response and coordination challenges.

The achievements of the response and the work of WFP under the (I)CSP are ultimately a positive reflection on its staff's ability to work under difficult conditions. However, the stress under which WFP staff have had to work during and since the northern Ethiopia response, in the aftermath of the diversion scandal and, more recently, budget and staff reductions leading to fears about job security, have had significant negative impacts upon staff wellness and almost certainly on staff motivation and productivity. High turnover of country directors had a negative impact on clarity on strategic direction and staff morale.

225. The activation of the internal L3 emergency response in late March 2021¹⁷⁸ initiated a scale-up, with international staff being moved into key positions. Identifying and deploying relevant staff was reportedly challenging, including due to difficulties in getting government permission for some key staff to enter Tigray. According to multiple key informant interviews with those directly involved in the northern Ethiopia response, this resulted in less experienced individuals coming in (with supply chain staff an exception to this). Further, there were high levels of staff turnover given the difficult conditions in Tigray, which meant time had to be spent training new people. Several interviewees also expressed the view that national staff were side-lined by international personnel who had weak country-specific knowledge. Cooperating partners in Tigray also had very few international staff due to government restrictions – thus their mix of staff capacities was determined more by nationality than need. These factors meant that WFP staff in Tigray had to work harder to compensate for inexperience; and though it is not clear how or to what extent it affected delivery of assistance, there is a clear sense among key informants that there were some negative effects.

226. As per standard procedure,¹⁷⁹ the regional bureau in Nairobi was appointed “responsible for overall operational management of the response, in conjunction with the [Ethiopia] Country Director, with the Regional Director as designated Corporate Response Director reporting to the Executive Director in headquarters.” An emergency coordinator in charge of managing the overall response was based in Tigray and reporting to the Corporate Response Director (Regional Director) in the regional bureau in Nairobi. Country office support was coordinated by an emergency coordinator advisor based in the country director's office in Addis Ababa. This structure led to a certain degree of confusion about the country office's role and created some initial inefficiencies in the response, given that the country office was not as directly engaged and yet had the strongest country knowledge and direct relationships with key partners and stakeholders. Challenges were exacerbated during initial phases by virtue of only having an emergency coordinator in Tigray but not one in Addis Ababa. These issues were gradually smoothed out over time, with the country office taking on a more leading role and an experienced emergency coordinator being brought to Addis Ababa, which helped to integrate the emergency response in Tigray with WFP operations in the rest of the country.

¹⁷⁸ Ethiopia L3 Decision Memorandum, 24 March 2021.

¹⁷⁹ Ethiopia L3 Decision Memorandum, 24 March 2021.

227. Stakeholders perceived that WFP capacities for managing a large-scale emergency response were less strong than the situation demanded during the initial phases. Some interviewees indicated a sense that this was because programme staff were over-weighted towards “changing lives,” the (I)CSP’s new ambition. Some technical areas are also notably understaffed, including protection (see EQ 2.3 above) and nutrition, where field offices in Amhara, Oromia and SNNPR do not currently have nutritionists despite nutrition being one of the major WFP intervention areas.

228. Changes in senior staff, most noticeably at the country director level (where there have been three country directors in post over the (I)CSP period: July 2018-December 2021; April 2022-June 2023, an ad interim country director June 2023-May 2024, and another ad-interim country director May-August 2024, however not based in-country)¹⁸⁰ left staff feeling that direction and decision making was sometimes not as clear or as fast as needed, and that there were some discontinuities in setting priorities related to the northern response. High turnover at the country director level had negative impacts on staff morale.

229. WFP operations in Ethiopia had broader challenges in recruiting and retaining staff from 2023 onwards, as its operations faced budget reductions and thus potential staff tended to pass over opportunities there given the uncertain outlook. The aid diversion scandal and the Tigray outbreak of conflict helps to explain the surge in the number of temporary duty assignments. A further element related to the appropriateness of human resources capacity is the need to scale down staffing from 2023 onwards in a strategic manner given the reduced levels of implementation of crisis response activities since the aid suspension and in light of budgetary constraints. This process was still underway as the evaluation was gathering data.

230. The stress under which WFP staff have had to work during and since the northern Ethiopia response, and the further blow to morale in the aftermath of the diversion scandal and, more recently, budget and staff reductions leading to fears about job security, is considerable. This has also had significant negative impacts upon staff wellness and almost certainly on staff motivation and productivity. It is a tribute to staff stamina and senior management that WFP has been able to continue its work under difficult circumstances.

¹⁸⁰ High senior management turnover had already been criticized by the Ethiopia Country Portfolio Evaluation (2012-2017) see Annex 9.

3. Conclusions and recommendations

3.1. Conclusions

Overall

231. Conclusion 1: Overall, WFP assistance under the (I)CSP in Ethiopia was highly relevant and maintained relevance as circumstances and the context changed. It was consistent with government policies and strategies. WFP assistance was broadly based on reliable evidence, with the exception of emergency assistance under SO1, where estimates of population in need and targeting were questionable. This led to targeting errors and opened the door for aid diversion.

232. Conclusion 2: In the area of crisis response, although resource-constrained, WFP was broadly effective. The country office had to make difficult resource allocation decisions and tended to favour coverage over adequacy, with concomitant effects on food and nutrition security gains. Severe access constraints, weaker than desirable advocacy for access on the part of the humanitarian community and a slower than desirable scale-up, compounded by staffing challenges, had negative effects on the response in northern Ethiopia. The credibility and reputation of WFP were badly damaged by the aid diversion scandal. Partners have expressed broad satisfaction with measures put in place to address concerns through the assurance project, but concerns remain over the high cost of assurance and the need to build up cooperating partner capacities, especially in monitoring and protection (for example managing community feedback mechanisms).

233. Conclusion 3: School feeding and nutrition are areas of long-standing WFP expertise and have contributed to both crisis response and resilience. They are institutionally sustainable as they are embedded in government systems, although financial sustainability depends on donor funding. School feeding played an important role as a safety net in conflict-affected and food-insecure areas but was affected by funding shortages and school closures due to COVID-19. WFP contributed significantly through capacity strengthening to the HGSF programme under the Ministry of Education. Through fresh food voucher interventions and support to the Ministry of Health, WFP provided an important contribution to the national effort to prevent stunting. Nevertheless, conflict in the north, the limited amount and short duration of the voucher and the imperfect complementarity with PSNP, impeded results.

234. Conclusion 4: Resilience projects have achieved promising but scattered results, especially where entire communities were involved. However, they have not coalesced into an operational plan at a national (or regional) scale for pursuing the transition from “saving lives” to “changing lives”. This suggests that WFP is in need of a better-articulated operational plan for resilience, which includes measures and approaches to ensure stronger geographic integration with relief assistance and better use of limited existing human and financial resources as well as better monitoring and evaluation (see Conclusion 10).

Strategic directions

235. Conclusion 5: The (I)CSP ambition 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. Some events that derailed the transition from “saving lives” to “changing lives” were unpredictable. However, others are recurring shocks in Ethiopia and could have been included within planning uncertainty bands. Better risk management, including forward-looking political economy and conflict analysis to inform conflict-sensitive approaches, was called for.

236. Conclusion 6: Historically, and even more strongly with the outbreak of the northern Ethiopia crisis, donors prioritized funding for crisis response. While WFP Ethiopia’s major donors contributed generously to the large-scale crisis response, they could not be counted on to provide significant resources to WFP for the emerging resilience and livelihoods agenda. At the same time, WFP neglected to provide evidence of results (see Conclusion 10) and make stronger advocacy and marketing efforts in these areas. WFP did, over the

evaluation period, successfully diversify funding sources, though a limited number of donors continue to account for a disproportionate share of support.

237. Conclusion 7: The operational partnership with the Government had the advantage of ensuring strategic alignment and promoting close working relationships. It was also in theory, as compared to the post-assurance project regime, low-cost. However, it exposed WFP to limitations in government capacities, particularly at the local level. It limited WFP involvement in needs assessments and targeting. The long-standing reliance of WFP on government systems for needs estimation, targeting, registration and distribution increased the risk of aid diversion and risked compromising the humanitarian principles of humanity and independence in particular, but also of neutrality.

Implementation: strengths and weaknesses

238. Conclusion 8: Despite some successes, the shift from in-kind food aid to cash-based assistance, where feasible, has not been achieved anywhere near the ambitions set. While pilot-level initiatives showed promise, external and internal constraints led to delays in the intended modality shift. Moving forward, it is important that WFP continues to assess the feasibility of cash transfers and pursues adaptation of systems and mechanisms for registration and beneficiary identity management.

239. Conclusion 9: While WFP has made some progress on advancing its gender strategy, through providing technical guidance to field and cooperating partner staff, there are gaps in implementation at the community level. While a good degree of gender-sensitivity has been achieved, transformative changes to social inclusion and women's empowerment are not yet evident. Procedures and processes for PSEA issues are clearly established and disseminated. Accountability to affected people has undergone improvements, particularly in community feedback mechanisms since the assurance project, but there is scope for more to be done. Protection considerations require enhancement.

240. Conclusion 10: Monitoring and evaluation in Ethiopia, a long-standing weak point, has been implemented under multiple constraints, despite improvements under the assurance project. Constraints include access constraints due to conflict and insecurity, and limitations for remote monitoring. Cooperating partners, which were recently engaged under the assurance project and engaged to implement community feedback mechanisms, have a learning curve to climb and their capacity is often weak. Monitoring in all three major areas (crisis response, resilience and root causes) has been biased towards outputs rather than outcomes and quantitative rather than qualitative information. The evaluability of the CSP was constrained by the limited reliability of reported output data, especially beneficiary and food transfers data for relief assistance provided through government channels, limited regional disaggregation of data and outcome data gaps. The focus on corporate annual reporting to donors limited the usefulness of monitoring for informing adjustments to programme implementation or demonstrating the effectiveness of resilience and livelihood activities to donors.

241. Conclusion 11: Staff capacities have not matched programme demands. Discontinuities in senior leadership have hampered implementation of the (I)CSP and had a negative effect on staff morale. Concerns about job security due to resource shortages and staff reductions have contributed to impaired staff motivation and productivity in the country office. At the beginning of the northern Ethiopia response, WFP found itself with very strong staff capacities in the emerging areas of resilience, as a result of the strategic transition from "saving lives" to "changing lives", but with weaker staff capacities in the crisis response area. Infusions of staff on temporary duty assignments from headquarters and from the regional bureau in Nairobi addressed this, but at the cost of tensions and high staff turnover.

242. Conclusion 12: WFP provided much-appreciated capacity building to the Government of Ethiopia across areas ranging from supply chain to nutrition and school feeding. However, this was mostly on-demand and did not reflect a comprehensive assessment and coherent strategy from WFP. A result of this was that capacity building was slanted towards central level while decentralized (regional and local) capacity weaknesses remained unaddressed, a factor contributing to the diversion scandal via targeting and monitoring problems.

3.2. Recommendations

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

Recommendation	Type Theme Short/medium/ long-term	Responsibility (one lead office/entity)	Other contributing entities (if applicable)	Priority: high/medium	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>	Strategic Short term	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</p>	Strategic Medium term	Counrty office management and programme, partnerships and monitoring and evaluation units		High	End 2027

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<p>scale and scope.</p> <p>Rationale: School feeding, nutrition and resilience and livelihoods interventions are highly effective at promoting development, 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>					
<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 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</p>	<p>Strategic</p> <p>Medium term</p>	<p>Country office management and partnerships and programme units</p>	<p>Deputy Executive Director and Chief Operating Officer</p>	<p>High</p>	<p>End 2026</p>

Recommendation	Type Theme Short/medium/ long-term	Responsibility (one lead office/entity)	Other contributing entities (if applicable)	Priority: high/medium	Deadline for completion
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>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

Recommendation	Type Theme Short/medium/ long-term	Responsibility (one lead office/entity)	Other contributing entities (if applicable)	Priority: high/medium	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

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